

EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TRAINING

SENATE LEGISLATION COMMITTEE - QUESTIONS ON NOTICE 2003-2004 ADDITIONAL ESTIMATES HEARING

Outcome: 2

Output Group: 2.4 – Funding for higher education

DEST Question No. E871_04

Senator Stott Despoja provided in writing.

Question:

In response to DEST Question No. E677_04 you stated that fee flexibility in the higher education sector would promote a more diverse higher education system. What type of diversity would be promoted?

Answer:

Promote a more diverse higher education system

Australia needs a high quality education sector with a range of institutions servicing different communities and varied requirements. It is neither necessary nor desirable for all universities to be the same. A more diverse system will be achieved by institutions forging distinct missions within the overall system and through greater collaboration between individual universities and other education providers, industry, business, regions and communities. Diversity will be encouraged through the creation of performance-based incentives for institutions to differentiate their missions.

This will allow for diversity in the institutional focus and strategic direction, for example, a university may wish to focus on pursuing research excellence and having the resources to do this. Others might wish to focus on serving the local region, and keeping fees down for that particular socio-economic mix. It will also allow for diversity in the mix of courses, as universities target a particular sector of the student market.

The Australian Government's vision of education is to see that every Australian is able to find and achieve his or her own potential and it recognises that Australia's students demand the highest quality tertiary educational opportunities and choices. Therefore the Australian Government will no longer dictate what universities should charge for their courses in order to promote a more diverse higher education system.

Under the new arrangements, institutions will set their own student contributions for Commonwealth supported places within a range from \$0 to a maximum set by the Australian Government which is no more than 25 per cent above current levels. Fees for nursing and teaching courses, which cover about 14 per cent of students, will be exempt from any increase. Every dollar of student contributions will go directly to institutions to improve quality and reduce class sizes.