

## EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TRAINING

### SENATE LEGISLATION COMMITTEE – QUESTIONS ON NOTICE 2004-05 BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING

**Outcome:** 1 & 2  
**Output Group:** 2.4 Funding for Higher Education

#### DEST Question No. E097\_05

Senator Crossin provided in writing:

#### Question:

In a media release of 17<sup>th</sup> May 2004 (2004 Min 703/04), the Minister claims that a new study backs the Government's university scholarships. He states that the study found that among Year 10 to Year 12, students felt that living and accommodation costs affected their decisions to study.

- i. Is there a summary of the study available for this committee to see?
- ii. Exactly what questions were asked and how?
- iii. Who did the study?
- iv. When was it done?
- v. How were the participants chosen?
- vi. Where were the participants from – is there a breakdown of figures?
- vii. How many were Indigenous?
- viii. How many of those in the study were actually LIKELY to go on to university?
- ix. Was this question of their intent actually asked?
- x. Were they also informed of and questioned about the other (poor) living allowances they may be eligible for if studying?
- xi. Were they informed of figures showing how many hours students have to work part time for income these days?
- xii. Were they informed that HECS, the so called interest free loan (in the media release) can now amount to tens of thousands of dollars to be repaid when they earn \$36,000 or more?
- xiii. The media release goes on to say that \$4m (of taxpayers money) will be spent this year to assist potential students understand how HECS works. How will the \$4m be spent – how much on newspaper adverts, how much on TV – any other means?
- xiv. What is the proposed timeline for this project? Will the \$4m be spent BEFORE the election?

#### Answers:

- i. The full report "*Factors Impacting on Student aspirations and Expectations in Regional Australia*" was released on 17 May 2004 and is available at: [www.dest.gov.au/highered/eippubs.htm](http://www.dest.gov.au/highered/eippubs.htm) .  
The Summary is located in *Chapter 8: Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations* on pages 245 to 253.
- ii. Please refer to *Appendix 1: Parent Questionnaire*, pages 291-293, and *Appendix 2: A Guideline for Focus Group Questions*, pages 295-297.
- iii. The project team was led by Professor Nola Alloway of the Department of Education at James Cook University. Other team members were Pam Gilbert, Rob Gilbert and Sandy Muspratt.

Their work included a methodology paper, literature review, analysis of about 72 focus group interviews with students, parents and teachers and a final report.

- iv.** Information for the study was collected during the last school term of 2002.
- v.** Information about the design of the focus groups and interviews is provided on pages 3-11 of the report. The study set out to capture the voices of students in Year 10 and Year 12 from diverse regional communities across the country, so that 14 regional sites and two sites in Melbourne to provide a metropolitan comparison were surveyed. Focus groups of students were assembled to ensure a mix of typical students by gender and Indigenous background. In sites with both government and non-government schools, separate focus groups were held with students from each school type.
- vi.** A full listing of participating schools and composition of focus groups is provided on pages 10 and 11 of the report.
- vii.** Where relevant, focus groups included Indigenous students. In sites with significant numbers of Indigenous students, additional focus groups were sought with these students. As a result, 3 of the 72 interview groups comprised only Indigenous students.
- viii.** The students were asked if their post-school plans involved "further education and training" and whether this was university or VET (refer to Appendix 2 of the report, pages 295-297). The study did not follow up these students to gather information on the number who actually went to university. As a broad indication, national level data from the *Longitudinal Survey of Australian Youth (LSAY)* suggest that around 60% of those who aspire to go to university do so in the year immediately after leaving school.
- ix.** Refer to answer to part (viii).
- x.** This information was not provided as part of the focus group interviews. The report's findings suggest that students were aware of income support arrangements for tertiary study.
- xi.** This information was not provided as part of the focus group interviews. The financial needs and circumstances differ significantly between individual students. Students showed an awareness of these issues as indicated by their response to questions on the costs of university study.
- xii.** Information on HECS was not disseminated as part of the study. HECS was raised by the focus group facilitator in the focus group discussions on costs of attending university.
- xiii.** The Department has engaged the services of a market research consultant to get a better understanding of the university-bound student population and its information needs. The findings of the research, including the best communication strategies to successfully reach the target audiences, will inform the development of the higher education reforms campaign. The advertising strategy, including the distribution of expenditure between the various communication mediums recommended by the research, is yet to be determined.
- xiv.** The project is expected to begin in September/October 2004 and run until the beginning of 2005 as previous research has shown that this is the optimal time to target students, the primary target audience. The Department will also, however, be looking to the market research findings to refine this timing to ensure the campaign is run at the most effective time for students.