

Senate Committee: Education and Employment

QUESTION ON NOTICE Additional Estimates 2015 - 2016

Outcome: Skills and Training

Department of Education and Training Question No. SQ16-000018

Senator Carr, Kim asked on 10 February 2016, Proof Hansard page 17

Incomplete answers to SQ15-000896 and SQ15-000897

Question

Senator KIM CARR: It might be. There were three answers—on 8 February, so that is this Monday—and the particular information I was seeking here was: how many people have unintentionally or otherwise unfairly incurred VET FEE-HELP debts? And the question does not actually go to the substantive issue. I was just wondering, at what point is there an editorial process now put in place to actually ensure that questions are actually answered? Mr Cook: That would be the responsibility of the appropriate deputy secretary, as always. Senator KIM CARR: So in that particular matter—SQ15-000896 and SQ15-000897—I just put on notice to the relevant officer, I will be looking for advice as to why the answers were incomplete.

Answer

The Department of Education and Training does not have data on the number of people who have unintentionally or otherwise unfairly incurred VET FEE-HELP debts. The department has some data on students that may have contacted or been referred to the department disputing the debt, however providers are required to have in place grievance processes to deal with both academic (such as study results) and non-academic (such as fees) matters, and therefore persons are directed to resolve these concerns with their provider and students can access complaint processes without reference to the department.

VET providers are required to publish their academic and non-academic grievance procedures on their websites. The procedures are required to have three formal stages being:

Stage one—Formal complaint to provider

The procedure must include a process for lodging a formal complaint if the matter cannot be resolved informally.

Stage two—Internal provider review

The procedure must include a process for lodging an appeal with an independent senior officer of the VET provider or an internal committee or unit with appropriate expertise.

Stage three—External review

A VET provider must have arrangements in place so a person or body independent of, and external to, the VET provider established or nominated by it—such as an independent dispute resolution body or stakeholder organisation—can hear unresolved appeals arising from the internal review.

The VET FEE-HELP reforms implemented during the course of 2015 and 2016 have made changes to the VET FEE-HELP loan rules to ensure students are protected from signing up to courses and getting debts that they don't want or need. These include:

- stronger rules for marketing and recruitment
- two business day gap between enrolment and student's requesting Commonwealth assistance
- parental consent for students under 18 years of age to request Commonwealth assistance
- tuition fees charged proportionately and sequentially across the duration of a VET course of study
- issuance of Invoice Notices no less than 14 days before a unit of study census date to ensure students are provided with information on the debt they will incur and have time to withdraw prior to incurring the debt
- expanded circumstances relating to unacceptable conduct under which a student can apply to the Department of Education and Training to request a re-credit of their FEE-HELP balance and remittance of their debt, such as in cases of inappropriate marketing, offering of inducements and failure to provide invoice notices
- infringement and civil penalties sanctions for VET providers found not to be complying with legislative requirements.