

Subject: Indigenous Boarding Survey
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INDIGENOUS BOARDING SURVEY

Respondent Profile

In total, 28 respondents completed the survey. Of these, 25% were from Qld, 25% from WA, 18% from both SA and NT, with 14% from NSW/ACT. No respondents were from Vic/Tas.

More than half (54%) of the respondents offer more than 50 boarding places for Indigenous students. Another 25% offer between 25-50 places, with the remaining 21% offering less than 25 places for Indigenous boarders. As such, the survey included respondents from Indigenous-specific and 'mainstream' boarding schools and residences.

Two-thirds of respondents deliver dormitory style boarding on the school campus. Three respondents deliver hostel-type boarding and three responses were from family group home boarding providers.

ABSTUDY delays

Almost three quarters (71%) of respondents indicated that students were delayed from attending boarding at the start of the year while awaiting ABSTUDY approval. The reasons for these delays were not explicitly sought in the survey, although subsequent comments in the survey indicated that delays were a combination of time required to process applications and follow up to collect all required data and consents (e.g. tax file numbers, parent signatures, income records) in the case of incomplete applications.

The extent of these delays is alarming in terms of the amount of school missed by students. In response to the question, "How many students were delayed by more than 4 weeks awaiting their application to be processed?" some 300 students were identified (approximately 15 per residence responding to the question).

At the time of the survey (week 6-7 of the term), almost two-thirds of respondents (64%) indicated that they are still awaiting students while ABSTUDY issues are being addressed.

Improving ABSTUDY

Respondents were asked "What are your 'top 3' suggestions about how you think ABSTUDY could be improved?" The most frequent answers (grouped by theme) are listed below.

- Simplification of processes and clarity of information.
- Improved information for parents.
- Improved processes for travel bookings, with some flexibility to simplify travel arrangements (eg allocation for schools with large numbers of students).
- Flexibility and case-based considerations.
- Lines of communication improved with Abstudy – reduced waiting times; additional call takers; nominated contact person; call back service.
- Faster approval and advice if not approved.

Alternative Boarding Options

For some time, Boarding Australia has been interested in emerging practices in informal boarding environments. This may include staying with family while boarding, but also includes the use of private houses or hostels which are operated as commercial entities.

One-third of respondents are aware of these informal boarding options being used by students

at their school. Four respondents indicated that they have concerns about the quality and safety of these arrangements.

Regards

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