

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. E404_06

Senator Nettle provided in writing.

Question:

- a) Did the Department give any advice (other than that published in the information pack for prospective HEPs) to those prospective HEPs regarding their responsibilities in offering FEE-HELP or HECS-HELP supported places to new students?
- b) Did the Department accept applications for FEE-HELP places that included an assumption that the institutions in question would achieve HEP status in time for their first census date?
- c) Was the Department aware that a number of prospective HEPs were marketing their courses to prospective students access to FEE-HELP for first semester on the assumption that HEP status would be achieved before the first census date?
- d) What steps did the Department take to prevent a situation arising in which students were accepted on the basis that FEE-HELP would pay their tuition only to find that Parliament disallowed the guidelines that conferred HEP status on their institution?
- e) Did the Department advise prospective HEPs not to advertise FEE-HELP places for at least the first semester on the basis that the disallowable period expired in June. If not, why not?

Answer:

Advice on FEE-HELP availability prior to expiry of private providers disallowance period

- a) and b) There were many discussions with prospective higher education providers during 2004. The oral advice provided by the Department was generally along the following lines:
 - prospective providers wishing to make FEE-HELP available in 2005 should apply no later than 9 July 2004. This would provide adequate time for assessment. (This was the advice provided in the information pack for prospective higher education providers.)
 - prospective providers could, if they wished to do so, indicate to students that they had applied to be approved as a higher education provider, where this was the case. However, a prospective provider could not indicate that FEE-HELP would be available, prior to its approval becoming effective (i.e. until after the disallowance period).
- c) There was one occasion on which the Department became aware of a provider advertising the availability of FEE-HELP on its website. The provider removed this material from its website as soon as it was contacted by the Department.

- d) The Department provided written advice on the availability of FEE-HELP to all approved private providers awaiting the expiry of their disallowance period. A copy of the “Fact sheet – what institutions can do prior to HEP approval becoming effective” is at Attachment A.

- e) No. For the majority of the currently approved private providers, their disallowance period expired in March 2005.

Fact sheet – what institutions can do prior to HEP approval becoming effective

Census dates for units of study

- A student's entitlement to FEE-HELP is established on the census date for a unit of study.
- HEPs have the flexibility to determine their own census dates for units of study under the new arrangements.
- HEPs whose approval has been tabled can set their census dates taking into account when their HEP approval will be effective.
- HEPs should, however, note other implications of delaying a census date. For example, students must receive a refund of their tuition fees if they withdraw prior to the census date. General information on setting census dates is in Part 9 of the Administrative Information for HEPs, available at: www.dest.gov.au/highered/css/default.htm#8.

Distribution of FEE-HELP information products

- The *FEE-HELP information* booklet and *Request for FEE-HELP assistance* form may be distributed to students prior to an institution's approval as a HEP becoming effective.

Completion of the Request for FEE-HELP assistance form

- Students are able to complete, date and sign the *Request for FEE-HELP assistance* form prior to an institution's approval as a HEP becoming effective.
- However, students must be told that FEE-HELP loans will only become available if and when final approval as a HEP is granted.

Collection of fees

- HEPs are able to collect fees from enrolling students (as they do now) prior to the date of effect of their HEP approval.
- HEPs can choose to refund these fees to students prior to the census date if they wish to allow eligible students to apply for a FEE-HELP loan. While there is no obligation on HEPs to refund fees collected in this manner, students who do not receive a refund will not be entitled to FEE-HELP.

What to tell students about FEE-HELP eligibility

- Students can be informed that:
 - the institution may become a HEP in 2005;
 - they will be able to obtain FEE-HELP only from the date on which the institution becomes a HEP;
 - they can complete and return a *Request for FEE-HELP assistance* form prior to this date;
 - they will only be entitled to FEE-HELP for a unit of study which has a census date after the date on which the institution becomes a HEP; and
 - they will need to pay the tuition fee for any other unit of study without FEE-HELP.

DEST contact officer:

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