

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Budget Estimates 2017 - 2018

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Department/Agency: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
Outcome/Program: Outcome 2: Indigenous
Topic: Higher Education

Senator: Kakoschke-Moore

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Question:

Ms Hefren-Webb: The consultation on the higher education package occurred as normal through our usual budget processes and cabinet processes. We were in contact at officer level with department of education colleagues and provided comments on proposed changes of various types. The matter would have come forward for deliberation by ministers as part of the cabinet process prior to being announced in the budget.

Senator KAKOSCHKE-MOORE: Were any of those comments specifically directed towards the impact that these changes would have on Indigenous tertiary students?

Ms Hefren-Webb: That would be the area that we would focus on when we provide comments. We provide comments on policies across government, and our focus is always on potential impacts on Indigenous people and communities.

Senator KAKOSCHKE-MOORE: What potential impacts were identified during these discussions?

Ms Hefren-Webb: We would have provided some input on proportions of Indigenous students who might have been in various student categories, but I would need to provide on notice any more information about that.

Senator KAKOSCHKE-MOORE: If you could, that would be helpful. I would also like to know whether there were any special measures put in place, or discussions about putting in place special measures, for increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tertiary students.

Answer:

The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet worked closely with the Department of Education and Training on the higher education reforms in relation to Indigenous students. Specific details of the advice provided cannot be disclosed as it is subject to Cabinet confidentiality.

In relation to special measures, the Indigenous Student Success Programme commenced on 1 January 2017. The programme is designed to increase the enrolment, retention and completion rates of Indigenous students. Universities can use the funding to provide scholarships, tutorial assistance and other support services that Indigenous students need to assist them to successfully complete their studies. The Indigenous Student Success Programme was developed in close consultation with universities and stakeholder groups over 2015 and 2016.