

Senate Standing Committee on Education and Employment

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE Supplementary Budget Estimates 2013-2014

Outcome 2 - Schools and Youth

Department of Education Question No. ED0137_14

Senator McKenzie provided in writing.

Question

Digital Education support - National Secondary School Computer Fund

1. What was the total funding spent on National Secondary School Computer Fund over the full life of the DER NP?
2. How much was budgeted for this program though?
3. Were they laptops or computers that were delivered in schools?
4. Were students able to keep the computers / laptops? Or were they for communal use.
5. What was the ratio of each?
6. What was the target ratio of computers/laptops to students? What is the actual ratio of computers to students?
7. How many computers/laptops were delivered over the life of the NP – was the 967 000 correct?
8. How many schools already had computers – are these counted as part of the 967 000? If so, why, if they were at no cost to the Australian Government and not rolled out under our program?
9. If the cost of the program was more than \$1 billion, can the Department provide a background / reasons as to why the original promise by the previous government, to deliver 1 million laptops for \$1000 was not achievable?

Answer

1. \$2 billion was spent on the National Secondary School Computer Fund (the Computer Fund) over the full life of the Digital Education Revolution (DER) National Partnership (NP) with states and territories and Funding Agreements with non-government education authorities.
2. The previous government spent \$2 billion providing ICT equipment for all senior secondary schools with students in Years 9 to 12 under the Computer Fund. The original estimated cost for the programme was \$1 billion to provide a million computers.
Extra funding was allocated to the programme to take account of additional costs associated with installing computers in schools that had not been factored into the original estimated cost. It was made as a one-off payment of \$807 million in 2008 after states and territories successfully raised the issue through the Council of Australian Governments led by NSW. There was also an additional \$200 million provided in 2012-13 for the continued support and maintenance of equipment.

3. Education authorities had primary responsibility for decisions about educational hardware and software best suited to the specific needs of their schools. Depending on need, schools bought netbooks, laptops, tablet computing devices or installed more desktop computers.
4. Education authorities implemented the Computer Fund in different ways. Not all education authorities adopted the same approach. Some purchased computing devices to place in libraries or computer labs while others provided students with netbooks or laptops for their personal use.
5. Data that would allow the comparison of the number of laptops to computers delivered under the Computer Fund was not collected. This level of data would need to be sought from states/territories and non-government education authorities.
6. The aim of the Computer Fund was to achieve a one to one computer to student ratio (1:1 ratio) for students in Years 9 to 12. This target ratio was achieved.
7. Over the life of the Computer Fund, 967 667 computers were installed.
8. At the commencement of the Computer Fund, state and territory government and non-government education authorities were already investing in ICT in their schools. In 2008, the then Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations conducted a preliminary survey of schools which estimated that nationally 30 per cent of the computer fleet required to reach the 1:1 target was already in existence and less than four years old. The Australian Government undertook to fund the remaining 70 per cent investment to reach the 1:1 ratio, as stated in the DER NP and DER FAs. The 30 per cent were to be maintained and replaced as required by education authorities as their 'maintenance of effort' component which is common in Commonwealth/state programmes.
9. Refer to answer in question 2.