

Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit

Inquiry into Policy and Program Design and Implementation

QUESTION ON NOTICE

Date of hearing: 02 February 2024

Outcome: Higher Education, Research and International

Department of Education Question No. IQ24-000001

MP Julian Hill on 02 February 2024, Proof Hansard page 23

Data set for the three metrics with 2030 target

Question

CHAIR: To unpick that and be clear on what I was looking for: yes, of course we'd like to see access improve, but the point of the question is that it doesn't matter whether access has improved or not. It's: are you looking at the impact? If it's getting worse, you know that an intervention hasn't worked or there's some other problem. It's a more technical question or exploration we're looking for than whether access is improving. I'm sure everyone would like to know that.

Your point that it takes time to see trends or material changes—that's true, but I'd like to understand whether you have been collecting the right data. This might be a question for the Audit Office. Was the agency collecting the right data and simply not analysing it or aggregating it to analyse in a outcome sense, or was the problem that the right data wasn't being collected? If it's the former then, if you've now got a framework, you actually could do that retrospectively quite easily and quickly, so I would like to understand whether you haven't been collecting the data or haven't been analysing the data?

Senator REYNOLDS: Could I add to that? I was going to ask a similar question. In the audit snapshot in the audit report, there are three metrics there from 2016. This might be a framework to answer the chair's question. In 2016 you had three metrics—the percentage point differential between inner regional and metropolitan students in attainment rates—and you had a 2030 target. It was the same thing there: the percentage point differential between outer regional and metropolitan students. You've got those three metrics there with the 2030 target. Do you have consistent data so that you could answer the question of what that actually is today? Have you closed these three gaps? Where are they sitting? Are you able to track at least those three metrics?

Drew Menzies-McVey: We do track those three metrics on a regular basis. Attainment rates are something that is regularly collected across the system from the higher education providers, and the distinction that has been drawn out in the audit report is a regular feature of our reporting. In terms of our recent data, I have it as—I beg your pardon; I have brought the wrong data set, but we do track against those data points. I would have to take on notice the precise level of where we are at the moment. I do apologise; I don't have that to hand.

Answer

The data for the three targets is provided in the below tables.

The Napthine Review used 2016 data as the most recent Census data at the time. However, noting most of the actions only commenced in 2021, reviewing the baseline information on release of the 2026 Census would enable more appropriate assessment of the impact of the measures.

While attainment and participation rates have increased for inner regional, outer regional and remote areas, they have increased by a greater amount in metropolitan areas, hence the

disparity for most categories has not reduced. However, the disparity has reduced for Certificate IV and above attainment rates between metropolitan and inner regional areas.

Note - 'pp' refers to percentage point in all tables below.

Source: *Census 2016 and 2021*

Target 1: By 2030, halve the disparity between metropolitan and each regional and remote location category for Cert IV and above attainment rates for 25-34 year olds.		
	2016 Disparity	2021 Disparity
Major Cities – Inner Regional	19.4pp	19.2pp
Major Cities – Outer Regional	22.8pp	23.9pp
Major Cities – Remote	27.9pp	30pp

Source: *Census 2016 and 2021*

Target 2: By 2030, halve the disparity between metropolitan and each regional and remote location category for attainment rates of higher education for 25-34 year olds		
	2016 Disparity	2021 Disparity
Major Cities – Inner Regional	19.2pp	19.6pp
Major Cities – Outer Regional	20.8pp	22.4pp
Major Cities – Remote	23.4pp	25.7pp

Source: *Participation rates are derived by dividing the number of enrolments by the number of Australians aged 15-64. ABS (2016,2021) Census; Australian Government Department of*

Target 3: By 2030, halve the disparity between metropolitan and each regional and remote category in the rate of participation for Cert IV and above by work age Australian (15-64 years).		
	2016 Disparity	2021 Disparity
Major Cities – Inner Regional	3.4pp	4.3pp
Major Cities – Outer Regional	4.6pp	5.3pp
Major Cities – Remote	5.8pp	6.7pp

Education (DoE), Higher Education Statistics Collection; National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), Total VET Students and Courses Collection.

Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit

Inquiry into Policy and Program Design and Implementation

QUESTION ON NOTICE

Date of hearing: 02 February 2024

Outcome: Higher Education, Research and International

Department of Education Question No. IQ24-000002

Senator Linda Reynolds on 02 February 2024, Proof Hansard page 24

Progress update on data since 2016, where it has been updated

Question

Senator REYNOLDS: what questions would you be able to answer? I've just mentioned these three metrics. If you were asked, 'Can you provide the data since 2016,' where you've obviously had that data, would you be able to provide the data of the actual results through to this financial year? And, in terms of table 3.1 in this report, has there been any progress, and would you be able to provide more detail? It's basically two questions: the first three metrics, and then the metrics, in terms of, for example, this table—tertiary access payments, the CGS, the RRES program. Would you be able to provide progress data on those yet, or is that still going to be a work in progress?

Drew Menzies-McVey: Thank you for that clarification. Yes, we would be able to provide you with a progress update on the data since 2016, where it has been updated. Some of the data we use is drawn from external sources like the ABS, so we're held to their reporting and update cycle. In terms of the initiatives that are captured in 3.1, we could provide up-to-date information on where the program delivery and those initiatives are up to.

Senator REYNOLDS: Thank you; that was very helpful. Just to clarify, at the top of page 55, in that table for 'Regional Education Commissioner', it says 'none' for data collected and 'none' for data analysis undertaken. Is that something that you will look to remedy, or will there never be any information about the progress on that? Have you started looking at remedying that?

Drew Menzies-McVey: Just as a general statement for the Regional Education Commissioner, there's a lot of qualitative information and data that's collected in terms of her activities and her reporting. I would argue that we would be in a position to provide a lens on what that particular role is delivering. But I think Ms Mattinson has more detail that she'd like to share with the committee.

Ms Mattinson: Certainly. As Ms Menzies-McVey said, there's quite a lot of qualitative data in terms of the role that the commissioner is playing. There are also some metrics that we can provide, in terms of numbers of stakeholders she's met, meetings she's held, commissions she's been part of, speeches she's given—all of that type of thing. We can provide that as well.

Drew Menzies-McVey: And consultation.

Ms Mattinson: Yes, and the number of consultations.

Senator REYNOLDS: That is an inherently qualitative area to measure against, whereas a lot of the others are quantitative.

Drew Menzies-McVey: Yes.

Ms Mattinson: Yes, it's a different kind of measure.

Answer

Updates for each of the 3 measures mentioned by Senator Reynolds are provided in the following table.

Program / measure	Progress update
Tertiary Access Payment (TAP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9,737 payments made to tertiary students to date: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 2,125 in 2021 ○ 3,896 in 2022 ○ 3,716 in 2023. • First stage TAP evaluation was completed in 2021. Of the 376 TAP recipients surveyed, the majority reported the TAP greatly assisted their relocation, with some indicating without it, the relocation would not have been possible. • In 2023, 6,387 students have applied for the TAP, of which 3,716 payments were granted (58.2%). • Of the remaining claims 2,486 (38.9%) were rejected; and 185 (2.9%) claims are yet to be finalised. • A review of the Naphthine Measures (including TAP) will be undertaken by the Regional Education Commissioner, the Hon Fiona Nash in 2024. The second stage evaluation of the TAP is postponed pending consideration of the Australian Universities Accord final report.
Increased Commonwealth Grant Scheme funding for regional university campuses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$146 million has been provided over four years from 2020-21 to increase the commencing non-medical Commonwealth Grant Scheme funding for regional university campuses by 3.5 per cent a year.
Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarships program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Total funding committed to the program was \$62.6 million for the period 2017-18 to 2022-23. • In line with the original commitment, the program ceased following the completion of Round 6 on 14 July 2023. • 5,740 scholarships awarded across 6 rounds.

Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit

Inquiry into Policy and Program Design and Implementation

QUESTION ON NOTICE

Date of hearing: 02 February 2024

Outcome: Higher Education, Research and International

Department of Education Question No. IQ24-000003

The Committee provided in writing.

Ensuring policy planning and implementation is cohesive

Question

The audit report argues that delivering programs separately with no overarching framework 'creates a risk that there is no common awareness over shared stakeholders, risk and mitigations, milestones and dependencies' (para 3.6, p.50). How does the department respond to this argument? What measures, if any, has it taken to address this type of risk?
A) How is the department ensuring policy planning and implementation is cohesive, rather than individual program areas working separately?

Answer

Refer page 25 of Hansard for the department's response to this question at the hearing on 2 February 2024.

As noted in the department's submission to the inquiry, the department has established a Performance and Data Framework. The framework sets out baseline measures and ongoing monitoring and reporting at an individual program and initiative level, as well as at a package level, for a range of higher education access and participation programs, including those examined in the ANAO report. The framework also covers risk management, evaluation, and assurance processes.

While different teams have responsibility for the implementation of individual programs and policies, the Higher Education Access and Equity Branch has responsibility for the framework and will report to the department executive annually on the progress of the package of measures. This ensures the package of measures is monitored cohesively and considers shared stakeholders, risks, risk mitigation and any dependencies between various measures.

See IQ24-000011 for more information on department risk management.

Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit

Inquiry into Policy and Program Design and Implementation

QUESTION ON NOTICE

Date of hearing: 02 February 2024

Outcome: Higher Education, Research and International

Department of Education Question No. IQ24-000004

The Committee provided in writing.

Performance and Data Framework and a Stakeholder Engagement Plan to address Recommendations 1 and 2

Question

The department's submission stated that it has developed a Performance and Data Framework and a Stakeholder Engagement Plan that addresses Recommendations 1 and 2 of the audit report. When were these programs finalised and implemented?

A) Were any other 'tools' developed to respond to the governance-related findings in the ANAO audit and the November 2022 internal audit?

B) Can the department please elaborate on how these tools ensure an overarching arrangement to coordinate and consolidate governance, risk assessment and reporting is in place? (2.54, p.37)

C) The department argued that these documents addressed the ANAO recommendations 1 and 2. Can the department elaborate on how these tools address the recommendations to measure performance, track outcomes, collect data and conduct evaluation and assurance processes? (2.74, p.74)

D) How often does the department intend to review these programs to ensure they continue to meet their objectives?

Answer

The Performance and Data Framework and Stakeholder Engagement Plan were finalised on 23 October 2023 to be implemented from 15 November 2023. It is expected the Department's Audit and Assurance Committee will endorse the closure of the ANAO recommendations at their upcoming meeting in March 2024.

A) The Performance and Data Framework and Stakeholder Engagement Plan are the only tools specifically developed in response to the audits.

B) The Performance and Data Framework sets out the measurement methodology at both package and individual measure levels, and the related data requirements, assurance processes, risk management and evaluation activities that will be monitored and reported on by the department. Under the Framework, a report will be prepared annually and provided to the senior executive, covering all measures, and considering the way they operate as a package.

The Stakeholder Engagement Plan supports the implementation of the Performance and Data Framework by identifying key stakeholders and outlining the timing of engagement.

C) See B.

D) There will be an annual update on the status of key performance measures and targets for each of the programs/initiatives, with a report provided to the department Executive on the progress of the package of measures.

Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit

Inquiry into Policy and Program Design and Implementation

QUESTION ON NOTICE

Date of hearing: 02 February 2024

Outcome: Higher Education, Research and International

Department of Education Question No. IQ24-000005

The Committee provided in writing.

Performance and Data Framework and Stakeholder Engagement Plan

Question

The department argued that the development of the Performance and Data Framework and Stakeholder Engagement Plan addressed the ANAO audit recommendations 1 and 2 related to performance measurement, evaluation, and assurance processes.

Answer

See response to IQ24-000004.

Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit

Inquiry into Policy and Program Design and Implementation

QUESTION ON NOTICE

Date of hearing: 02 February 2024

Outcome: Higher Education, Research and International

Department of Education Question No. IQ24-000006

The Committee provided in writing.

Additional analysis of data undertaken to determine if projects achieve outcomes

Question

The audit found the department did not undertake additional analysis of data to determine if projects were achieving outcomes.

- A) Has the department increased or changed the data collected for each program?
- B) Is the department now undertaking additional analysis of data?
- C) How does this additional analysis ensure projects are achieving outcomes?
- D) Does the department now generate performance information against targets in the strategy to measure progress?

Answer

- A) The department routinely collects data for each of the programs and measures included in the audit report. Due to the relatively recent implementation of several of the measures (most implemented in 2021), rich data analysis has been limited. Since the audit, the department has reviewed the data and information collected for each of the measures and for the package of measures, as part of developing the Performance and Data Framework.
- B) Yes, the department analyses data as it becomes available for each of the programs and measures included in the audit and will undertake additional analysis as part of annual reporting on the measures and package.
- C) The department monitors trends in the data to monitor progress and assess whether a measure is working toward its intended outcome. This will be assessed at a package level through the Performance and Data Framework, which will collate and analyse data for all measures, and report annually to departmental executive on progress being made at a package level. This analysis allows the department to be adjustable were needed, based on indications emerging from data analysis.
- D) Yes, the department is generating performance information against targets in the strategy using the latest Census and Australian Bureau of Statistics Higher Education and Skills data as it becomes available. See IQ24-000001.

Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit

Inquiry into Policy and Program Design and Implementation

QUESTION ON NOTICE

Date of hearing: 02 February 2024

Outcome: Higher Education, Research and International

Department of Education Question No. IQ24-000007

The Committee provided in writing.

Limitations to available progress data

Question

The ANAO audit notes there were 'limitations to the data currently available to measure progress' for newer programs established outside the strategy.

A) Can Education comment on how these limitations have been addressed?

Answer

The Department of Education is continually collecting, monitoring, and analysing data for a range of programs, including those mentioned in the ANAO report.

This includes the department's internal higher education statistics, gathered through the Tertiary Collection of Student Information (TCSI), as well as Census data and the Australian Bureau of Statistics annual Higher Education data collection.

The limitations on analysing data on the progress of measures implemented in response to the *National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy* (the Naphthine Review) relate to timing as most measures were implemented from 2020-21 and data was often immature. Noting the latest available data is 2021 Census and 2022 TCSI data, this can limit options for analysing trends and determining the effects of these measures.

The department's Performance and Data Framework will include regular data updates on each of the measures, and annual reporting to the departmental executive on the overall impact of the package of measures.

See IQ24-000002 for data on the Tertiary Access Payment, Increased Commonwealth Grant Scheme funding for regional university campuses, and the Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarships program.

Note – the referenced point from the ANAO report refers to 'newer programs and initiatives established out of the Strategy' – therefore is referring to the measures implemented in response to the Naphthine Review, rather than 'outside' the strategy.

Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit

Inquiry into Policy and Program Design and Implementation

QUESTION ON NOTICE

Date of hearing: 02 February 2024

Outcome: Higher Education, Research and International

Department of Education Question No. IQ24-000008

The Committee provided in writing.

Australia's Higher Education System Review

Question

Can the department confirm if the \$2.7 million 12-month review of Australia's higher education system is currently on schedule? (para 3.57, p.60)

Answer

The Australian Universities Accord Panel submitted the Final Report to the Minister for Education on 28 December 2023.

The Final Report was released on 25 February 2024 and is available at <https://www.education.gov.au/accord-final-report>.

Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit

Inquiry into Policy and Program Design and Implementation

QUESTION ON NOTICE

Date of hearing: 02 February 2024

Outcome: Higher Education, Research and International

Department of Education Question No. IQ24-000010

The Committee Julian Hill provided in writing.

Assurance and evaluation activities – frequency

Question

The ANAO report found assurance and evaluation activities were undertaken on an ad-hoc basis and not considered as part of a broader strategic approach to evaluation and assurance. How frequently does the department intend to conduct assurance and evaluation activities going forward? (para.3.67, p.62)

Answer

To support a strategic approach to assurance and evaluation and address the ANAO's recommendations, the Higher Education Access and Equity Branch updated its Performance and Data Framework (the Framework) and Stakeholder Engagement Strategy. The Framework outlines performance measurement methodology, data/information requirements and quality assurance methods and mechanisms specific to each initiative, as well as the package of measures.

The Department's new centralised Evaluation unit will be supporting the Higher Education Access and Equity Branch monitor and evaluate measures in the Framework.

Timing of individual assurance and evaluation activities are tailored to each measure. As described in the Framework, the department will also coordinate an annual performance report on the portfolio of initiatives and measures that support access and participation for regional and remote students. The report will draw on evaluation and assurance activities for the measures and for the package and identify issues or significant risks.

An evaluation led by the Regional Education Commissioner, the Hon Fiona Nash, of the package of measures undertaken in response to the Napthine Review will commence in the first half of 2024. This will form part of the monitoring and evaluation of the broader package of regional measures, as outlined in the Framework.

Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit

Inquiry into Policy and Program Design and Implementation

QUESTION ON NOTICE

Date of hearing: 02 February 2024

Outcome: Corporate

Department of Education Question No. IQ24-000011

The Committee provided in writing.

Changes or improvements – risk considerations

Question

What changes or improvements has the department implemented to how it considers risk since the audit tabled?

A) How is the department ensuring risks are considered in a cohesive or interlinked way, as suggested by the audit? (para 2.64, p.37)

Answer

On 30 November 2023 the Secretary approved the current Enterprise Risk Management Policy and Framework (ERMPF), which provides the foundations and organisational arrangements for managing risk in the department. Changes and improvements to the framework include clearly articulating risk roles and responsibilities of all staff, updating enterprise-wide risks to ensure alignment with the department's current operating environment, and reviewing the risk appetite and tolerance statement which provides guidance on the level and limits to risk taking that the department considers acceptable to achieve its objectives. The department has also introduced new arrangements for the stewardship of its enterprise-wide risks.

To support staff to further develop their risk capability, the department has updated its mandatory online risk training, provided risk workshops for individual teams and updated guidance for drafting and managing risk plans.

A) As noted in the department's submission to the inquiry, the department has also established a Performance and Data Framework. The framework sets out baseline measures and ongoing monitoring and reporting at an individual program and initiative level, as well as at a package level, for a range of higher education access and participation programs. The Framework also covers risk management, evaluation, and assurance processes. The Higher Education Access and Equity Branch will include consideration of whole-of-package risk management in its annual reporting on the Framework, including the option of linking the risk plans.

Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit

Inquiry into Policy and Program Design and Implementation

QUESTION ON NOTICE

Date of hearing: 02 February 2024

Outcome: Corporate

Department of Education Question No. IQ24-000012

The Committee provided in writing.

SharePoint transition and recordkeeping practices

Question

The ANAO found working documents for five programs were maintained in shared network drives, inconsistent with the department's Information Management Policy. (para 2.60, p.36)

A) Has the department completed the transition to SharePoint, which was still in progress as of November 2022? (para 2.64, p.37)

B) How will the department ensure proper recordkeeping practices are maintained in the future?

Answer

A) Yes.

B) The department's Information Management Strategy 2023-2026 outlines processes and procedures for proper record keeping. Online mandatory training is required to be completed every 12 months.