

EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TRAINING

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

Outcome: 3

Output Group: 3.3

DEST Question No. E155_04

Senator Carr asked on 5 June, 2003, EWRE Hansard pages 515-516

Question:

Is the SARS virus having an effect on our students in terms of the operations of any of our providers? So you have no hard data as yet in terms of the estimates of enrolment effects? Can you take a question on notice to give us a report once that data is available?

Answer:

SARS virus and its effect on enrolments

DEST has international student enrolment data from the Provider Registration and International Students Management System (PRISMS). PRISMS data is now available for 2002 and the first half of 2003. Using analysis of sector and country categories, possible impacts of SARS on numbers of new students commencing a period of enrolment are discernible. This data covers students entering Australia's education system on a student visa. Students on short stay visas are not included. The data currently shows:

Higher Education

The numbers of commencing new higher education students normally exhibit a strong peak in March each year. Compared to 2002, data for commencing new higher education enrolments were down compared to last year's trend in March for Hong Kong (45%), Malaysia (34%) and Taiwan (15%). This may be a result of the SARS epidemic.

ELICOS

Taiwanese new enrolments were down in March (28%), April (38%), May (11%) and in June (31%). Japanese new enrolments were also down significantly in March (62%), April (74%), May (83%) and June (88%). However as Japanese enrolments were already down in January (18%) and February (27%) before SARS, only some of this March to June enrolment drop can be attributed to SARS. Chinese new enrolments were down 18% in April but this may be a normal occurrence and not related to SARS as Chinese enrolments were also down 30% in January 2003.

Small ELICOS providers, with an enrolment concentration from Japan or Taiwan, may have noticed a more distinct fall in their new enrolments during these months.

Vocational Education and Training (VET)

Enrolments of commencing new students normally peak in February each year. As this was well before the outbreak of SARS no clear impact in later new enrolments can be discerned. However VET new enrolments were noticeably down for Japan after March (approximately 70%). As the total number of new enrolments from Japan were low after March and new

enrolments were already down in January and February before the SARS outbreak, it is not possible to draw any firm conclusion about a specific VET SARS impact for Japan at this stage. Current trends may reflect typical volatility in year on year data.

VET new enrolments from Taiwan in May and June 2003 were lower than in 2002 but as the numbers of enrolments were less than 20 each month, it is not possible to attribute this movement to SARS.

Schools

PRISMS data for 2002 indicate that new school enrolments are normally high in January to February so a strong SARS impact in later months is not likely. However data from China indicates a drop in 2003 school enrolments was recorded for April (28%). As other April variations in schools' new enrolments from South Korea and Taiwan are similar, but reflect increases, it is not possible to attribute the Chinese fall directly to SARS. Normal volatility may have caused this movement.

General

DEST expects to be in a better position to assess the impact of SARS once enrolments figures for second semester have been entered into PRISMS and sector industry associations have received feedback from their members.