

Senate Select Committee on COVID-19

QUESTION ON NOTICE

Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic - 28 July 2020

Outcome: Higher Education, Research and International

Department of Education, Skills and Employment Question No. IQ20-000105

Senator Kristina Keneally on 28 July 2020, Proof Hansard page 41 and 46

Job-ready Graduates Package fees

Question

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Senator KENEALLY: Okay, let's start at basics then. On what basis is the department deciding which courses are going to attract higher fees and which courses are going to attract lower fees?

Mr Heferen: That's not a matter for the department, that's a matter for ministers. The level at which those fees are set is a matter for ministers as it's a question of policy.

CHAIR: But it is an announced policy, so what's the rationale behind it?

Mr Heferen: I think we can explain how government policy is implemented, but the rationale for any particular policy is a matter of policy and so that's something you'd have to direct to a minister. We can take that on notice and ask the minister to respond. That's clearly a question of policy.

...

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Senator KENEALLY: I would like to know if the Job-ready Graduates Package that was announced by the minister was recommended by the department as he announced it?

Mr Heferen: Because the Job-ready Graduates Package is an enormous package with many, many elements, to give that its due I will need to take it on notice to see what the minister wants to provide.

CHAIR: So are you taking it on notice or referring it to the minister for a public interest immunity claim?

Mr Heferen: I will take it on notice.

Answer

The Department of Education, Skills and Employment was closely involved in the development of the Job-ready Graduates Package and supported the Minister at all stages of the policy development process. As with all policy development processes, the announced package was one among a range of options considered.

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Department of Education, Skills and Employment Question No. IQ20-000106

Senator Kristina Keneally on 28 July 2020, Proof Hansard page 43

Number of students with reduced fees

Question

Mr Heferen: I think for 60 per cent of new students, not existing students, their overall loan to pay back will be reduced, and so for 40 per cent it will increase. So for 60 per cent it will be reduced or not changed.

Senator KENEALLY: Do you have a figure for how many of that 60 per cent it will reduce?

Mr English: No, I don't. I'd have to take that on notice.

Answer

Based on 2018 enrolment numbers 57.9 per cent of students will have a decrease in student contributions.

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Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic - 28 July 2020

Outcome: Higher Education, Research and International

Department of Education, Skills and Employment Question No. IQ20-000107

Senator Kristina Keneally on 28 July 2020, Proof Hansard page 44 - 45

Establishment of unit within TEQSA

Question

Senator KENEALLY: But hasn't the minister established a unit within TEQSA to ensure that universities don't game these new funding rules in order to incentivise students into the higher-fee-paying courses? This is what he said in his National Press Club speech.

Mr Heferen: I think I might need to take that one on notice.

Answer

Please see response to IQ20-000112.

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QUESTION ON NOTICE

Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic - 28 July 2020

Outcome: Higher Education, Research and International

Department of Education, Skills and Employment Question No. IQ20-000108

Senator Mehreen Faruqi on 28 July 2020, Proof Hansard page 46 and 47

Universities that provided information about costs of course delivery

Question

Senator FARUQI: When you say the universities have given you this information, what does that mean—what universities?

Mr Heferen: For the 2018 data collection, the universities were the Australian Catholic University, Charles Sturt University, Deakin University, Griffith University, James Cook University, Monash University, the Queensland University of Technology, Southern Cross University, the University of Melbourne, the University of New England, the University of Newcastle, the University of Queensland, the university—

Senator FARUQI: Sorry to interrupt. Could you provide me that list on notice? You've said that those universities—

Mr Heferen: I have it right in front of me, so I can read the rest out if you'd like. There is the University of the Sunshine Coast—

Senator FARUQI: My time is limited.

...

Mr Heferen: Sorry, I apologise to the rest of the universities that I haven't been able to name, because there are quite a few who have contributed. A number are also on the reference group—

Senator FARUQI: Can you provide it to me on notice?

Mr Heferen: but I will provide that material to the committee.

Answer

The institutions listed below participated in the 2018 data collection for the Deloitte report *Transparency in Higher Education Expenditure*:

1. Australian Catholic University
2. Charles Sturt University
3. Deakin University
4. Griffith University
5. James Cook University
6. Monash University
7. Queensland University of Technology
8. Southern Cross University
9. University of Melbourne
10. University of New England
11. University of Newcastle
12. University of Queensland
13. University of Southern Queensland
14. University of Sunshine Coast
15. University of Sydney
16. University of Wollongong
17. Victoria University

18. Charles Darwin University
19. Curtin University of Technology
20. Federation University
21. Flinders University
22. University of Canberra
23. University of South Australia
24. University of Tasmania
25. University of Western Australia

In 2019, the following universities were added:

26. CQ University
27. Edith Cowan University
28. Murdoch University
29. RMIT University
30. Swinburne University of Technology
31. The Australian National University
32. The University of Adelaide

From 2020, all other universities were scheduled to be phased-in (note collection was delayed due to COVID-19):

33. La Trobe University
34. Macquarie University
35. The University of New South Wales
36. University of Technology Sydney
37. Western Sydney University

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Department of Education, Skills and Employment Question No. IQ20-000109

Senator Rex Patrick on 28 July 2020, Proof Hansard page 49

Five year data projection

Question

Senator PATRICK: Thank you for that, but, noting the uncertainties created by COVID, how do you come up with any projection at this point in time, particularly when everyone else is saying they can't predict anything? Jobs, budget has been delayed, all those sorts of things—it really is an unknown.

Mr Heferen: Some of the things have been pretty robust to that. A good example would be nursing. Another is teaching. My understanding is that the teaching workforce across the country has more middle-aged and mature-age people who over the next little while will start to think about retirement. That's one where there appears to be an anticipated shortage in the future. There will still be that demand for school teachers. I think that's a relatively safe one, as is nursing and other areas of allied health. Again, they have an ageing population. Most people would agree that demand for qualified nurses will increase and not decrease. Other clear ones would be maths and, to the same extent, information technology—IT, digital literacy and skills. I think most people would argue that selecting those subjects in any kind of degree or actually doing an IT degree or a maths degree will be sets of skills that will be relatively robust to uncertainties of the future. Whilst I accept the point completely that it's very hard to predict with any kind of certainty, there do seem to be some of those that should remain robust to uncertain times.

Senator PATRICK: If possible, can I on notice get a look at that five-year data that you used to base your decision about where the jobs would be and basically provide an indication of what you think is still valid, noting COVID has had such a large effect on the economy.

Answer

The Department of Education, Skills and Employment Labour Information Market Portal provides information on the latest projections for employment (<https://lmip.gov.au/default.aspx?LMIP/GainInsights/EmploymentProjections>).

Employment is projected to increase in 16 of the 19 broad industries over the five years to May 2024. Health Care and Social Assistance is projected to make the largest contribution to employment growth (increasing by 252,600), followed by Professional, Scientific and Technical Services (172,400) and Education and Training (129,300).

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Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic - 28 July 2020

Outcome: Higher Education, Research and International

Department of Education, Skills and Employment Question No. IQ20-000110

Senator Rex Patrick on 28 July 2020, Proof Hansard page 50

University attrition data

Question

Mr English: We publish quite extensive material on the attrition rates from the initial studies from universities, and then we publish quite extensive material on completion rates, both six and nine year completion rates. You can see in that the trends and the subjects that tend to do better in that domain.

One thing I will say is that the attrition rate, I think, is pretty incomplete in the sense that we count a student who moves from a university course to a different university course or to a different university as being a continuation student, but we don't yet count a student who moves to VET, for example, as a continuation. In the scheme of things, helping a student decide early on in a university experience that it isn't for them or to send them a clearer signal beforehand—such as in some of the work that the government is aiming to do with year 12—is obviously a worthwhile policy ambition. The cost of somebody taking a bit of time in higher education and then moving to VET, I think, would balance it against free choice and sending clearer signals earlier. At this point, my only hesitation in pointing to the attrition data is it doesn't pick up people exiting to VET, which I think is a valid place.

Senator PATRICK: On notice, can you point the committee to where that data is and where that cost information might be?

Mr English: Certainly. The attrition data and the data on completions is on our departmental website. We can give you the links on notice.

Senator PATERSON: Yes, can you provide the committee with the link?

Mr English: Absolutely.

Answer

The department publishes excel reports on completions and attrition and these are available as follows:

Completion rates – www.docs.education.gov.au/node/53032

Attrition rates - www.docs.education.gov.au/node/53029

The department also publishes visual analytic reports on completion and attrition and these are available as follows:

Completion rates -

<https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjojM2MwMWQ2ZDMtNGViNy00Mjc5LTk0OTgtNzJhMmM5ZDQwYWUxliwidCI6ImRkMGNmZDE1LTQ1NTgtNGIxMi04YmFkLWVhMjY5ODRmYzQxNyJ9>

Attrition rates -

<https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjojYWM2NjRkYTktZGJkNC00MGVklWJlYjltMGRjNTc3Y2FkNmVklwidCI6ImRkMGNmZDE1LTQ1NTgtNGIxMi04YmFkLWVhMjY5ODRmYzQxNyJ9>

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Department of Education, Skills and Employment Question No. IQ20-000111

Senator Perin Davey on 28 July 2020, Proof Hansard page 50

Maths and STEM course applications

Question

Senator DAVEY: I have two questions. When the maths and STEM student contributions were reduced in 2008, what happened to those courses at that time?

Mr English: My recollection of the numbers is that there was a noticeable increase in the rate of application for those courses amongst students seeking to go to university, so I think the growth rate, overall, was about four per cent in applications up to that point, both across the board and in those disciplines. In those disciplines we saw it lift about eight or nine per cent, from memory—I will confirm this with data on notice. And that was sustained for a couple of years until that incentive was withdrawn and the rates of applications started to fall back to more normal levels. It's important that I'm clear that that's the application rate. The actual enrolment rate didn't shift as much, in part because the decision to apply and enrol takes two to tango, so to speak—the universities have to accept the students. I would be cautious in attributing that all to price. There was a pretty robust national debate at the time about the value of STEM skills into the future. We do know that students, particularly school students, are quite affected by the state of received wisdom, you could put it, from their advisers: their parents, their careers advisers and their teachers. So I think the combination of the price sending a signal in that debate and the debate itself being championed by people like the Chief Scientist and various other parts of the community, both business and government, all contributed to a sense of that interest, for what it's worth.

Answer

Please see response to IQ20-000115.

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QUESTION ON NOTICE

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Outcome: Higher Education, Research and International

Department of Education, Skills and Employment Question No. IQ20-000112

Senator Kristina Keneally on 28 July 2020, Proof Hansard page 51

TEQSA integrity unit

Question

Senator KENEALLY: Thank you very much. I just have a quick question to Mr English. Earlier, I referred to the minister's statements around the TEQSA integrity unit. I think I might have said that it was in his National Press Club speech. It was actually after that. Can you tell me the date that you became aware that the integrity unit was going to expand to target or investigate substantial shifts in enrolment patterns at universities?

Mr English: I became aware of the minister's statement on that the day that he made it, obviously. We'd been working on the role of the unit for some months beforehand. As I think I said before, the examination of enrolment patterns and student experience is core to both our interest in what universities do and TEQSA's oversight of them. It has always been part of the function of this body—to look at the student experience.

Senator KENEALLY: Yes, but the minister actually announced that it would be expanded beyond just looking at the student experience to 'establish a mechanism to ensure universities do not exploit humanities students by moving away from providing a quality degree that is consistent with the costs charged to the student and the federal government'. This was in direct response to concerns raised by people like Robert French and Julie Bishop, chancellors in our university system, who warned that universities would try to recruit humanities students. Was this a recommendation from the department to expand the integrity unit to incorporate this function?

Mr English: Senator, I'd like to take it on notice. I'm not contesting your description of the minister's words, but I'd like to check the records on the process to get to that point, because 'expansion' is not a word that has particularly stuck with me in describing the unit and its roles. It's always had an interest in the matters about the way students engage with the sector and the sector with students.

Senator KENEALLY: I would refer you to two exclusive stories by Richard Ferguson on 24 June in *The Australian*, where the minister makes this announcement, as well as a story on 25 June by Paul Karp in relation to this announcement by the minister.

Mr English: I understand, Senator. In my mind, this was a highlighting of the roles. Somebody else has used the word 'expansion'. If it's the minister, I will check it and confirm if there's anything in my records that suggests that there was a different expectation beforehand. But, in my mind, that description was merely to highlight some of the things that the unit was always intended to take quite seriously. The discussion about shifting enrolment patterns proceeded as you described, I agree, over the days following the announcement. But we haven't, to my mind, done anything more than highlight what that unit could bring to the discussion, which was always a part of its function. So I would need to take it on notice.

Answer

The Hon Dan Tehan MP, Minister for Education, announced the establishment of the TEQSA higher education integrity unit on 24 June 2020 (see <https://ministers.dese.gov.au/tehan/ensuring-integrity-higher-education>).

An article in *The Australian* on 25 June 2020 (“Unit to investigate ‘profiteering’ unis”), quoted the Minister as stating that as part of its mandate, the integrity unit would investigate substantial shifts in enrolment patterns of universities, and consider the implications for educational quality and provider governance.

Considering changes in enrolment patterns is not a new mandate for TEQSA. It is an established tool in TEQSA’s monitoring and oversight of higher education providers. It was used, for example, in monitoring the reaction of dual sector vocational and higher education providers to changes in the VET FEE-HELP and VET Student Loan programs; where some sudden and unexpected increases in higher education enrolments at a provider was picked up and queried by both TEQSA and the department.

The role of the integrity unit is published by the department at www.dese.gov.au/job-ready/improving-transparency-and-accountability.

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Department of Education, Skills and Employment Question No. IQ20-000113

Senator Kristina Keneally on 28 July 2020, Proof Hansard page 52

Substantial shifts in enrolment patterns

Question

Senator KENEALLY: Alright. I would also ask the same question I asked Mr Heferen: did the department recommend that the integrity unit monitor 'substantial shifts in enrolment patterns'? Those are the minister's words.

Mr Heferen: Sorry, Senator. That's part of Job-ready Graduates, which I think we've gone back to taking that on notice.

Senator KENEALLY: In fact, it was announced after Job-ready Graduates, so it is an additional question: did the department recommend that the integrity unit police 'substantial shifts in enrolment patterns'?

Mr Heferen: We'll take that on notice.

Senator KENEALLY: Thank you.

Answer

Please see response to IQ20-000112.

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QUESTION ON NOTICE

Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic - 28 July 2020

Outcome: Higher Education, Research and International

Department of Education, Skills and Employment Question No. IQ20-000114

Senator Katy Gallagher on 28 July 2020, Proof Hansard page 52

TEQSA Higher Education integrity unit

Question

Mr Heferen: My recollection is that the Job-ready Graduates Package had a range of elements, of which one was the expanded role for TEQSA. How those things then get announced over time is obviously a matter for the minister. CHAIR: So you're saying that that was part of the original decision and policy? Mr Heferen: My recollection—and I stand to be corrected—is that the expanded role for TEQSA, as Mr English has pointed out, was to ensure the ongoing quality experience for students at universities. TEQSA has also been provided with, I think, a role to take on around—again I stand to be corrected—cybersecurity and a greater consciousness around that. CHAIR: We're not asking about that.

Mr Heferen: I know, but my point was that I thought that was part of the Job-ready Graduates Package, which is, as you know, an enormous package. Having taken that on notice, I think that's also one that would fit within that.

CHAIR: Okay, we will look forward to a full answer on that when you reply to the committee with that information. It seems a very unusual set of circumstances to me, so, if you are able to provide some clarification, that would be most useful, because at the moment we know that there was an announcement on the 19th and then there was another announcement on the 24th after there had been some criticism in the middle. The committee would like that period of time clarified and correct information given to it, and any incorrect information will not be tolerated—or refusal to provide information.

Mr Heferen: Understood, Senator. We will take it on notice and assist the committee as we can.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Answer

Most elements of the Job-Ready Graduates Package were announced by the Hon Dan Tehan MP, Minister for Education, on 19 June 2020 (see <https://ministers.dese.gov.au/tehan/minister-education-dan-tehan-national-press-club-address-qa>).

A small number of measures in the Package were announced separately by the Minister at later dates, including the Marketplace for online micro-credentials on 22 June 2020 (see <https://ministers.dese.gov.au/tehan/marketplace-online-microcredentials>), and the TEQSA Higher Education Integrity Unit on 24 June 2020 (see <https://ministers.dese.gov.au/tehan/ensuring-integrity-higher-education>).

The specific timing of announcements was determined by Government.

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QUESTION ON NOTICE

Australian Government response to the COVID-19 pandemic - 28 July 2020

Outcome: Skills and Training

Department of Education, Skills and Employment Question No. IQ20-000117

Senator Mehreen Faruqi provided in writing.

Heads of Agreement for JobTrainer funding

Question

Please provide a copy of the Heads of Agreement for JobTrainer funding.

Answer

The Heads of Agreement is available at <https://pmc.gov.au/resource-centre/domestic-policy/heads-agreement-skills-reform>.