

EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TRAINING

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

Outcome: 2
Output Group: 2.4 Higher education funding

DEST Question No. E011_04

Senator Crossin tabled on 4 June 2003.

Question:

The DEST Report from the 2002 to 2004 triennium states: "It appears that Indigenous students moved into vocational education and training at the expense of higher education, though it is not clear why this may be the case or whether this is of benefit to the Indigenous community. There have been claims that changes to ABSTUDY have deterred students from higher education. Initial Departmental investigation does not substantiate these claims, although it may be the case that community perceptions have been affected".

- a) What evidence can the Department provide to support the claim that Indigenous students moved into vocational education and training at the expense of higher education?
- b) The statement refers to initial Departmental investigation. What did this entail?

Answer:

Indigenous students and higher education

- a) Between 1996 and 1999, Indigenous numbers in vocational education and training (VET) were growing much faster than in higher education (57 percent compared with 15 percent). For students aged 20 years and under, the difference in growth rate was even greater (75.9 percent compared with 14 percent). This data suggested a greater and possibly growing interest in vocational education, especially by younger people. More recent data, however, do not provide conclusive evidence of an unusual move to VET from 2000. Furthermore, given the very different sizes of the student populations in VET and higher education, it is difficult for data alone to confirm such movement in a single year.
- b) Initial investigation entailed an analysis of available data by DEST officers responsible for Indigenous higher education programmes. Available data included student statistical data for higher education, vocational education and training, Year 12 retention and ABSTUDY; Indigenous education strategies provided by institutions for profile discussions with the Department and discussions with some higher education institutional Indigenous contact officers on their views of the situation within their institutions. The analysis looked separately at each possible factor that may have contributed to changes in Indigenous student numbers from 1997, such as changes in HECS and ABSTUDY.