

## EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TRAINING

### SENATE LEGISLATION COMMITTEE - QUESTIONS ON NOTICE 2004-2005 ADDITIONAL ESTIMATES HEARING

**Outcome:** 1

**Output Group:** 1.2– Assistance to individuals including those with special needs

#### **DEST Question No. E673\_05**

Senator Carr provided in writing.

*Refers to DEST Question No. E305\_05.*

#### **Question:**

It is noted that, on 5 January 2005, Acting Education Minister Gary Hardgrave said that the current literacy benchmarks were 'too low'.

Is the Government planning to revise or review the current benchmarks? When? What form will such a review take? Will there be public consultation? When will the revised benchmarks be applied?

What are the implications for the tuition voucher program? To what extent does DEST project an increased number of students qualifying for assistance under this program as a result of raised benchmarks? When will the revised benchmarks become the criteria for access to this program?

How much money will be required, and how much will be allocated, once the revised criteria are applied?

#### **Answer:**

##### *Literacy Benchmarks*

The Australian Government supports the development of authoritative measures of the standard of literacy and numeracy achievement of all students. Parents require assurance that their child is achieving minimum acceptable literacy and numeracy standards.

The development of the national literacy and numeracy benchmarks was realised through a cooperative process involving all State and Territory school authorities, the Australian Government and representatives of non-government schools. The development work was undertaken by Curriculum Corporation with reference to levels of achievement as demonstrated in national surveys, State assessment programs and international data. The development process involved both technical expertise and extensive consultation. Those involved included all key school education authorities, academic experts in literacy and numeracy, educational testing experts, parent groups, teachers and teacher professional organisations.

The national benchmarks that underpin the reporting of student achievement describe nationally agreed minimum acceptable standards for aspects of literacy and numeracy at particular year levels. That is, they represent the minimum acceptable standard of literacy and numeracy that a student must have at a particular year level in order for the student to continue to make progress at school.

The benchmarks do not attempt to describe the whole range of literacy learning, nor the full range of what students are taught; nor do they try to describe the full range of student

achievement. Instead, they represent important and essential elements of literacy at a minimum acceptable level.

Education Ministers agreed in July 2003 to move towards enhanced reporting of literacy and numeracy achievement. In addition to reporting the percentage of students achieving national literacy and numeracy benchmarks this would enable a range of student achievement to be reported.

On 30 November 2004 the Minister for Education, Science and Training, the Hon Dr Brendan Nelson, MP, announced details about the Australian Government National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy. The Inquiry will be a broad, independent examination of reading research, teacher preparation and practices for the teaching of literacy, particularly reading. One of the objectives of the Inquiry is to examine the effectiveness of assessment methods being used to monitor the progress of students' early reading learning. A report of the Inquiry's findings will be prepared in the second half of 2005.

The Tutorial Voucher Initiative is a pilot programme and hence eligibility is limited to a defined group of students – those who were below the Year 3 national reading benchmark in 2003. The Initiative will be independently evaluated. Any decision to extend the Initiative to other groups of students will be a matter for future consideration by the Government.