

EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TRAINING

SENATE LEGISLATION COMMITTEE - QUESTIONS ON NOTICE 2003-2004 BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING

Outcome: 2

Output Group: 2.5 Assistance for post school students including those with special needs

DEST Question No. E008_04

Senator Crossin tabled on 4 June 2003

Question:

A recent report in Queensland showed that Indigenous TAFE enrolments have increased dramatically – 250% in Southern Queensland for example, and around 10% per year for the past three years in Cairns. At the same time the figures show that Indigenous students are swamping TAFE, it shows they are leaving universities.

- a) Are these figures correct?
- b) Do they apply nation wide?
- c) When did the decline in Indigenous enrolments start – was it associated with ABSTUDY?

Answer:

Indigenous TAFE enrolments in Queensland

a) This question appears to be based on an article published in *The Courier Mail* on Wednesday 21 May 2003 entitled 'INDIGENOUS STUDENTS SWAMP TAFE'. Neither the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) nor the Queensland Department of Employment and Training (DET) are aware of any recent report which contains the statistics referred to in the article. We are therefore not able to provide advice as to the veracity of the data.

There is a significant discrepancy between the Indigenous enrolment statistics reported without source by the newspaper article and those supplied by Queensland DET, as illustrated in the following table:

Table 1: Comparison of Indigenous enrolments at Southern Queensland Institute of TAFE and Tropical North Queensland Institute of TAFE as reported by Queensland DET and The Courier Mail, 2001 and 2002

| Institute | Indigenous enrolments (supplied by Queensland DET) | | Indigenous enrolments (quoted without source in <i>The Courier Mail</i>) | |
|---|---|-------------|--|-------------|
| | <u>2001</u> | <u>2002</u> | <u>2001</u> | <u>2002</u> |
| Southern Queensland Institute of TAFE | 712 | 940 | 90 | 317 |
| Tropical North Queensland Institute of TAFE | 2065 | 2150 | 1790 | 2454 |

It is theoretically possible that both of these sets of figures could be correct if enrolments were taken at different times of the year, however without knowing the source for the figures quoted by the newspaper there is no way to verify this.

The rate of student enrolment growth at Southern Queensland Institute of TAFE (SQI) from 2001 to 2002, according to the DET figures at Table 1, was 32 percent. At Tropical North Queensland Institute of TAFE (TNQ) the rate was 4.1 percent. The national rate of growth of Indigenous vocational education and training (VET) enrolments from 2000 to 2001 was 12.4 percent, while in Queensland overall for the same period it was 13.3 percent. DEST does not have any information on how the increase in Southern Queensland Institute of TAFE enrolments may affect the capacity of the Queensland TAFE system.

Data on commencing students and total number of Indigenous students at the University of Southern Queensland and James Cook University for 2001 and 2002 does not indicate that university enrolments have declined, rather numbers appear to have increased at both universities.

Table 2 commencing and total students at university

| University | Commencing | | Total | |
|----------------------------|------------|------|-------|------|
| | 2001 | 2002 | 2001 | 2002 |
| * | | | | |
| University of Southern Qld | 94 | 144 | 196 | 271 |
| James Cook University | 136 | 169 | 321 | 345 |

* Using the 2002 definition of enrolment for both 2001 and 2002 figures. The 2002 definition shows students undertaking units of study during the period 1 September 2001 to 31 August 2002.

b) These figures do not apply nationwide. The table below shows that in 2000, there was a small decrease in commencing Indigenous students in VET and a larger decrease in higher education. In the following years, commencing students increased in both VET and higher education. (Note that VET data for 2002 is not yet available.)

Table 3: Commencing Indigenous students in higher education and vocational education and training

| | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 |
|--------------------|--------|--------|--------|---------|---------|
| VET (nos) | 52,143 | 60,764 | 58,630 | 64,399 | |
| VET (% inc) | | +16.5% | -3.5% | +9.8% | |
| HEd (nos) | 3,997 | 4,140 | 3,510 | 3,566* | 3,661* |
| HEd (% inc) | | +3.6% | -15.2% | +1.6% | +2.7% |
| HEd (nos) | na | na | na | 4 130** | 4 246** |
| HEd (% inc) | na | na | na | na | +2.8% |

Note: The scope of definitions of commencing and all students changed between the 2001 and 2002 Higher Education Statistics Collections:

- The 2001 definition showed students undertaking units of study at 31 March 2001 with load in semester 1.
- The 2002 definition shows students undertaking units of study during the period 1 September 2001 to 31 August 2002. (In effect, adding the summer semester).

* The unshaded numbers are with 2001 definitions.

** The shaded numbers are with 2002 definitions.

c) The decline in higher education appears to have been a one off fall within a longer trend of increasing enrolments. It occurred in 2000. In 2000, ABSTUDY numbers in the tertiary sector as a whole increased despite a decrease at higher education. This suggests that ABSTUDY was not the primary cause of the decline.