

Senate Standing Committee on Education Employment and Workplace Relations

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE Additional Estimates 2012-2013

Outcome 2 - Schools and Youth

DEEWR Question No. EW0864_13

Senator Nash provided in writing.

Refers to previous DEEWR Question No EW0740_13.

Question

Laptop Program

1. As part of the laptop program, was there a long term plan in place to assist schools, teachers and parents to continue to provide and maintain computers when and if the funding lapsed?
2. Some schools are telling students to buy their own laptops, others are requesting parents lease or rent the laptops. What is being done to assist these parents and to ensure students are not put at an educational disadvantage?
3. There are reports that hundreds of thousands of outdated computers in classrooms need to be replaced. Is this correct?
4. Is there sufficient funding allocated to states to allow outdated computers to all be replaced?
5. How many laptops will need to be replaced in 2013 and how many in 2014? How many of these are in regional and remote schools?

Answer

1. The National Secondary School Computer Fund (the Computer Fund) is the main funding element of the Australian Government's Digital Education Revolution (DER) National Partnership (NP) with states and territories and Funding Agreements (FA) with the non-government schools sector. The Computer Fund has established a strong technology base in Australian secondary schools and has fast-tracked the effective integration of information and communication technology (ICT) into teaching and learning.

The Government recognised that there were additional costs associated with the implementation of the Computer Fund. In that context, the Government provided a one-off payment of \$807 million to education authorities to meet the additional costs including ICT technical support and maintenance of computers for the life of the DER NP and FAs.

The DER NP and FAs are due to end on 30 June 2013, with funding provided to maintain the Computer Fund for the 2013 school year.

On 14 April 2013, the Prime Minister, the Hon Julia Gillard MP, announced the Government's National Plan for School Improvement which includes a new funding model to provide the proper resourcing of all Australian classrooms, teachers and schools.

The Government's goal is for Australian school students to be among the world's top five in reading, numeracy and science by 2025, and the National Plan will support this by establishing a new, fairer schools funding approach, linked to reforms that will improve school performance and outcomes for individual students. Under the National Plan, if states and territories agree, schools across the country will benefit from an extra \$14.5 billion in public investment over the next six years, with 65 per cent of this extra investment provided by the Government.

This extra money will help schools buy new curriculum resources, including new ICT equipment, so students can further develop the skills they need in the 21st century.

2. The purchasing of ICT equipment under the Computer Fund is taking place at a state, sector or school level because government and non-government education authorities have primary responsibility for decisions about the educational hardware and software best suited to the specific needs of their schools. Depending on need, schools can buy netbooks, laptops, tablet computing devices or install more desktop computers. The Computer Fund is directed towards students in Years 9 to 12 and some schools may have chosen to implement technology programs for other year levels that are independent, and in addition, to the Computer Fund. This occurs at the discretion of the school, and in consultation with the parent community.

In order to help families meet the costs of educating their children, the Government, as part of the 2012 Budget, announced a new Schoolkids Bonus, aimed at assisting low and middle income families to make ends meet. The Government's Schoolkids Bonus provides upfront support of \$410 a year for each child in primary school and \$820 a year for each child in secondary school to assist families to pay for school-related expenses including technology hardware and software.

3. *The Review of Legitimate and Additional Financial Implications of the National Secondary School Computer Fund* concluded that computers funded under the National Secondary School Computer Fund (the Computer Fund) would have a four-year life cycle. Funding under the Computer Fund was not distributed until July 2008. Therefore, there are computers provided under the Computer Fund that are expected to become obsolete sequentially from 2012–13 to 2015–16. The approximate number of devices has previously been tabled in previous DEEWR Question No. EW0740_13.
4. The Government has provided sufficient funding to maintain a one-to-one computer to student ratio (1:1 ratio) for the life of the DER National Partnership Agreement and Funding Agreements. Under those agreements, education authorities are required to contribute 30 per cent of the total expenditure required to maintain the 1:1 ratio.
5. The approximate number of devices expected to become obsolete during 2013 and 2014 has previously been tabled in EW0740_13.

The Department is unable to provide a breakdown of the number of devices expected to be replaced during 2013 and 2014 in regional and remote schools. The bi-annual DER Progress Reports requires education authorities to provide data on the total number of computers installed under the Computer Fund and does not require them to provide a breakdown on whether the devices were installed in a rural or remote location.