

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 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION, SCIENCE, RESEARCH AND TERTIARY

TOPIC: Low-SES students

REFERENCE: Written Question – Senator McKenzie

QUESTION No.: SI-66

In 2010, to achieve approximate population parity, an additional 88,000 regional and remote students would have to be enrolled at a university. 100,000 low SES students were required to be enrolled for low SES population parity.

Why doesn't increasing representation of rural and remote students receive a similar level of policy response to low SES students?

Is the department considering any new measures or enhancements to existing measures to increase the number of rural and regional students attending university?

Does the department recognise that low SES areas are often also rural and regional areas and that increasing low SES enrolments also means increasing rural and regional enrolments? Please point to the department's policy document/s in relation to this.

ANSWER

The Government is making a major investment in higher education for regional Australians through initiatives including:

- increasing the regional loading to \$272.9 million for the four years from 2012-13;
- a Regional Priorities Round of the Education Investment Fund of \$500 million;
- \$377.2 million for 13 Structural Adjustment Fund projects; and
- improving access to Youth Allowance.

In 2012, Australia's regionally headquartered universities will receive over \$1.7 billion in core Commonwealth funding – an increase of over 53 per cent from 2007.

Commonwealth supported places at regional headquartered universities have increased from 62,600 EFTSL in 2007 to an estimated 78,400 EFTSL in 2012 (a 25 per cent increase).

Reward Funding will be delivered to universities that meet performance targets agreed with Government. The program is designed to raise the participation of students from both low SES backgrounds and other underrepresented groups. Ten out of 37 universities chose to nominate improving participation of regional and/or remote students as their other underrepresented group performance target.

From 2012, public universities will determine the number of students they enrol in bachelor level courses (excluding medicine) and will receive funding for these places. By removing the historic

caps on bachelor degree funding, the Government is giving universities greater flexibility to offer more places, and allowing more students the opportunity to participate in higher education.

The Government is making a substantial investment to support regional students and regional higher education. The Government is monitoring the effectiveness of these measures and early indications show significant growth in the number of regional and remote students attending university.

Between 2011 and 2012, university applications increased by 3.1 per cent to reach 15,450 for the six universities in the Regional Universities Network (RUN), above the national increase of 2.2 per cent. By comparison, applications increased by just 0.1 per cent for the Group of Eight. University offers for RUN increased by 2.5 per cent from 14,861 in 2011 to 15,238 in 2012.

Regional and remote student commencements increased by 12,611 from 2007 to 2011, or 22.9 per cent. Compared to 2007, enrolments for students from regional and remote areas increased by 17.4 per cent to 164,906 in 2011.

Regional Higher education Youth Allowance student numbers have increased by 42 per cent (11,506 students), compared to a national increase of 28 per cent (35,873 students) since the start of reforms in April 2010 and August 2012.

Yes – below are some of the policy documents that refer to this connection.

- *Higher Education Base Funding Review: Final Report*, October 2011 (p.116)
- *Review of Student Income Support Reforms*, July 2011 (p.5)
- *Budget 2011-12: Investing in Regional Australia*, May 2011 (p.74)
- *Review of regional loading: Final report*, May 2011 (multiple references including p.7,9,19)
- *Review of Australian Higher Education: Final Report*, December 2008, chapter 3.2