



INDUSTRY, EDUCATION, TRAINING AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

Members present:

Mr K.G. Shine MP (Chair)
Mr S.L. Dickson MP
Dr B. Flegg MP
Mr S.A. Kilburn MP
Mrs D.C. Scott MP
Mrs J.A. Stuckey MP

Staff present:

Ms B. Watson (Research Director)
Mr P. Rogers (Principal Research Officer)

BRIEFING ON EDUCATION AND CARE SERVICES NATIONAL LAW (QUEENSLAND) BILL 2011

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

WEDNESDAY, 7 SEPTEMBER 2011

Brisbane

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Committee met at 11.16 am

GRANTHAM, Ms Julie, Director-General, Department of Education and Training

REDDELL, Ms Anne, Executive Director, Policy and Performance, Office of Early Childhood Education and Care

RYAN, Ms Therese, Assistant Director, Policy and Performance, Office of Early Childhood Education and Care

WHITEHEAD, Ms Annette, Associate Director-General and Chief Officer, Office of Early Childhood Education and Care

CHAIR: Good morning and welcome back. We may well get to see quite a bit of each other, which is very good. Somebody mentioned to me that there was a suggestion that somebody from the department was excluded from our last meeting. I was unaware of it and I have no idea about the validity of the comment. Certainly, you do not know anything about any complaint from departmental officers that they were not allowed in the last time?

Ms Grantham: No. As you recall, I think a comment was made on the record that we had a number of people present and certainly everyone who had information, should the committee have required it, was present at that time. No, I have never been made aware of anything like that.

CHAIR: It was a public meeting, but if you were aware of any instance we would certainly want to convey to that person or persons that it was not the intention, anyway.

Ms Grantham: Not at all. In fact, with the new committee system a number of people were present as observers to see how it would work. Certainly, there is no intention to exclude anyone.

CHAIR: We do not know who it was, Julie, otherwise I would have raised it with you independent of today. Hopefully, it was not true and did not refer to this committee but perhaps to another one.

Ms Grantham: Perhaps.

CHAIR: I was not aware of it. I would like to welcome Ms Julie Grantham, Director-General of the Department of Education and Training, who is here to brief the committee in respect of the Education and Care Services National Law (Queensland) Bill 2011, which was referred by the House to the committee yesterday, 6 September. I also welcome Ms Grantham's colleagues: Ms Annette Whitehead, the Associate Director-General and Chief Officer of the Office of Early Childhood Education and Care; Ms Anne Reddell, the Executive Director, Policy and Performance of the Office of Early Childhood Education and Care; and Ms Therese Ryan, Assistant Director, Policy and Performance of the Office of Early Childhood Education and Care.

In its inquiry into this bill, the task ahead of this committee is to consider the bill in terms of the policy intent to be achieved, as well as fundamental legislative principles and lawfulness, and develop a report to parliament before the bill is debated in the House. Today's briefing from the Department of Education and Training is the first public committee activity relating to the bill inquiry. The committee has not yet finalised its schedule and process for its inquiry, but we will publish those details as soon as practicable. It is likely the committee will seek stakeholder input and seek further departmental briefings before it finalises its report to parliament. The intent of today, from the committee's perspective, is to obtain some background information on the bill, including any consultation that has occurred to date and the views expressed during that consultation and advice as to the policy intent of the bill.

Ms Grantham, in the spirit of transparent inquiry and opportunity for public input to the process, this briefing is open to the public. It will be recorded by Hansard reporters and a transcript will be available on the committee's website. As a proceeding of parliament, the privilege of contempt provisions of the Parliament of Queensland Act 2001 apply to all committee meetings and hearings. You are, however, able to request that any material or information you provide be kept private or object to particular questions. All of this is outlined in schedule 8 of the Legislative Assembly's standing orders. Members of the committee may wish to ask questions as we go. Is that agreeable to you?

Ms Grantham: It is.

CHAIR: Thank you. I hand over to you.

Ms Grantham: I thank the committee for the opportunity to brief you on this bill today. I refer to my comments of 24 August where I advised the committee of the imminent introduction of this bill and the minister's request that I alert the committee to the urgency of it. In December 2009, all governments agreed through a COAG national partnership agreement to adopt a national law to enact a national quality framework for early childhood education and care services prior to 2012. By introducing this bill to the Queensland parliament, Queensland is meeting a milestone commitment under a multilateral implementation plan to receive national partnership funding. The purpose of the bill is to apply the Education and Care Services National Law as a law of Queensland. The bill will also amend the Child Care Act 2002 to exclude services that will be covered by the national law and make consequential amendments to other Queensland legislation.

The national quality framework will replace separate state and territory licensing and Commonwealth quality assurance processes for those early childhood education and care services that are covered by the national partnership agreement. This is a departure from the current system where most providers must deal with state and territory agencies for licensing purposes and with the Commonwealth for accreditation purposes. The reforms focus on improving the quality of education and care services for all children, reducing the regulatory burden on services and providing parents with greater access to information about the quality of services.

The introduction of the national quality framework is being facilitated by a cooperative legislative model, using an application of laws approach to confer the relevant administrative, quality assessment and review functions on state and territory agencies and officials. Victoria, as host jurisdiction, has developed the legislation in consultation with all jurisdictions and the Victorian parliament passed its Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010 on 5 October 2010. The Victorian act contains a schedule that sets out the education and care services national law and it is this national law that the bill proposes to apply as state legislation. The other states and territories are required to enact legislation to apply the national law by reference, with the exception of Western Australia which will pass its own corresponding legislation.

I turn to the consultation. The Education and Care Services National Law Act and supporting national regulations underpinning the national quality framework have been developed through extensive consultation with the community, the sector and the government since 2008. In 2008, peak stakeholders were consulted on the potential for national quality standards. As a first step towards developing the framework, COAG published a discussion paper and held public consultations during August and September 2008. Approximately 400 written submissions were received for the 2008 public consultations. Independent advice was also sought from an expert advisory panel of notable early childhood education and care professionals.

In 2009, an extensive COAG regulation impact statement consultation occurred across Australia to seek further public comment, including a series of options to improve the quality of early childhood education and care. Nineteen open public forums were held around Australia, involving 1,700 people from across the sector. Around 350 written submissions were received. At the local level, the Department of Education and Training has consulted closely with Queensland stakeholders through its Legislative and National Implementation Reform Committee, an early childhood development forum that includes representatives from employer and union groups, academics and parents. In 2010 a national stakeholder reference group was established, comprised of representatives from national early childhood education and care sector bodies and academics.

This year we have had extensive national public consultation on draft regulations. They commenced in December 2010 and were completed in May 2011. A series of 19 face-to-face and video-link consultation sessions have been held across Queensland in partnership with DEEWR—the federal department—attended by more than 1,300 Queenslanders representing more than one-third of attendees nationally. There have been peak stakeholder consultation sessions, a comprehensive communication package aimed at encouraging services, educators, families and the broader early childhood sector to have their say on the reforms, including direct mail, email and online, and via various sector communication channels. Approximately 700 written submissions have been made, more than one-quarter of which came from Queensland. In addition, the new quality assessment process was trialed in approximately 200 services nationally, 35 of which were in Queensland. Those trials allowed services to have detailed firsthand feedback to the development of the quality assessment and ratings process.

For our next steps we intend to have continued close liaison with Queensland's peak stakeholder committees to inform Queensland's position on the final regulations, to continue the implementation of Queensland's comprehensive communication plan, including departmental representation at relevant education and early childhood conferences, and to disseminate fact sheets and other resources. Australia-wide information sessions following the release of the regulations are currently planned for approximately 20 sessions across Queensland in late October to early November. To support a smooth transition for services, it has been agreed that the quality assessment of services will not commence until June 2012. Services to be assessed in mid-2012 will be contacted around April to commence development of their quality improvement plan.

The Australian government is currently reviewing professional development opportunities to ensure the sector is prepared for the introduction of the NQF. The Commonwealth took into consideration stakeholder feedback on the national law, particularly with respect to matters relating to affordability, access, workforce and regulation. For example, the introduction of the new staffing standards will occur

gradually from 2012 to 2020 with improved ratios for Queensland services not commencing until 2016. Queensland also negotiated some flexibility to ensure that the right balance was achieved in the national law between increased quality and affordability for parents, with longer transition periods to assist services implement the reforms in Queensland. Some stakeholders remain concerned about potential cost impacts that the national law may have on services and families. In 2009 and 2010, Queensland achieved key concessions to mitigate cost impacts for services and families, including delaying staffing requirements and special provisions for our Queensland services. The bulk of the cost impact to Queensland services is anticipated to occur in 2014 to 2016 when early childhood teachers will be required in all long-day care and kindergarten services and when improved educator-to-child ratios commence.

Given the extensive level of consultation with stakeholders on the development of the national law, large scale public consultation on the development of this bill to apply the national law in Queensland has not been necessary. Regarding consultation for the national regulations, the national working group has also been developing the national regulations that will provide further detail about how a service must operate under the national law, including compliance with the national quality standard, the assessment and rating system, staff-to-child ratios and fees associated with the national quality framework.

Extensive public consultation has been undertaken on the draft national regulations from December 2010 to May 2011. The draft national regulations are currently being finalised for consideration by the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs in the near future. The national law requires that the national regulations have been made by the ministerial council. Each minister representing a participating jurisdiction must table a copy of the regulations in their respective houses of parliament.

The key features of the national law: firstly, it establishes a national quality framework and contains broad enabling powers with more detailed matters to be set out in the national regulations. The national law establishes a national authority, the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, which will be governed by a board appointed by the ministerial council. The national authority will be responsible for guiding the consistent implementation and management of the national quality framework on behalf of all jurisdictions. The ministerial council will be responsible for monitoring the performance of the national authority. The national law provides for a role for the regulatory authorities in each jurisdiction to approve persons and services that provide education and care, to monitor compliance with the national law and to assess and publicly rate services against the new national quality standard.

In Queensland the chief executive of the Department of Education and Training will be the regulatory authority. Under the national law the approval to operate means that regulatory authority approval will be required for both the provider and the service. This will replace Queensland's existing licensing framework for the services covered by the national law. The national law contains transitioning arrangements so that all existing licensees of services to be covered by the national law will be automatically approved to operate as approved providers and their services will become approved services under the national quality framework. An important aspect of the national law is that the granting of approved provider status will be recognised in all other jurisdictions. This will eliminate the need for providers to obtain separate provider approval from each jurisdiction in which they intend to operate.

A key element of the new legislative approach will be the introduction of an assessment and ratings process. Regulatory authorities will be required to assess services against the quality rating system and against the seven quality areas in the national quality standard, the details of which will be prescribed in the national regulations. Providers will be required to display a services rating at the service. The introduction of this transparent rating system will give parents access to information about the quality of services so that they can make more informed choices about the services their children attend. The bill also includes additional provisions to ensure the national law is implemented in a nationally consistent way and operates effectively.

I am pleased to offer assistance to the committee members today with their inquiries. I thank you again for the opportunity to brief you. Anne is available to answer questions on the more practical applications and the nature of the regulations while Therese is available for the more technical aspects of the legislation.

CHAIR: Could you give us a bit of an idea of what other countries are doing in this area of early childhood education? Are we following others or leading the pack?

Ms Reddell: I would like to say that we are leading the pack. No, there are others who were in this space before us. For instance, New Zealand already has a very similar system. They have integrated the monitoring of compliance with legislative standards with a continuous improvement approach. This means that they are also assessing the quality of services and supporting services to continually improve the quality of their services.

CHAIR: Do they have a national approach? They do not have a federal system, but they have a country-wide approach to the issue?

Ms Reddell: They do.

CHAIR: What about other countries like the UK?

Ms Reddell: It differs right across the world, but in relation to the notion of making it national, I think we are leaders in that respect. The idea of bringing the compliance and the quality assessment together is happening in other countries.

CHAIR: And the other countries are generally concentrating on the early childhood area as well? There is a realisation that this is important world-wide?

Ms Reddell: Absolutely! I think the work that Australia is doing around its curriculum—when the Early Years Learning Framework, which is a part of this new legislative requirement, was developed it was conscious of the fact that the early childhood education aspects needed to fold seamlessly into the new national curriculum. So that was very much on the minds of people who are drafting the Early Years Learning Framework. The early years is seen right around the world as an important first step. It is the link to ongoing education. There are studies that show that investment and having children access a quality early childhood education and care program means that they will have lifelong benefits that accrue from that, and so will society and community. They are less likely to be unemployed. It is the notion of the mobilising factor of a good education.

CHAIR: It is an advance on *Sesame Street*. I am sure you would appreciate that comment.

Dr FLEGG: In relation to the new ratios, is the ration for up to 36 months still going down from one to four to one to three, or is that one of the ones where concessions were made?

Ms Reddell: The nought to two ratio nationally will be one to four, which is where Queensland currently is.

Dr FLEGG: Is that a change, because that was not what was originally proposed?

Ms Reddell: I think you may be referring to some advice that was received earlier on from an expert panel, you may recall. The difficulty about ratios is that there is no absolute science about what the ratio should be. So there are some advocates that say that it should be one to three, but what has been settled on for the national framework is one to four for children nought to two, and that is the ratio that we currently have in Queensland. That will be a ratio that all the other states and territories will need to comply with in 2012, the very first year of the new framework. Our services will already be at that standard.

Dr FLEGG: What about two to three?

Ms Reddell: Two to three will come into being in 2016. Currently we are at one to six and that will be one to five in the new world.

Dr FLEGG: There have obviously been quite a few concessions made, which I am sure a lot of people will be quite pleased about—a lot of people who are talking to me, anyway. In terms of the physical structure of the building, the renovations now only have to be done if the business is sold or if it is transferred to another provider to meet the new standards for the physical.

Ms Reddell: Currently Queensland has very strenuous requirements around the buildings. We have in our Queensland development code all of the physical requirements that licensed child-care services in Queensland need to comply with. In the new framework we will have national requirements around buildings. They will not be as prescriptive as the Queensland development code, but they cover all the essential requirements for children to be safe and secure in those environments.

There will be in the new system, in the new legislation, something that we do not have in Queensland currently and that is that services can apply for a waiver in relation to their physical requirements. It may be a waiver that is just temporary, something that needs to be amended or some renovations need to be done. So they will be able to apply for a waiver. The regulatory authority will need to consider the application and, based on the merits of the application, may give them that waiver for anything up to 12 months. There may also be some services that request a permanent waiver, what is called a service waiver. To give you an example, that could be a very small service in a very small, discreet Indigenous community where culturally appropriate practice is being adhered to but they may not meet the strict requirements of indoor space, for instance, because they may have a very outdoor focused program. That is an ability that the sector here currently does not have that they will have in the new framework.

Dr FLEGG: I was not aware of the requirement to have an early childhood teacher from 2014-16 in every day care sector.

Ms Reddell: Yes, from 2014 that will apply.

Dr FLEGG: Is that a little bit at odds with the kindergarten rollout in long-day-care centres?

Ms Reddell: I think it will be very complementary. Those Queensland long-day-care centres that have been approved as kindergarten providers and are getting funding under our funding scheme will already have the teacher. So that funding will assist them to go a long way to them meeting that requirement for a teacher.

Dr FLEGG: What about the ones that do not have a kindergarten teacher?

Ms Reddell: They will be in the same position as every other service in the country. The idea behind the teacher is basically about raising the educational outcomes from all services. Up until now we have had a very divided system where those services that are seen as early childhood education are delivered by qualified teachers and those services that are seen as early childhood education and care with an emphasis perhaps on the care are delivered here in Queensland by people who have diploma qualifications but not necessarily a teaching qualification. It is about raising the benchmark in terms of educational outcomes so that children of that age group, regardless of what setting they are in, are actually receiving the same kind of inputs and will receive the same kind of educational program.

Dr FLEGG: Will there be enough teachers to go around?

Ms Reddell: We are doing everything that we can to get teachers, as I am sure you are aware, yes.

CHAIR: Do you take note of what is happening at universities in that regard in terms of students who are enrolled or students who are encouraged to go into this area rather than primary or secondary?

Ms Grantham: We have actually written to every teacher on the lists seeking their interest to get these qualifications. We are doing scholarships. We have a whole workforce strategy around how we actually work with the sector—because we are not the employing authority, of course—on how we can assure that we do have the workforce available at the appropriate time.

CHAIR: It just occurs to me that, as members of parliament, we have people contacting us wanting our help to get employment within the department. It just seems a shame that people go to all of the trouble and effort of gaining a degree but cannot get a job. If we could steer them into this area where there is a shortage, it makes sense.

Ms Grantham: Of course we are working with our university partners to get that message out there that primary education, with an emphasis on early years education, is where the employment opportunities will be.

CHAIR: In terms of the rate of pay, is that comparable with primary at this stage?

Ms Grantham: Anne would have to answer that one.

Ms Reddell: The conditions and pay rates are different according to the setting. So in terms of the hierarchy, it is primary school, kindergartens and then, as the director-general pointed out, the services in the main are run by non-government organisations. So they have their own arrangements, industrial arrangements about pay scales.

CHAIR: But generally speaking, are they markedly different?

Dr FLEGG: Yes.

Ms Reddell: There are differences, yes.

Ms Grantham: In the kindy rollout we are making sure that the subsidy we pay enables a matching of the salary consistent with the primary school. That is in the kindy rollout, which is separate to this aspect.

Ms Reddell: Just to add to the discussion, we also have a bridging program available for primary school trained teachers who may well be interested in making the move into early childhood. So they can do RPL and many of them would be able to do that bridging course very quickly and externally of course.

Dr FLEGG: In relation to some of the smaller, more remote towns, it strikes me that it could be quite difficult to get the necessarily qualified person. Say you are out in Surat, Injune or those sorts of places, given that they are generally significantly less well remunerated and certainly less well holidayed than primary teachers, I would imagine it would be a fairly major issue getting people out in those towns.

Ms Reddell: I think there are a couple of strategies. Remember the waivers that I talked about earlier in relation to physical requirements? There is also an application for waiver process in relation to staffing as well, which we do not have currently in Queensland. So in relation to those small services that you are talking about, you are absolutely right; it can take some time for them to attract a teacher. Often they have had a teacher for a very long time—

Dr FLEGG: —and they lose them.

Ms Reddell: A teacher has gone out there as a young teacher—

Dr FLEGG: —and married a local farmer. A farmer finds a wife!

Ms Reddell: That is right, something like that.

Mrs STUCKEY: You do not watch that, do you?

Dr FLEGG: No, of course I do not.

Ms Reddell: The other thing is that in our workforce action plan that the director-general referred to there are some strategies that are encouraging people to go into rural and remote communities. So there are incentives.

Dr FLEGG: Earlier you mentioned that these provisions are going to be dealt with by national regulations. Without being an expert on these things, I presume that under a national regulation there is no role for the Queensland parliament. If it is a state regulation, we could move a disallowance here, but I presume that if it is a national one that probably does not apply.

Ms Ryan: Could I answer that question for you? The process that has been set up in the national law is that the ministerial council makes the regulations—Julie mentioned that before in her speech—and that is because it needs to be a nationally consistent instrument. The national law does require, however, that each participating minister on that council must then come back to their own parliament and table the regulations in parliament. So the Queensland parliament will have an opportunity to scrutinise the national regulations.

Dr FLEGG: The national regulations will come to the parliament.

Ms Ryan: Once they are tabled.

CHAIR: That applies to all legislation of this nature across the portfolios.

Ms Ryan: It seems to be part of the national applied laws process.

CHAIR: Are there any further questions?

Mrs SCOTT: I guess for me I am interested in the more disadvantaged families in my area and access to facilities and so on and whether or not it is more by encouragement or compulsion that we actually engage with a lot of these mums. The sad thing is that some children are far better off in a day care or kindergarten situation than in their home where they have no stimulation, no storybooks—all of those sorts of things. What is the optimum number of hours per week that is recommended in a kindergarten situation? Is it three days a week for five hours a day? Where do we head with that?

Ms Grantham: The kindergarten program, as you know, is a qualified program with a qualified teacher for 15 hours a week. That is the kindergarten. This is more broadly applied, of course, through long day care. The quality standards will apply for long day care. The kindy program itself is 15 hours.

Mrs SCOTT: So three days a week for five hours a day or so.

Ms Grantham: Yes.

Mrs SCOTT: How do we engage with families that are just not inclined to really do anything with their children and so on? It is very difficult sometimes to actually give the motivation to even do that, even with the Commonwealth's subsidy and so on.

CHAIR: And these are the children most in need.

Mrs SCOTT: They are, very much so.

Ms Reddell: Yes. They are the children who we want to have accessing a quality program. Our communication strategy has been ramping up and will continue to ramp up. We are invited to a number of speaking engagements and we absolutely take on each and every one of them. We are also meeting regularly with representatives from groups like Playgroup Queensland. Often families who may feel somewhat marginalised will attend their local playgroup. So Playgroup Queensland is supporting us in getting the message out to those families that their child-care centre down the road or their kindergarten centre down the road is a place where their children can go and they can feel comfortable with their children going there.

In terms of the long-day-care centres, there are perhaps a higher proportion of children in the families that you speak of attending long-day-care centres. That is why it is a great thing that we are funding the kindergarten program in long-day-care centres and that these new higher quality requirements are going to apply to those long-day-care centres, because it has got to be a quality program that the children are accessing.

Mrs SCOTT: I wondered about you engaging with programs such as Helping Out Families that is in our area through Beenleigh and I think down to Nerang. That corridor has a lot of very needy families. I think the funding for that over four years is \$55 million and entails the full gamut of social services that a family may need. So maybe it could be an avenue of being able to engage in that way as well.

Ms Grantham: Of course, you have seen in the last couple of years the rollout of the early year centres, some of which are in your area.

Mrs SCOTT: Yes, and they are so good.

Ms Grantham: And the child and family centres that will gradually come on line, with 10 throughout Queensland.

Mrs SCOTT: And, hopefully, we will have an Indigenous one soon, although I think there is a problem with where that might be located. Another thing to take into consideration in our area is that there are so many cultural groups. We have a multicultural community with so many new refugees coming and some children do not have any English and so on. There are a lot of issues out in that corridor.

CHAIR: On another issue, kindy and long day care et cetera is not compulsory.

Ms Grantham: That is correct.

CHAIR: Do you have a way of determining what proportion participates and how many will not?

Ms Grantham: Yes, and we have targets set for maximising the enrolment of children into kindy programs. In 2008 the percentage of children in Queensland enrolled into a qualified program—the conditions of the teacher, the curriculum and the time—started at 29 per cent, whilst across Australia that was a much higher percentage. Our strategy in the rollout of the kindies is to reach the national average of around 95 per cent by the end of 2013. At the moment, we are currently in the midst of a census. Our goal for the end of 2011 is 65 per cent. We are making real inroads into making sure that we are rolling out the kindy program either through new buildings through the C&K and schools or through funding and subsidising long-day-care centres to get the teacher in and to have the qualified curriculum. We will make sure that the children who are in long day care already will be in a qualified program while they are there.

CHAIR: So provide the service and the kids will come.

Ms Grantham: Yes. Many of them are in long day care. There is a very high percentage of children in the long-day-care sector so that is why we are not duplicating by having additional kindies. We know where the children are, so we work with the existing providers and do not go into competition with the private sector. We will fund them through this subsidy approach and maximise it in that way.

CHAIR: Desley was referring to the fact that you will always have a proportion of parents who do not send their kids to school let alone to prep or to kindy.

Ms Grantham: Yes, we recognise that.

Mrs STUCKEY: I want to talk about the provider approval system, which is listed as an additional key feature of this law—that is, that there will be a perpetual service to replace the existing three-year licence. Could you explain that? Part 2 of that question relates to the ‘consideration of the fitness and propriety of providers’. Are you looking at their physical fitness or are there other criteria as well?

Ms Reddell: I might answer that question, if I may. Basically, as you say, we have a three-year licensing program here in Queensland and that will be replaced by a perpetual provider approval. What we call licensees here will be approved providers. It is also a portable approval, which means they will be able to use that approval in any other state and territory in Australia. Of course, if something untoward happens then it can be reviewed but, basically, it is a one-off approval process and it is ongoing.

Mrs STUCKEY: So there is no accreditation required? In a lot of areas you need to have an accreditation every two or three years. Are you saying that once they get it, they have got it?

Ms Reddell: That is right. That is the process that is being contemplated currently in the legislation. I might just point out that, as the director-general referred to in her speech, a new national authority has been established which will oversight the way the system operates right across the country and it is also responsible for providing advice to regulatory authorities about best practice, improved practice and what have you. This may well be something that is looked at down the track, but currently it is just a one-off. The regulatory authority has the authority to review that on certain occasions.

Ms Grantham: But there are annual reviews.

Ms Reddell: And annual reviews, sorry.

Ms Grantham: So even though the services are licensed to continue, there are reviews annually of their performance.

Dr FLEGG: And accreditation? In the sense that hospitals, medical centres and all those sorts of things have accreditation

Ms Grantham: Yes.

Dr FLEGG: So they will have to tick off on certain criteria. If they fail, they will come back.

Ms Grantham: That is right. They have to meet that quality framework—

Dr FLEGG: So it is an annual accreditation inspection of some sort.

Ms Reddell: Yes. I just want to clarify for everybody that currently we have a licensing process where we look at the fitness and propriety of the licensee and we also look at the service. So that is the physical building and the program that is being delivered there. In the new system, those two aspects are separated so there is a provider approval, which is in perpetuity but can be reviewed as required. The service approval is also in perpetuity but, as you say, there will be inspections or quality assessments that will occur on a regular basis. There is an in-built capacity within the legislation to reward the services that are doing well and to pay closer attention to those that need some more support. So depending on the level of quality rating that a service gets, we will be back reassessing them either within 12 months or within two years.

Dr FLEGG: It seems a very short period of time.

Ms Grantham: It depends. If there is something that is not reaching a quality standard, you would not want it to be left for too long.

Dr FLEGG: That is pretty resource intensive though, is it not? You are talking about a lot of centres.

Ms Grantham: Currently, there is a review process.

Ms Reddell: Currently, we actually visit every service in Queensland at least once a year. It is important to remember that what we are talking about in the new framework is a continuous improvement approach. So, yes, we will go back to some services within a year or within two years but we do not necessarily start all over again. Our licensing process, which is every three years, is about starting all over again every three years. The new approach, the quality assessment, is about starting from where they began. So services will need to do a quality improvement plan, for instance, and they will update that as they need to. They would have identified the areas that they feel they need to improve in, the assessor would have identified the areas that he or she thinks they need to improve in, and by and large that will be the focus of the next one. So it is an iterative process, hopefully maintaining continuous improvement.

Mr DICKSON: Julie, thank you for giving us your time today, and all of your staff as well. My question is from page 8 of the green paper and relates to the estimated cost of government implementation. It talks about the federal government putting in ‘X’ amount of dollars and that you will absorb the difference. What is the difference and what effect will that have on existing facilities?

Ms Whitehead: The difference is about \$600,000. So the department will absorb that cost.

Mr DICKSON: But what are you using that \$600,000 for now?

Ms Whitehead: No, this is when we move to the new system that we will need to invest extra money.

Mr DICKSON: But that will come out of your existing budget, the existing \$600,000.

Ms Whitehead: And future budget bids, et cetera, yes.

Mr DICKSON: I read that in the rest of the document, but what is that money being used for now, that 600,000? Or do you just have that floating around?

Ms Whitehead: No, we do not have the money now. That is the money we will need as the new system kicks in and we need to train staff and get staff up and running.

Mr DICKSON: It says in here that DET will draw on the existing resources to reduce the cost of implementation of the national quality framework. So it is in the existing budget.

Ms Grantham: It probably applies to other activities that may not be necessary. At the moment we probably visit more than what is required under the new framework. So we will have to look at how we do that. In order to meet our obligations we will do that, but maybe we do not do it to the extent that we do it currently and our staff are diverted into other activities. There will be money set aside for training that we must do with the staff because the framework is a new framework, but there is certainly no excess funding. It is about realigning any existing funding that we currently have to make sure that we support the new regulations as we are required to deliver them. So sometimes it is looking at what we do, what do we stop doing that is no longer necessary—that sort of thing.

Mr DICKSON: That is the point I was trying to make: what do you stop doing to utilise that \$600,000. That is the magical number we are looking at. I am just wondering what you are going to have to cut back on.

Ms Grantham: It will not necessarily come from one part. The department's budget, as you can imagine, includes early childhood education and training as well as the regulatory functions with the universities. So it is about looking at our whole budget. Each year we do that. As new demands are placed upon a department's budget we look at what we do and what we stop doing. So it is more globally than saying this money will come from the existing regulation function. We look more globally at the time in our planning to do a departmental budget.

Mr DICKSON: Just to expand on that a little further, what is the quantum of the federal government's component?

Ms Grantham: The total budget for this aspect alone?

Ms Reddell: For Queensland?

Mr DICKSON: Yes.

Ms Reddell: Just give us a moment. We might need to take that question on notice.

Mr DICKSON: I can get it later. That would be great.

Ms Grantham: We will provide that.

CHAIR: That, I think, is all of the questions on this matter.

Ms Whitehead: We just want to clarify that we did find here that the NPA provides Queensland with \$4.99 million over 2009-10 to 2013-14 to implement the NQF.

Mr DICKSON: Thank you so much.

CHAIR: That concludes what you want to tell us and what we want to ask you about this bill. Bruce just has a question out of left field about the other bill that we have. You might be able to address it. If not, you can get back to us.

Ms Grantham: We can take it on notice, if necessary.

Dr FLEGG: It is not out of the other bill.

CHAIR: No, it is not either.

Dr FLEGG: The members of the committee are feeling their way a little bit, but as well as being a portfolio committee we fill a role on public accounts and public works. I am concerned that we might neglect that role so we had a discussion earlier and you will be pleased that some members of the committee thought anything we request on that should not be too onerous, either on our secretariat or on the department. In terms of fulfilling our public accounts role, I wanted to know what your thought was if we sought from you information in relation to, say, major capital works—for example, the construction of new schools or major capital works projects—along the same lines as a Public Accounts Committee, when we did have one, would do.

Ms Grantham: Our capital works program is well documented and available. I am not sure if it is published, but our capital works program is available for the committee to see.

Dr FLEGG: It would not be any problem or unnecessarily onerous on you if we asked to see that?

Ms Grantham: The capital works for which part. For kindy?

Dr FLEGG: No, for the department in general.

Ms Grantham: In general?

CHAIR: It would be huge, would it not? Every school might have a bit of capital work going on.

Dr FLEGG: That is why we did not want to overburden you.

Ms Grantham: There are a number of layers. It is a multilayered program.

Dr FLEGG: Is there a layer that maybe deals with just the large end of things?

Ms Grantham: If you wanted to know what our major projects were we could categorise that for you.

CHAIR: It would be good for us to specify as much as we can what we want.

Ms Grantham: Yes, that would be very helpful.

Dr FLEGG: So if we specified major projects so we did not get every classroom or school hall and all that, that would not be overly onerous to provide that?

Ms Grantham: Not for major projects, no.

CHAIR: What would you classify as a major project in terms of dollars?

Ms Grantham: I am not sure of the exact definition, but it is over a certain quantum that is a major project.

CHAIR: Building a new high school type of thing is a major project?

Ms Grantham: Or a new building of a substantial size in a school could be a major project.

CHAIR: We will get back to you on that. Thank you, Julie, and your officers today for your presentation, the manner of that presentation and the thoroughness of it as well. It is really appreciated. No doubt we will avail ourselves of your expertise and knowledge as required.

Dr FLEGG: Frequently.

CHAIR: Thank you again

Ms Grantham: And I thank the committee.

Committee adjourned at 12.05 pm