

Senate Standing Committee on Education and Employment - Education

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE Budget Estimates 2014-2015

Outcome 3 - Higher Education, Research & International

Department of Education Question No. ED0369_15

Senator Whish-Wilson asked on 5 June 2014 , Hansard page 73

Question

Higher Education Reforms

Senator WHISH-WILSON: It is very much part of the community. Ms Paul: It is very much part of a community. Yes, it is. It is very much part of the fabric of the community. The vice chancellor is on the working group, and that is a good reminder. He is actually on the working group to discuss all of the issues coming out of the sector in financing and implementation of the whole package, so he has the ideal forum to raise any of his concerns. There is some evidence that goes to some of this commentary from other VCs. In considering that potential, what we are finding is that a couple of things are happening. I do not know if this is the case, but we have found with other commentary that one thing that is happening is that universities or commentators are taking the changes to the clusters, to the tiers, and kind of assuming they are required to implement them in certain ways, and that is not the case. They can do things in different ways. That is one thing I will say. I do not know if it goes to this. I am quite happy to take some of this on notice. Secondly, if he and I were sitting down together, I would be saying, 'Think about the opportunities for Tasmania that this package might deliver' because, as I have been saying here through evidence, it is a balanced set of incentives. It is a quite comprehensive reform potentially. A place like the University of Tasmania—and they probably do some of this already—is ideally placed to enter into partnerships with private higher education providers and sub-bachelor courses. I bet you— Senator WHISH-WILSON: On that point— Ms Paul: I bet they are in partnerships with TAFEs or whatever already. Senator WHISH-WILSON: I am not an expert on that point, I admit. But Peter Rathjen has already publicly said in the last two days that he does not believe there is a role for private providers because of the costs that they have to bear in these areas. It just would not be economical. Ms Paul: That is interesting because we know some universities—I can think of a couple; I will not name them—who have entered into arrangements with private providers to lower the unit cost of some teaching delivery but within the university setting. The thing about these reforms is that those sort of arrangements with private providers will attract Commonwealth funding for the first time. It is the same with the sub-bachelor programs. To the extent that he almost certainly has some arrangements with TAFEs in Tasmania, those things may well attract Commonwealth funding for the first time. I am quite happy to take on notice and to comment on the \$30 million question, but I would say those general things about the reforms.

Answer

It is not possible to accurately estimate the impact of the Government's higher education reforms on individual universities.

The university will be able to increase revenue from students in 2016, as the Government is removing limits on the amount that students can be charged for tuition. The university will also be able to increase the number of sub-bachelor students it enrolls, as the Government has announced that from 2016 it will provide a Commonwealth supported place for every eligible student enrolled in an accredited higher education diploma, advanced diploma or associate degree.

University-TAFE partnership arrangements provide innovative and flexible business models which enable universities and TAFEs (or other higher education institutions) to cater for different types of students and varying levels of demand without the need to invest in new infrastructure in other locations. They also facilitate access to higher education in underserved areas, and for people from disadvantaged backgrounds (including people with low levels of formal education).

The Government's higher education reforms may encourage institutions such as the University of Tasmania to explore the opportunities and benefits of expanding these kinds of partnership arrangements.