

EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TRAINING

SENATE LEGISLATION COMMITTEE – QUESTIONS ON NOTICE 2006-2007 BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING

Outcome: 2

Output Group: 2.4 – Funding for higher education

DEST Question No. E345_07

Senator Wong provided in writing.

Refers to DEST Question No E024_06.

Question:

Please provide an update to E024_06:

Indigenous student commencements fell by 3.2% in 2003 – and male commencements by 6.1%. Not only that, but the “access rate” – the proportion of commencing students who are Indigenous – has fallen slightly on 2002, but quite significantly on 1999 figures: down from 1.75% in 1999 to 1.52% in 2003. To achieve access parity with domestic students as a whole, Indigenous students would have to constitute 2.5% of the total.

(a) What has contributed to this decline? The Report says you conducted “informal conversations” with representatives of those institutions where the fall has been greatest.

(b) Since then, has DEST undertaken any more systemic or scientific research? What did it find? Can you provide any reports produced?

Answer:

Possible reasons for the fall in Indigenous student commencements in Higher Education

(a) Contributing factors identified in discussion with institutions include:

- Low secondary retention and completion rates mean many Indigenous students are less ready than other students, require tailored entry strategies and additional pathways (eg. preparatory courses); institutions vary in the extent to which they cater for these needs.
- Variable distribution by institutions of equity programme funding specifically to Indigenous students.

(b) DEST will analyse the 2005 commencing student data when it becomes available, and will continue to address constraints on improving Indigenous access with higher education institutions at both operational and senior officer level in 2006.

Research has also been conducted in the context of the review into the impact of the 2000 ABSTUDY policy changes. The report of that review is available at www.dest.gov.au/abstudy_changes.htm.