

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT GRANT UPDATE

On 8 August 2024 the Federal Government announced a new Grant Opportunity for the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector. The Grant was designed to address workforce shortages in the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector. They determined that low wages, low professional status, and lack of pay parity with school teachers were among the barriers impacting attraction and retention of ECEC workers.

The Grant was introduced as a temporary measure to lift wages for ECEC workers whilst a more detailed analysis was conducted under the heading of Gender based undervaluation, which resulted in the Gender-based undervaluation — priority awards review — Children’s Services Award (CSA) 2010 (AM2024/23).

The Town of Bassendean (TOB) employees are not employed under the CSA, they are employed under the Local Government Industry Award. See attached comparison table of the CSA award rates compared with the current Town of Bassendean agreement rates. The issue for the Town was that despite TOB Childcare staff being paid approximately 20% above award, there was an expectation that the grant would apply to our staff, to retain and attract staff. We therefore applied for the Grant.

At the time of applying for the Grant (**November 2024**), the Town understood thousands of applications were being lodged from Childcare services throughout the country and delays were expected. However, the delay was 11 months.

The Town received correspondence in **February 2025** from the Department of Education (the Department) advising that they identified a number of matters that required attention to progress the application, these were dealt with and the application was updated (**March 2025**).

At the time the only method of communication between the Town and the Department was via a Web Portal. A contact phone number or email address for the Officer dealing with our application was not an option.

In **June 2025** we were advised there was now an issue with the Town’s Enterprise Agreement because it made no reference to the Grant, and how it would be paid. The Department offered a solution that worked for businesses covered by the Fair Work Act, but it was not suitable because the Town of Bassendean as a result of new state government legislation was required to move from the Federal system to the State Industrial Relation System.

At that time the Department advised “they could not provide advice to resolve the issue as they are not permitted to give legal advice”

After further exchanges of information via the portal, the matter was escalated to another officer and a path forward was identified. It was agreed the Town would prepare draft wording for its Enterprise Agreement as the Department would not provide the sample wording required for the State Industrial environment. It appeared we were the **only** Local Government going through this process.

As a result of these discussions, it was determined that the Town had to update the Town of Bassendean (Administration) Agreement 2024. This required interaction with the ASU WA, as the representative union.

On **22 July 2025**, once the wording was agreed between the Department and the Union, the Town lodged the revised Agreement with the WAIRC.

The Town’s revised Agreement was approved on **13 October 2025**, and it was then provided to the Department.

On **23 October 2025** the Department advised that the Grant Application that was lodged in November 2024 was successful.

The awarding of this grant was published to the Grant Connect Website on **7 November 2025**. However, the information published were quite broad and lacked details. The United Workers Union and the local state member proceeded to make public statements without an understanding of the grant process and payment issues without providing the Town to explain the situation.

The union and local member continued to spread mis- information by stating the Town had not applied for the grant, which the Town subsequently corrected. They then mislead staff, telling staff that the Town had received a payment of \$476,766.83 and was withholding payments, which was also untrue. The Union and Local Member continue to misrepresent the facts and cause distress to workers for political gain.

As of **24 February 2026**, there was still some confusion as to how the payment system was intended to work and how the Town was to seek reimbursement for the Grant. The Manager Children Services contacted the Department to discuss the claims process but could not determine the claiming requirements.

On **5 March 2026**, the Manager of Children Services identified that some payments for the grant had been received but they had been included in the regular Childcare Subsidy payments, which are only accessible through the PRODA website.

The total of the payments received to date are \$259,691.91, which is significantly less than what would be owed if the payments had been made. Our calculations indicated the Town should have been paid \$350,000, based on the hours worked.

The Department made payments but did not issue a detailed remittance or a financial breakdown. Therefore, the Town is unable to pay employees without the ability to reconcile back to employees timesheets.

On **12 March 2026**, the Manager Children Services was able to talk to staff from the Department to attempt to resolve how the payments were calculated.

The issues discussed were;

- How did the Department calculate the hours worked by each employee?
- What classification was applied to each employee? and,
- Were the Town of Bassendean Child ratios factored into the calculations?

To date the staff have not been paid the allowance as the amount required due to the inability to reconcile the required payments compared to what has been paid.

The Department advised that they had a standard calculation method and that none of the matters raised above were taken into consideration. The payment is based on the number of charged session hours at our service. For example, if there are 35 children attending our service daily with an average session length of 10 hours, we will receive a payment based on 350 hours per day or 1750 hours per week. However they have not advised how much is paid per hour.

This means that a service that operates above the usual ratio, as the Town does is disadvantaged.

They then advised that the Town could request a Funding Review and if successful that the Department could make a Top Up payment.

On **25 March 2026** the Town lodged a request for Funding Review and on **20 April 2026** we were advised that the request for a review information was accepted.

On **6 May 2026**, the Department advised that the Funding Review was not yet complete.

As of **13 May 2026** the Town has still not been advised of the outcome of the Funding Review or Top up payment.