

EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TRAINING

SENATE LEGISLATION COMMITTEE - QUESTIONS ON NOTICE 2005-2006 BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING

Outcome: 2

Output Group: 2.4 – Funding for Higher Education

DEST Question No. E402_06

Senator Nettle provided in writing.

Question:

- a) Has the department done any research into the impact of the abolition of compulsory student association fees on student hardship, educational outcomes, or student load?

Has the department done any research on the impact of the prohibition of compulsory student fees on the expansion of the higher education sector in Australia?
- b) How many people are employed by services funded wholly or predominately by student association fees?
- c) Has the department done any research into the number of job losses that will occur if Universities cease levying a compulsory student association/guild fee? Or does the government have no idea how many people will lose their jobs directly and indirectly as a result of this government legislation? If the government does not have this information, what steps is the government taking to gather these figures so that it is aware of the number of jobs that will be lost as a result of this government policy?
- d) Does the government acknowledge the value of ensuring that students can be represented in academic appeals and other advocacy work currently done by students unions by someone not employed by the university? How does the government intend to ensure that this is possible in any post VSU environment?
- e) Is there any way that the government can prevent universities from spending non-Commonwealth funding on students services, politics, advocacy and trade union offices and activities on campus?

Answer:

The impact of voluntary student unionism on student services, employment and advocacy

- a) All information is available in the Department's submission to The Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Legislation Committee Senate Inquiry into the Provisions of the Higher Education Support Amendment (Abolition of Compulsory Up-front Union Fees) Bill 2005.
- b) The Department has not collected this data.
- c) The impact will depend on the decisions of students to support these services, together with employment that might be generated in the private sector if students choose to spend their money in alternative services provided off-campus.
- d) Voluntary student unionism will not prevent students from having access to procedures for handling their complaints. The *Higher Education Support Act 2003* (HESA) requires providers to have grievance procedures for dealing with student complaints relating to academic and non-academic matters. The Department cannot comment on the quality of current advocacy services available to students.

- e) The Australian Government does not intend to prevent a higher education provider from financially supporting amenities, facilities or services of a non academic nature, if the provider chooses to do so, without breaching the provisions of the Voluntary Student Unionism Bill.