

Child Care Fee Relief Banyan Park Early Learning Centre – Norfolk Island

Key Issues

- In 2018 Price Waterhouse Cooper was commissioned to provide the Department with a baseline assessment and transition plan for the Banyan Park Early Learning Centre (Banyan Park). A report was provided to the Department in June 2018 on the viability of the Centre to meet the requirements set out in the National Quality Framework and to provide baseline costs for the provision of fee relief for up to 25 children prior to transition to a child care regulator and Banyan Park transitioning to be an approved centre. No significant concerns were raised in the report. A number of safety concerns identified in the report have been managed by Banyan Park.
- In May 2018, Senator the Hon Simon Birmingham, the then Minister for Education and Training provided conditional agreement to provide one-off administered funding to Banyan Park Early Learning Centre in lieu of mainland child care fee relief, for the period 2 July 2018 to 31 December 2018. At this time, Banyan Park was the only Norfolk Island child care centre that had expressed an interest in becoming an approved centre for the purpose of attracting the Child Care Subsidy (CCS) equivalent.
- A number of assurances were sought by Minister Birmingham, from the then Minister for Regional Development, Territories and Local Government, the Hon Dr John McVeigh MP, in regard to Banyan Park's application of CCS fee relief equivalent, and that Banyan Park meet (where possible) standards for child care, consistent with an approved centre on the mainland.
- The interim funding was announced on 2 July 2018 and is provided through a contract with Banyan Park administered by the Department. The Department has not identified any issues with Banyan Park's administration of fee relief, or its operation, during the contract period.
- When the interim funding arrangement was agreed, there was an expectation that a state child care regulator would be in place by 31 December 2018. This has not occurred and it is not likely that a regulator will be in place within the next 12 months. With the current interim arrangement expiring on 31 December 2018 and in the absence of a regulator, a more enduring solution is required.
- The Department is consulting with the Department of Education and Training (DET) to recommend that Banyan Park is supported by DET as a budget-based funded centre. Unlike the interim arrangement, this gives the centre certainty and on-going support from DET.
- The Department procured the services of a mentor [REDACTED] to assist Banyan Park to continue to work towards the requirements under National Quality Framework to be an approved child care centre.
- The Administrator of Norfolk Island, Mr Eric Hutchinson is a strong advocate for the continuation of child care fee relief to families on Norfolk Island.

Background

- Banyan Park is the largest child care centre on Norfolk Island opening in 1977. Currently 28 children from the ages of 3 to 5 attend the centre.
- Norfolk Island families are not able to access the Australian Government's CCS, as Banyan Park and other child care providers on Norfolk Island are not accredited child care service providers eligible to attract CCS.
- Funding for Banyan Park Child Care Fee Relief is via the transfer of administered funds of \$250,000 from the DET to this Department. The transfer of funds will occur through the 2018/19 MYEFO process and was approved by Assistant Minister to the Prime Minister, the Hon Steve Irons MP, in September 2018.

Sensitivities

- Parents and the Norfolk Island Community are understandably anxious about ongoing access to childcare fee relief beyond 31 December 2018. The Commonwealth will be publicly criticised if assistance is not provided beyond 31 December 2018.
- You and Minister Tehan, and respective Departments will agree on arrangements post 31 December 2018, including any announcements or talking points that will support the future arrangement.

Other Childcare issues

- Norfolk Island Family Day Care (FDC) providers, Ms Katherine Lance and Ms Deborah Sheridan, have approached the former Minister for Regional Development, Territories and Local Government and his Advisor, seeking support to provide CCS to FDC providers on Norfolk Island. The Department advised the priority is to strengthen and embed the Banyan Park arrangement prior to considering expansion to include FDC.
- Childcare worker placements at Banyan Park. Correspondence was received from [REDACTED] People Plus, in relation to students undertaking the practical component of childcare training at Banyan Park. The Department provided advice from DET encouraging [REDACTED] contact the Australian Skills Quality Authority to ascertain the process through which Banyan Park can become a regulated centre for workplace placement purposes.