

EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TRAINING

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

Outcome: 2
Output Group: 2.4 – Funding for Higher Education

DEST Question No. E109_05

Senator Stott Despoja provided in writing.

Question:

- (a) How diverse will the higher education system be in 2005?
- (b) Was this level of diversity higher or lower than expected?
- (c) What other measures in Backing Australia's Future will increase the diversity of the system?

Answer:

Diversity of Higher Education system

- (a) The Department cannot anticipate how diverse the higher education system will be in 2005. First, it is difficult to define and quantify a subjective measure such as diversity. Second, the reforms provided under the *Higher Education Support Act 2003* allow for choices by higher education providers and students. It is not possible to predict reliably sectoral and student behaviour in response to these reforms.
- (b) The Department is unable to predict the level of diversity in 2005.
- (c) Backing Australia's Future will allow for diversity through the range of student contribution amounts to be charged, the possibility of full fee-paying students, and the strategic directions universities are pursuing, initially through their bids for new places starting in 2005, in which they were able to express their priorities for growth.

In addition, there are measures within *Backing Australia's Future* that will ensure support for all higher education students in making their choices.

Commonwealth Learning Scholarships, Student Learning Entitlements, the HECS-HELP, FEE-HELP and OS-HELP Programmes and Commonwealth Research Scholarships will all ensure equitable access for students.

More targeted assistance includes equity measures such as the *Enabling Loading, Increased Equity Funding, Indigenous Staff Scholarships* and a new *Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council*.

It should also be noted that in conjunction with the efforts of the Government to ensure access to higher education to a broad cross-section of Australian students, a University's strategic direction and its individual diversity policies play a significant role in making sure students from all backgrounds have the opportunity to participate in higher education.