

Economics Legislation Committee
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education Portfolio
Supplementary Budget Estimates Hearing 2012-13
17 October 2012

AGENCY/DEPARTMENT: DEPARTMENT OF INDUSTRY, INNOVATION, SCIENCE, RESEARCH AND TERTIARY EDUCATION

TOPIC: Government response to an inquiry into regional and rural access to secondary and tertiary education

REFERENCE: Question on Notice (Hansard, 17 October 2012, pages 72-73)

QUESTION No.: SI-33

Senator NASH: Firstly, can I get a clarification on something which I did not get a chance to ask about last estimates. I am not sure if this is the appropriate place but I cannot see where else to go. There was a Senate committee report on the inquiry into regional and rural access to secondary and tertiary education opportunities that was tabled in 2009. The government response was earlier this year, in March 2012. Can you give me any indication of why it took over two years to get a response to that report?

Mr de Carvalho: I think this might be a question for DEEWR; I am not sure. It is not something I happen to know about. We can take it on notice, if you like, and find the right—

Senator NASH: I would prefer to know today or tomorrow.

Mr de Carvalho: We can find out today who the right person is to ask that question of.

Senator NASH: If you could. Maybe there is some point tomorrow at which we could—

Senator CHRIS EVANS: I think that the trouble that we will have is that, if DEEWR are responsible for leading the response, we will have to get the answer from them. But we will get you what information we can. Your interest is in the reason for the delay?

Senator NASH: Yes, and given it is only eight pages there must be some reason for that.

Mr de Carvalho: Sorry, I missed the name.

Senator NASH: It is the inquiry into rural and regional access to secondary and tertiary education opportunities, and it was tabled on 18 December 2009.

Senator Chris Evans: We will see what we can find out for you, Senator.

Senator NASH: That is fine. If it assists, the government response was 13 March 2012, which does seem like an inordinately long period of time.

Senator Chris Evans: Does it say who it was tabled by? Was it me or Minister Garrett?

Senator NASH: I have not got that information with me, sorry, Minister.

Senator Chris Evans: That is all right.

Senator NASH: That would be useful.

ANSWER

The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) took the lead on developing the Australian Government Response to the *Senate Inquiry into Rural and Regional Access to Secondary and Tertiary Education Opportunities*, in consultation with a number of relevant departments in particular the Department of Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government and the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

The Australian Government Response was delayed at various points in time so that information on relevant new initiatives could be included. Specifically:

- The developments regarding the removal of regional eligibility distinctions for Youth Allowance between inner regional and outer regional students and the *Review of Student Income Support Reforms*.
- Following the 2011-2012 Budget in order to incorporate information on the funding for regional universities, a regional priorities round for the Education Investment Fund, and the engagement of Regional Education, Skills and Jobs Coordinators.
- Following the *Review of Student Income Support Reforms*, the Government introduced the *Social Security Amendment (Student Income Support Reforms) Bill 2011* on 21 September 2011. The bill was passed on 25 November 2011.
- The Machinery of Government changes in late 2011.

The Response was approved by Senator The Hon Kate Lundy, on behalf of the Prime Minister, on 7 February 2012 and was subsequently tabled during the Senate sitting on 13 March 2012 after being held over from the Senate sitting on 1 March 2012.

Throughout this period, the Government was undertaking actions that address the matters raised in the Inquiry.