



Schools Assistance (Learning Together—Achievement Through Choice and Opportunity) Amendment (2007 Budget Measures) Bill 2007

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Schools Assistance (Learning Together—Achievement Through Choice and Opportunity) Amendment (2007 Budget Measures) Bill 2007

Date introduced: 23 May 2007

House: House of Representatives

Portfolio: Education, Science and Training

Commencement: Royal Assent

Purpose

The purpose of the Bill is to amend the *Schools Assistance (Learning Together—Achievement Through Choice and Opportunity) Act 2004* (the current Act) to provide in 2008:

- an estimated \$50 million in increased per student assistance for newly arrived humanitarian entrant students under the English as a Second Language – New Arrivals Programme and
- an estimated \$40 million in additional general recurrent grants funding for regional and remote area non-government schools.

Background

The Bill's provisions implement two measures from the 2007–08 Budget. Other school education budget measures which involve new expenditure and which will be implemented in 2007–08 will be funded through the Appropriations Act.

English as a Second Language – New Arrivals (ESL–NA) Programme

The ESL–NA Programme provides funding to government and non-government education authorities to assist with the cost of delivering intensive English language tuition to newly arrived migrant primary and secondary school students. The funding is provided as a once-only per student grant. Under the current program, the initial (before supplementation) 2007 rate is \$5277 per student.¹

Currently, as the administrative guidelines for schools state, students are expected to receive a minimum of six months intensive English language tuition either in intensive language centres or units, or in schools. For assistance provided in schools it is expected that students will be provided with a minimum of ten hours of ESL assistance per week.

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However, the amount and duration of assistance for individual students is the decision of the education authorities.²

The Bill provides additional funding to assist newly arrived migrant school aged children who arrive under Australia's Humanitarian Programme by increasing the per student rate for these students to \$9708.

The budget measure reflects the changed composition of Australia's Humanitarian Programme and the additional needs of school-aged children arriving under that program. In recent years Africa has become the regional focus of the program—refugees and humanitarian entrants from African countries have comprised about half the program's intake.³ Refugee families from countries like Sudan may have spent years in refugee camps with little access to education. In Australia they are faced with a new culture and a different way of life and have acute settlement needs.⁴

The current guidelines for the program are therefore likely to change given that these humanitarian students 'need, and are spending, much longer in the initial phase of intensive English language tuition.'⁵

Recurrent funding for regional and remote non-government schools

The Bill provides additional general recurrent funding for regional and remote non-government schools by introducing a per capita loading based on the degree of a school's remoteness. The loading will increase a school's general recurrent funding entitlement for eligible students by 5, 10 or 20 per cent depending on its degree of remoteness. Eligible students are those who attend a non-government school campus on a daily basis unless 'the Minister has determined that the student is to be treated (because of special circumstances) as so attending the school.'⁶

The Minister for Education, Science and Training has stated that the additional funding will support students in more than 400 regional and remote non-government schools.⁷ According to figures from the Report on Government Services, 24 per cent of non-government school students (equating to 351 555 full time students) attended schools in regional and remote areas in 2005. For government school students the figure was 31.9 percent (equating to 716 502 full time students).⁸

The current system of determining general recurrent grants (which constitute most of the Australian Government's grants for schools) for non-government schools is based on a measure of a school's socioeconomic status (the SES system). However this measure does not take into account a school's location. The index which determines the SES score and, hence, the funding levels of non-government schools includes three dimensions: income, education and occupation.⁹ The additional funding will not be incorporated into the SES funding formula but provided in addition to a school's SES funding as a percentage of that funding.

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The additional funding recognises ‘the higher cost of delivering schooling in regional and remote regions in Australia, and the negative impact that this can have on student achievement levels.’¹⁰ The 2005 national benchmark results for reading, writing and numeracy for Years 3, 5 and 7 show that achievement levels drop dramatically for students in remote areas—in some cases there is almost some 30 percentage points difference. Further these differences increase with age. While the achievement levels of younger students in regional areas are only one to two percentage points below metropolitan students in Years 3 and 5, by Year 7 this difference increases to 3 to 4 percentage points. For Year 7 remote students the differences are even greater. For example, Australia-wide the percentage of Year 7 students in remote areas achieving the reading benchmark is 78.5 per cent, compared to metropolitan students 91 per cent of whom achieve the reading benchmark. For very remote students the result is far worse with only 59.1 per cent of Year 7 students achieving the reading benchmark.¹¹

The budget announcement to increase general recurrent funding for regional and remote non-government schools includes a proviso that the next schools funding agreement for 2009–12 will require state and territory governments to provide an equivalent increase in funding for regional and remote government schools. It is not clear from the available information whether the Australian Government has taken into account the existing distance weighting mechanisms that are part of state governments’ funding formulae for government schools. For instance, the Victorian Government’s funding formula for government schools includes a Rural School Size Adjustment Factor which accounts for the staffing difficulties of schools outside metropolitan areas and location indexed funding which accounts for the greater service costs of these schools.¹²

Financial implications

The Bill provides for an estimated appropriations increase of \$181 million in 2008 as follows:

- \$50 million for the ESL – NA Programme and
- \$40 million for additional recurrent grants funding for non-government schools in regional and remote areas.

The additional appropriations are estimates because the program changes implemented by the Bill’s provisions are demand-driven—i.e. dependent on the number of eligible students. The two initiatives are also ongoing and therefore will have financial implications beyond 2008. Total funding estimates for the two programs are:

- \$127.8 million over four years for the ESL – NA Programme and
- \$121.1 million over four years for the additional general recurrent funding for regional and remote non-government schools.¹³

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Main provisions

Schedule 1—Eligible humanitarian new arrivals

Items 1 to 8 of Schedule 1 amend the current Act to make provisions for the new category of humanitarian new arrivals under the ESL – NA Programme. **Item 1** inserts a new definition of ‘eligible humanitarian new arrival.’

Item 10 of Schedule 1 amends the current Act’s Schedule 8 which deals with the actual grants amounts for targeted assistance. The item inserts a new Part 3 which provides for an ESL – NA grant of \$9708 per eligible humanitarian entrant student.

Schedule 2—Remoteness per capita loading

Items 1 to 6 of Schedule 2 amend section 4 of the current Act, by inserting definitions for ‘moderately accessible’, ‘remote’ and ‘very remote’ school campuses.

Item 12 of Schedule 2 inserts a new Subdivision 1 into Division 2 of Part 6 of the current Act. The subdivision provides for the remoteness per capita loading and outlines the formulae for determining the level of additional remoteness funding.

Concluding comments

The provisions of the Bill are well justified given the proven needs of the students that will benefit. However, the provisions relating to the additional funding for non-government school students in regional and remote areas will add to the complexity of Australian Government funding for non-government schools. The proposal to require state and territory governments to match this funding may also intensify the debate about the relative roles of the Commonwealth and states in school education and the increasing number of conditions for Australian Government funding.

Endnotes

1. For further information see the Department of Education, Science and Training’s website, *English as a Second Language – New Arrivals Programme, Arrangements for 2007*, http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/school_education/programmes_funding/programme_categories/special_needs_disadvantage/english_as_second_language_new_arrivals_programme/home.htm, accessed on 25 May 2007.
2. Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST), *Australian Government Programmes for Schools Quadrennial Administrative Guidelines 2005–2008: 2007 Update*, DEST, Canberra, p. 106, <http://www.dest.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/23B2372D-2A78-452A->

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- [83CE-C7B767EB6FF9/16356/Quad_Admin_Guidelines_2005_2009.pdf](#), accessed on 25 May 2007.
3. For further information see Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 'Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Programme', *Fact Sheet*, no. 60, March 2007, <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/60refugee.htm#e>, accessed on 25 May 2007.
 4. See, for example, R. Castello, 'Out of Africa, a plea for fair go', *Sunday Mail* (Adelaide), 18 February 2007, http://parlinfoweb.aph.gov.au/piweb/TranslateWIPILink.aspx?Folder=pressclp&Criteria=CITATION_ID:839M6%3B, accessed on 25 May 2007.
 5. J. Bishop (Minister for Education, Science and Training), *Support doubled for the English as a Second Language – New Arrivals Programme*, media release, 8 May 2007(a), http://www.dest.gov.au/ministers/bishop/budget07/bud28_07.htm, accessed on 28 May 2007.
 6. *Schools Assistance (Learning Together—Achievement Through Choice and Opportunity) Act 2004*, s. 5 (1) (b).
 7. J. Bishop, Minister for Education, Science and Training, 'Second reading speech: Schools Assistance (Learning Together—Achievement Through Choice and Opportunity) Amendment (2007 Budget Measures) Bill 2007, House of Representatives, *Debates*, 23 May 2007, p. 2, http://parlinfoweb.aph.gov.au/piweb/TranslateWIPILink.aspx?Folder=hansardr&Criteria=DOC_DATE:2007-05-23%3BSEQ_NUM:6%3B, accessed on 28 May 2007.
 8. Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, *Report on Government Services 2007*, Tables 3A.1, 3A.2 and 3A.25, <http://www.pc.gov.au/gsp/reports/rogs/2007/education/attachment03.pdf>, accessed on 28 May 2007.
 9. For further information see M. Harrington, *Australian Government General Recurrent Grants for Schools – A Brief Explanation*, Parliamentary Library, Canberra, 2007, http://libiis1/Library_Services/electoralatlas/SchoolGrants/Explanation.htm, accessed on 25 May 2007.
 10. J. Bishop (Minister for Education, Science and Training), *More support for regional and remote non-government schools*, media release, 8 May 2007(b), http://www.dest.gov.au/ministers/bishop/budget07/bud27_07.htm, accessed on 25 May 2007.
 11. Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), *2005 National Report on Schooling in Australia: Preliminary Paper: National Benchmark Results: Reading, Writing and Numeracy: Years 3,5 and 7*, MCEETYA, Sth Melbourne, Vic., 2007, pp. 8, 17 and 26, http://cms.curriculum.edu.au/anr2005/pdfs/2005_benchmarks.pdf, accessed on 28 May 2007.
 12. Victoria. Department of Education, *Guide to the 2007 Confirmed Student Resource Package*, 2nd ed., Department of Education. Melbourne, 2006, pp. 12, 49, http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/edulibrary/public/finman/allocate/schoolfund/srp/2007_Guide_to_the_Confirmed_SRP.pdf, accessed on 25 May 2007.
 13. J. Bishop (Minister for Education, Science and Training), 8 May 2007 (a) and (b), op. cit.

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