Senate Standing Committee on Education and Employment - Education

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Supplementary Budget Estimates 2013-2014

Outcome 2 - Schools and Youth

Department of Education Question No. ED0134_14

Senator McKenzie provided in writing.

Question
National Secondary School Computer Fund

These questions are to seek out the cost of each computer through the National Secondary School Computer Fund.

1. What was the total funding spent on National Secondary School Computer Fund over the full life of the DER NP?

2. How much was budgeted for this programme though? (Was there an overspend?)

3. Were they laptops of computers that were delivered in schools?
    *   Context: Kevin Rudd would talk about this programme but refer to laptops?

4. Were students able to keep the computers/laptops? Or were they for communal use?

5. What was the target ratio of computers to students? What is the actual ratio of computers to students?

6. How many computers were delivered over the life of the NP – was the 967,000 correct?

7. How many schools already had computers – are these counted as part of the 967,000? If so, why, if they were at no cost to the Australian Government and not rolled out under our program?

8. Therefore, what is the overall average cost to the Australian Government of each computer delivered (and installation/support) under the National Secondary School Computer Fund?
    *   Total cost divided by number of computers delivered = cost per computer

9. If the cost of the program was more than $1 billion, can the Department provide reasons as to why the original promise by the previous government (Rudd in 2011), to deliver 1 million laptops for $1,000 was not achieved?

Answer

1. What was the total funding spent on National Secondary School Computer Fund over the full life of the DER NP?

$2.0 billion was spent on the National Secondary School Computer Fund (the Computer Fund) over the full life of the Digital Education Revolution (DER) National Partnership (NP) with States and Territories and Funding Agreements (FAs) with non-government education authorities.

2. How much was budgeted for this programme though? (Was there an overspend?)

The previous government spent $2.0 billion providing ICT equipment for all senior secondary schools with students in Years 9 to 12 under the Computer Fund. The original estimated cost for the programme was $1 billion to provide a million computers.

Extra funding was allocated to the programme to take account of additional costs associated with installing computers in schools that had not been factored into the original estimated cost. It was made as a one-off payment of $807 million in 2008 after states and territories successfully raised the issue through the Council of Australian Governments led by NSW. There was also an additional $200 million provided in 2012-13 for the continued support and maintenance of equipment.

3. Were they laptops or computers that were delivered in schools?
    *   Context: Kevin Rudd would talk about this programme but refer to laptops?

Education authorities had primary responsibility for decisions about educational hardware and software best suited to the specific needs of their schools. Depending on need, schools bought netbooks, laptops, tablet computing devices or installed more desktop computers.

4. Were students able to keep the computers/laptops? Or were they for communal use?

Education authorities implemented the Computer Fund in different ways. Not all education authorities adopted the same approach. Some purchased computing devices to place in libraries or computer labs while others provided students with netbooks or laptops for their personal use.

5. What was the target ratio of computers to students? What is the actual ratio of computers to students?

The aim of the Computer Fund was to achieve a one to one computer to student ratio (1:1 ratio) for students in Years 9 to 12. This target ratio was achieved.

6. How many computers were delivered over the life of the NP – was the 967,000 correct?

Over the life of the Computer Fund, 967,667 computers were installed.

7. How many schools already had computers – are these counted as part of the 967,000? If so, why, if they were at no cost to the Australian Government and not rolled out under our program?

At the commencement of the Computer Fund, state and territory government and non-government education authorities were already investing in ICT in their schools. In 2008, the then Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations conducted a preliminary survey of schools which estimated that nationally 30 per

cent of the computer fleet required to reach the 1:1 target was already in existence and less than four years old. The Australian Government undertook to fund the remaining 70 per cent investment to reach the 1:1 ratio, as stated in the DER NP and DER FAs. The 30 per cent were to be maintained and replaced as required by education authorities as their 'maintenance of effort' component which is common in Commonwealth/State programmes.

8. Therefore, what is the overall average cost to the Australian Government of each computer delivered (and installation/support) under the National Secondary School Computer Fund?
    * Total cost divided by number of computers delivered = cost per computer

Due to the nature of the programme, it is not possible to calculate a meaningful average cost for a computer delivered under the Computer Fund. In addition to computers, funding provided by the Australian Government allowed for education authorities to purchase complementary ICT equipment including wireless and other network equipment, and infrastructure support. This funding also helped to provide technical training and support in schools and systems. Achieving value for money was also recognised with agreements and guidelines encouraging centralised purchasing. Education authorities were able, therefore, to maximise their purchasing power by achieving economies of scale through bulk purchasing arrangements, which varied depending on the size and nature of the procurement.

9. If the cost of the program was more than $1 billion, can the Department provide reasons as to why the original promise by the previous government (Rudd in 2011), to deliver 1 million laptops for $1,000 was not achieved?

Refer to answer in question 2.