

## Question on Notice

No. 1093

Asked on 13 September 2023

**DR C ROWAN** ASKED MINISTER FOR EDUCATION, MINISTER FOR INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AND MINISTER FOR RACING (HON G GRACE)

QUESTION:

With reference to the Minister's admission in relation to the Free Kindy program that 'there will be pockets where we will need to employ more staff'—

Will the Minister advise (a) specifically where such 'pockets' exist, (b) how many additional staff will need to be employed to fill these 'pockets' and (c) how much of the \$120m budget allocation for attracting and retaining kindergarten staff has been spent from 1 July 2023 to date?

ANSWER:

The Palaszczuk Government is investing \$645 million over four years to deliver free kindergarten for 15 hours per week for 40 weeks of the year for eligible children in 2024 and beyond.

The Department of Education is working closely with all stakeholders on the implementation of Free Kindy for 2024. This includes identifying and supporting any locations or individual services that report difficulties in attracting and retaining early childhood teachers. At this stage, a small number of individual services (around 5% of all services) have reported difficulties with recruitment, with specific locations being identified.

Current workforce challenges are not isolated to Queensland—they are an issue across the country. The Queensland Government continues to work closely with the Australian Government, other jurisdictions and the early childhood sector to implement actions in the *Children's Education and Care National Workforce Strategy – Shaping Our Future*.

Data collected in the annual Early Childhood Census indicates that in Queensland the number of early childhood teachers (ECTs) has increased from 2493 ECTs in 2016 to 3742 ECTs in 2022. The early childhood sector is a demand-driven system run predominately by the private sector. Specific numbers of what additional staff may be needed by the private sector for growth is not collected in the annual census.

Attracting and retaining educators and ECTs is essential. This is why the Queensland Government is investing \$120 million over the next four years on workforce initiatives. These initiatives include:

- \$40 million to help attract and retain ECTs in kindergarten services in regional and remote locations; and
- \$80 million for the Queensland Early Childhood Workforce Strategy and Action Plan that will address workforce challenges in the early childhood sector, including family day care, outside school hours care, kindergartens and long day care.

The budget to assist kindergarten services to attract and retain ECTs in outer regional, remote and very remote communities for 2023–24 is \$10 million. To date, the department has expended \$2.7 million (July to September 2023) on remoteness subsidies. These subsidies are paid quarterly to eligible services.

In addition to the workforce investment, separate funding of \$7.1 million has been invested this financial year to build the capability of the kindergarten workforce through the successful Kindy Uplift program. This program will be expanded to over 2000 kindergartens from 2024.