

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. E326_04

Senator Crossin tabled on 4 June 2003:

Question

How will the measures in Backing Australia's Future reverse the decline in participation experienced by Indigenous Australians since 1999?

Answer:

Indigenous participation in higher education

There has not been a continued decline in participation experienced by Indigenous higher education students since 1999. The table below shows the decrease in commencing Indigenous students in 2000 followed by increasing numbers from 2001. It would appear that a return to the previous increasing trend is underway.

Table 1: Commencing Indigenous students in higher education

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
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.

The overall measures in Backing Australia's Future are expected to provide an environment which will further encourage growth in successful participation of Indigenous students in higher education. Specific measures directed at Indigenous Australians include increased Indigenous Support Funding which will increase and strengthen the support of the sector for successful student participation; the establishment of an Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council which will, in the longer term, support policy, highlight Indigenous achievements and contribute to Indigenous employment opportunities in the sector; and

Indigenous staffing scholarships which will encourage Indigenous staff to upgrade their academic qualifications. In addition, a proportion of the proposed learning scholarships will be directed to Indigenous Australian students. These will help remove financial barriers, with eligible students in receipt of both forms of scholarships receiving up to \$6,000 per year.

Backing Australia's Future

Indigenous Specific Budget measures

There is to be an increase of \$10.383 million for Indigenous Support Funding (ISF) over 3 years from 2005. The breakdown is \$1.681 million in 2005, \$3.435 million in 2006 and \$5.267 million in 2007 (out turn prices). Institutional eligibility requirements will include evidence of participation of Indigenous people in institutional decision-making processes, existence of an institutional Indigenous employment strategy and evidence of the implementation of enabling strategies for improving participation and completions for Indigenous students. Institutions will be required to report on their expenditure of ISF, including the amount provided to an Indigenous Support Centre.

Funding of \$260,000 per year will be provided for a new Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council (IHEAC). The IHEAC will advise the Minister and the Department on a range of issues including the Indigenous staffing scholarship awards and develop strategies to increase the number of Indigenous higher education staff. It will convene an annual Indigenous Higher Education Conference which will include discussion of research developments and policy directions, achievements, successful innovations and best practice measures; and present Neville Bonner Scholarships and Indigenous Staff scholarships.

Five national Indigenous staff scholarships will be awarded each year from 2004, each providing, for one year, \$10,400 to cover tuition fees and a non-taxable stipend of approximately \$20,999. The scholarships will enable staff to take one year of leave from their university employment to undertake full-time higher education study in their chosen academic or professional area.

Equity measures with a focus on Indigenous students

Learning entitlement scholarships include Commonwealth Education Costs Scholarships (CECS) and Commonwealth Accommodation Costs Scholarships (CACS). CECS are valued at \$2,000 per year for up to four years and will help lessen the impact of educational expenses at the point of entry to the academic year. CACS, valued at \$4,000 per year for up to four years will help alleviate the burden of moving from rural or isolated areas to undertake their studies.