

EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TRAINING

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

Outcome: 1

Output Group: 1.3 – Assistance for quality teaching and learning

DEST Question No. E734_05

Senator Carr asked on 16 February 2005, EWRE Hansard pages 87-88.

Question:

- a) Part of those recommendations from the agenda for action were recommendations concerning Indigenous teachers—section 5.2 on page 21 of the document. Has the Commonwealth taken action to consider those recommendations?
- b) In the past the Commonwealth has said, 'Really, that is a matter for the states.' So are we changing that position now?

Answer:

- a) *Review of Teaching and Teacher Education*

The Australian Government cannot address all aspects of these recommendations as they cover areas that are the responsibility of the State and Territory governments and higher education institutions. Higher education institutions are autonomous organisations, responsible for decisions of course content. There are, however, some current Australian Government initiatives that will contribute to improvements in these areas, including the National Institute for Quality Teaching and School Leadership which will develop criteria for the accreditation of initial teacher education courses. Other Australian Government initiatives are outlined under the respective action items.

Action 16: All teacher education programmes promote as a core competency, in qualifying students, an understanding of the diversity of students and their communities – most especially in relation to Indigenous students – and provide in-school experiences in a range of settings, including rural communities.

Through the *What Works* and *Dare to Lead* Projects (funded under IESIP and the Australian Government Quality Teacher Programme) teachers who work in schools across every State and Territory are supported to develop greater cross-cultural awareness, partnerships and inclusive teaching and learning practices which will improve the educational outcomes of Indigenous students. The *What Works* project delivers a professional development package to teachers through workshops aimed at improving the skills of teachers working with Indigenous students and their communities and to share best practice with Australian teachers.

There is also a *What Works* website which provides practical and reliable support materials for teachers. It enables all teachers to access case studies which explain best practice and successful programs and strategies that schools and individual teachers can use. Both student teachers and practising teachers can utilise this website to develop and support their teaching practice.

The Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council, (IHEAC) established under the *Our Universities: Backing Australia's Future* higher education reforms in 2003, will provide policy advice to the Minister on improving outcomes in higher education for Indigenous students.

IHEAC under its terms of reference will provide advice on identifying strategies to build Indigenous content into all mainstream higher education courses.

Action 17: Prospective Indigenous teachers be offered special incentives, including scholarships and payment of their HECS debt, to qualify as teachers and to take up teaching appointments.

Two Australian Government initiatives contribute to this action.

Through the Indigenous Higher Education Staff Scholarships, prospective Indigenous teachers may be eligible for financial support for part of their study. Under the scholarship guidelines, Indigenous university staff (academic or general) are able to take one year of leave from their higher education provider to undertake full-time higher education study in their chosen academic or professional area. Five national scholarships are awarded per year, providing up to \$10,600 to cover tuition fees and/or student contribution amounts for that year, and a non-taxable stipend of \$21,400 for each student.

The Commonwealth Learning Scholarships Programme was introduced in 2004 to assist students from low socio-economic backgrounds with the costs associated with higher education, including indigenous students who wish to qualify as teachers. There are two scholarships – one for educational costs (the Commonwealth Education Costs Scholarships, or CECS) and one for accommodation costs (the Commonwealth Accommodation Scholarships, or CAS). The CAS will particularly benefit students from regional and rural areas by providing assistance with away from home accommodation costs.

Indigenous Australians may also benefit from higher education reforms under the *Our Universities: Backing Australia's Future* package. This package provides additional support for areas identified as National Priorities, initially teaching and nursing. Lower student contribution ranges for units of study undertaken by students in these fields of education have been set. In 2005, higher education providers cannot set student contribution amounts for education units of study above \$3,847 for an equivalent full-time student load.

ACTION 18: Prospective teachers of Indigenous students be offered assistance to undertake practical experience in schools with significant cohorts of Indigenous students and be offered incentives to take up teaching appointments in schools with predominantly indigenous enrolments.

Tertiary institutions as autonomous bodies manage teacher education practice placements for their students. Teacher employment is the responsibility of State and Territory education departments. They source and employ teachers for schools with Indigenous students and therefore have responsibility to offer appropriate incentives to encourage teaching appointments in schools with significant Indigenous enrolments.

Education providers which receive Supplementary Recurrent Assistance under the *Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000* are required to report on the employment of Indigenous teachers and the professional learning of teachers which helps them foster in their Indigenous students: an appreciation of their histories; cultures; and identities; and, amongst all students, an understanding of, and respect for, Indigenous traditional and contemporary cultures.

b) The Australian Government has not changed its position, in that it can only take direct action on those recommendations that fall within areas of Australian Government responsibility.