

**Senate Committee: Education and Employment**

**QUESTION ON NOTICE  
Budget Estimates 2015 - 2016**

**Outcome: Higher Education Research and International**

**Department of Education and Training Question No. SQ15-000394**

Senator Carr, Kim provided in writing

***Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Advisory Council***

**Question**

In regards to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander Higher Education Advisory Council:

(a) Can you confirm that the Government has decided to abolish the Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander Higher Education Advisory Council?

(b) When was the decision taken? When was it announced?

(c) When were members of the council advised? How were they advised?

(d) Will the annual saving will be in the order of \$327,000?

(e) Can you explain the rationale for this move? What is the reason, or is this merely a cost-cutting measure?

(f) How long had the Council been in operation? Did it meet for the first time in December 2012? Has it been in operation for only two and a half years? How many meetings have occurred?

(g) Has the Government allowed long enough for a judgment to be made as to the Council's effectiveness? Couldn't the Council be seen as still finding its feet?

(h) Why has the Government not funded it for a few more years, just to see how effective it could become?

(i) Where will the Department get advice on this area in future? What body will now oversee developments in Indigenous higher education? Explain how this function will be undertaken.

(j) Do you agree that the area of Indigenous higher education is a specialised area? Doesn't it follow that the Government needs specialist advice from experts in this field, especially from Indigenous people?

(k) Did the report of the Behrendt Review of Indigenous higher education envisaged a key role in leadership for the Advisory Council in this field?

(l) What is the status of this report and its recommendations? Do you have a plan and a timetable for the implementation of the recommendations? What body will play the leadership role in Indigenous higher education as envisaged in this report for the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council?

(m) Did you consult the Indigenous community more broadly? Who did you consult, and by what means? What did they advise?

**Answer**

(a) The Government has decided not to appoint a new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Advisory Council following the expiry of the term of the current Council on 30 June 2015.

(b) The decision was taken in the Budget context. It was announced in the Budget on 12 May 2015.

(c) Members were advised by Minister Pyne in a letter dated 10 May 2015.

(d) Yes.

(e) The conclusion of Council's term at the end June 2015 afforded the Government an opportunity to explore new, flexible ways of engaging with Indigenous higher education stakeholders and higher education leadership more broadly. The Government decided not to appoint a new Council, and will focus on engagement with key organisations, including the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Consortium (NATSIHEC), the Prime Minister's Indigenous Advisory Council and Universities Australia, as well as consulting with and seeking advice from individual experts and leaders.

(f) The Council was established by the then Minister for Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education on 17 December 2012. Its term concluded on 30 June 2015. Council held seven full meetings and convened four roundtables/forums with a range of stakeholders.

(g) The decision not to appoint a new Council was not a reflection of the effectiveness of the current Council. Council has undertaken a substantial body of work that will provide important direction for future improvements in Indigenous higher education outcomes.

(h) As noted at point (e), the conclusion of the Council's term at the end June 2015 afforded the Government an opportunity to explore new, flexible ways of engaging with Indigenous higher education stakeholders and higher education leadership more broadly. The work that Council has done will provide an important foundation for future work.

(i) NATSIHEC will be the key mechanism for engagement with Indigenous academic leaders on issues regarding Indigenous higher education.

(j) The Government will seek the advice of organisations and expert individuals on Indigenous higher education issues broadly and on specific priorities, including Indigenous participation in STEM and growing the Indigenous academic workforce.

(k) Yes, the Review did envisage a leadership role for the advisory Council.

(l) The Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People will continue to provide a platform for work to improve higher education outcomes for Indigenous people.

(m) The decision was taken in the Budget context.

Also see Question No. SQ15-000284.