

Senate Committee: Education and Employment

QUESTION ON NOTICE Supplementary Budget Estimates 2016 - 2017

Outcome: Higher Education Research and International

Department of Education and Training Question No. SQ16-001090

Senator O'Neill, Deborah asked on 20 October 2016, Proof Hansard page 109

Higher Education reforms

Question

Mr Fintan: We have been working with Universities Australia and the universities that are providing the data and we are expecting to receive the data by 24 October.

Senator O'NEILL: What is the format required for the submissions?

Mr Fintan: I would have said that on notice. I understand that there is a template that the consultants are using that universities have been asked to complete.

.....

Senator O'NEILL: When it is collected will the universities be able to receive it?

Senator Birmingham: That probably is in alignment with the question about whether it will be made public. If the information is financially sensitive it is probably financially sensitive across the universities, almost more than in any other particular way. So it would not be shared with universities, I imagine, unless we were intending to make a public. I have said we will take that on notice, because I am not aware off-hand what sensitivities the universities have to that.

Senator O'NEILL: Did the minister receive any correspondence raising concerns about this process?

Mr Learmonth: Yes, there was a letter from Universities Australia that went to both the time frame and questions about interpretation of some of the items in the survey. We immediately met with Universities Australia and worked with them—we formed a reference group with Universities Australia to assist with the process. As a consequence, we have improved the guidance and definitions of terms, so universities understand what is being asked, to the extent there was ambiguity in the original construct. And we have extended the time frame by two weeks.

Senator O'NEILL: Can the correspondence be tabled?

Mr Learmonth: I will take that on notice.

Answer

The cost of delivery study requests that universities fill out a spreadsheet template with information on staffing levels, costs, and division of time between different levels of course and fields of education. A reference group convened by Universities Australia with representation from the Department of Education and Training and Deloitte ensures that respondents adopt a consistent methodology in their reporting.

Universities Australia wrote to the Minister on 12 September 2016 (**Attachment A**).

The department wrote to Universities Australia on 14 September (**Attachment B**) and agreed to meet to discuss the issues raised in the letter of 12 September. As a result of these discussions the department agreed to:

- extend the deadline for submission of data by two weeks
- participate in a reference group established by Universities Australia to assist with the collection of this data
- use only a sample of universities
- provide assurance on the confidentiality of data.

This was conveyed to Vice Chancellors on 15 September 2016 via email (**Attachment C**).



12 September, 2016

The Hon Senator Simon Birmingham
 Minister for Education and Training
 PO Box 6100
 Senate
 Parliament House
 Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister

Review of the cost of delivery of Higher Education

I am writing to you following concerns raised by our members about the Government's review of the cost of delivery of higher education. These concerns relate primarily to the collection of data for the review. The Government's higher education options paper *Driving Innovation, Fairness and Excellence in Australian Higher Education* states that better data on the cost of higher education delivery are needed to inform better policy. Universities Australia (UA) shares this view. As such, I would like to bring our members' concerns to your attention.

UA is particularly concerned about the data collection template that the Department sent to Vice-Chancellors on 1 September. In its current form, the template is unlikely to collect the accurate, comparable and robust data that the Government needs.

As I am sure you agree, it is in neither the Government's nor the university sector's interest to collect poor data on higher education costs. UA is therefore eager to work with the Government to improve the costings data collection, in order to get the best possible information within a reasonable timeframe.

I would like to take this opportunity to share the following concerns with you:

- The data collection will be a major task for universities, and the timeframe is not realistic.
- The design of the template means there is a serious risk that data provided to Government will not be accurate or reliable.
- The scope of the data collection is limited and excludes significant areas of university activity and expenditure.

UA proposes some practical initiatives to improve the data collection, including expanding its scope and improving definitions to ensure data consistency. We would also like to discuss

One Gellie Court
 Deakin ACT 2600
 GPO Box 1142
 Canberra ACT 2601
 AUSTRALIA

Ph: +61 (0)2 6285 8100
 Fax: +61 (0)2 6285 8101

contact@universitiesaustralia.edu.au
 www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au

options for collecting information from a representative sample of universities that are relatively well placed to provide costing data within a short timeframe.

Yours sincerely



Catriona Jackson
Deputy Chief Executive

One Gills Court
Deakin ACT 2600
GPO Box 1142
Canberra ACT 2601
AUSTRALIA

Ph: +61 (0)2 6285 8100
Fax: +61 (0)2 6285 8101

contact@universitiesaustralia.edu.au
www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au



Australian Government
Department of Education and Training

Deputy Secretary
David Learmonth

Ms Catriona Jackson
Deputy Chief Executive
Universities Australia
GPO Box 1142
Canberra ACT 2601

Dear Ms Jackson

Review of the cost of delivery of Higher Education

Thank you for your letter of 12 September 2016 regarding the review of the cost of delivery of higher education.

As has been the case throughout recent policy development processes, the department remains committed to an open, constructive and ongoing dialogue about reform priorities and the funding arrangements for the sector.

Accordingly, we are grateful for the assistance of Universities Australia with the development of the data collection template and we would be happy to discuss any necessary revisions in the light of the feedback from your members.

I have asked Dom English, Group Manager Higher Education, to follow up directly with you and your staff on these issues as a matter of urgency.

As you will appreciate, the timing and coverage of the data request is intended to support ongoing policy consideration within Government of the options for reform of funding and legislative arrangements from 1 January 2018 and I ask that any discussion of revisions in the approach take into account these imperatives.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a stylized 'D' and 'L' followed by a long horizontal line.

David Learmonth

14 September 2016

Opportunity through learning

50 Marcus Clarke Street, Canberra ACT 2601
GPO Box 9880, Canberra ACT 2601 | Phone (02) 6121 6000

[Sent via email]

Vice Chancellor,

I write with regard to correspondence of 1 September 2016 from Dom English seeking your universities input to the review of the cost of delivery of higher education. As has been the case throughout recent policy development processes, the department remains committed to an open, constructive and ongoing dialogue about reform priorities and the funding arrangements for the sector.

Accordingly, and in consultation with Universities Australia (UA), I am able to provide the following clarifications and assurances with regards to this important task:

- Given the difficulties for some universities to extract this level of data, the department is willing to accept a representative sample of universities to participate in this costing activity. We expect at least half the sector to take part, comprising a representative cross section of all universities.
- I acknowledge that the department's data request coincides with peak university budgeting periods. With this in mind, the department will extend the timeframe for this data collection until **cob 24 October 2016**. Please note that this is a hard deadline and no further extensions can be granted.
- In order to ensure the return of data is consistent across the sector, the department supports UA's proposal to establish a reference group to assist with the data collection process. This reference group will be chaired by UA and will include relevant representatives from participating universities, the department and the external consultant the department expects to have commissioned by 16 September 2016. The first task of this reference group will be to examine how/whether this exercise can/should account for other costs beyond teaching and scholarship, such as research and community engagement.
- I appreciate that the data sought by the department is of a sensitive, commercial nature. In this regard I can assure you that all data collected will be treated as commercial-in-confidence and accordingly, identifiable data will not be shared beyond the department and the aforementioned consultant.

I highly value the sector's input to the Government's *Driving Innovation, Fairness and Excellence in Australian Higher Education* policy agenda of which this task will provide a significant input.

Please don't hesitate to contact me to further discuss this issue.

Mel

Melissa Reardon

Branch Manager

Funding Policy and Legislation Branch

Higher Education Group

Australian Government Department of Education and Training

Phone (02) 6240 8409