

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Inquiry into the 2022-23 Budget Estimates – 23 May 2022 8:30-9:15

Early Childhood

Responses to questions on notice

S1.

Portfolio:	Early Childhood
Witness:	Hon. Ingrid Stitt
Committee member:	Mr O'Brien
Page of transcript:	3

Mr D O'BRIEN: Can I ask perhaps the department: the published target rate is 96 per cent, how many children in terms of actual numbers who are eligible are not actually attending kindergarten?

Ms ATTA: I might ask the Deputy Secretary to go to that detail.

Ms LITTLE: Thank you very much for the question. It is not actually possible to specify with certainty how many children that is, and I can explain why—and we can take this question on notice further to get you whatever information is available. The reason for that is that when you are talking about a population of this size, which is around 80 000 children, the specificity of the ABS denominator will make a lot of difference to that number. So as the minister has flagged, particularly over the last two years there have been issues with the ABS denominator, and there are always issues at the margins because it is only an estimate of what the denominator is in a particular state at a particular time. I will say that over the last two years the denominator in particular has been less reliable than normal because of the patterns of migration changing and has not been fully updated, but we are happy to get you whatever information is available.

Response to the question:

Noting the limitations of the 2021 Australian Bureau of Statistics population estimates as the denominator for calculating the kindergarten participation rates, using this methodology would indicate that approximately 5,800 children did not attend in kindergarten in 2021. The Department of Education and Training's advice is that this number was likely lower, and that the most accurate way to estimate the number of children who did not attend kindergarten in 2021 is through a comparison with 2022 Foundation (prep) enrolments. This dataset is not yet available.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Inquiry into the 2022-23 Budget Estimates – 23 May 2022 8:30-9:15

Early Childhood

Responses to questions on notice

S2.

Portfolio:	Early Childhood
Witness:	Hon. Ingrid Stitt
Committee member:	Mr Hibbins
Page of transcript:	8, 9

Mr HIBBINS: Thank you, Deputy Chair. And thank you, Minister, and your team, for appearing this morning. Can I just get some figures from you, on notice if need be. I saw in your presentation you have allocated \$1.4 million to meet the demand for the kindergarten fee subsidy. Can I get some data for the last financial year in terms of just what the total cost of the fee subsidy program was, how many were offered, breakdown by area, and then also for how many it was a subsidy versus how many families actually got free kinder from that program?

Ms STITT: I might check with Ms Little whether we can provide that sort of detail.

Ms LITTLE: We can certainly provide information about the KFS budget. I can say here for the committee that approximately 25 per cent of families accessing kindergarten in Victoria are using the kindergarten fee subsidy, available in particular in sessional kindergarten services, and that is for families who are concession cardholders, are Aboriginal, have multiple births and have certain kinds of refugee and asylum seeker visas. But we can certainly see, Mr Hibbins, what other information is available.

Mr HIBBINS: Terrific. Thank you. And can I get the same for the early start kindergarten program as well?

Ms LITTLE: Certainly. That is no problem at all.

Response to the question:

There were very few Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (KFS) enrolments in 2021 given that almost 98% of funded kindergarten services participated in the Free Kinder initiative. Children enrolled in sessional services who would normally attract KFS were instead provided with a free program through the Free Kinder initiative.

In 2020, prior to the broad application of Free Kinder as part of the Victorian Government's COVID-19 response, there were 18,294 children enrolled in a kindergarten program attracting the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy of \$1,552. This is on top of the per capita grant of \$3,774 (standard service rate). In addition, a further \$260 Kindergarten Fee Subsidy Ratio supplement was provided for eligible children in a sessional group of 23 or more.

In 2021 there were 3,325 Early Start Kindergarten enrolments attracting an average payment of \$6,052 per child. This is in addition to children receiving Three-Year-Old Kindergarten as part of the roll-out of this universal reform.