

EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TRAINING

SENATE LEGISLATION COMMITTEE – QUESTIONS ON NOTICE 2005-2006 BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING

Outcome: 2

Output Group: 2.4 – Funding for higher education.

DEST Question No. E025_06

Senator Carr provided in writing.

Question:

There is an astonishing trend among commencing Indigenous students – the fact that females now outnumber males in this category by around 2:1.

Overall, Indigenous female students considerably outnumber males also.

- (a) What is happening here?
- (b) What social or cultural factors are operating?
- (c) What work have you done to improve the rates for male students?
- (d) What factors are contributing?
- (e) Please provide copies of reports on any research you have undertaken or commissioned.

Answer:

Indigenous male students in higher education

- (a) There are fewer male students in Higher Education in both the indigenous and non-Indigenous populations in Australia. Latest available data (for 2003) show that 63.1 per cent of commencing Indigenous students were female and 36.9 per cent were male, while 63.4 per cent of all Indigenous students were female and 36.6 per cent were male. Comparable figures for non-Indigenous students are 57.0 per cent female and 43.0 per cent male for commencing non-Indigenous students and 56.3 per cent female and 43.7 per cent male of all non-Indigenous students.

The lower likelihood of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous boys undertaking Higher Education is partly due to their underachievement across a broad spectrum of measures of educational attainment at the school level, including early literacy achievement, results in most subjects at years 10 and 12, and school retention.

It is also due to the fact that Indigenous males are more likely than females to participate in the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector and undertake apprenticeships. Data for 2003 indicate 53.2 per cent of Indigenous VET students were male, and 46.8 per cent were female. Amongst apprentices and trainees, 63.0 per cent were male and 37.0 per cent were female. Comparable figures for the Non-Indigenous population indicate 51.0 per cent of non-Indigenous VET students were male and 47.6 per cent were female (remainder unknown), while 63.0 per cent of apprentices and trainees were male and 37.0 per cent were female.

- (b) Those cultural, social, economic and geographic factors that have been shown to affect boys' academic achievement, also affect Indigenous boys. For instance, living in a rural or remote locality and coming from a low socio-economic background have been shown to reduce the likelihood of undertaking Higher Education for both Indigenous

and non-Indigenous boys. Indigenous boys are more likely to leave school before completing Year 12 than Indigenous females (Years 7/8 to 12 apparent retention rates for 2004 – Indigenous males: 35.3 per cent; Indigenous females: 43.9 per cent), and are more likely to continue their education at vocational education and training institutions than Indigenous females (53.2 per cent of Indigenous students in VET in 2003 were males).

- (c) The gender difference in participation of Indigenous students has been highlighted in the National Report to Parliament which has been circulated to all universities. DEST will raise this issue when it holds officer-to officer level visits at universities in 2005 and 2006 to discuss Indigenous issues.

The Australian Government has allocated \$27 million over 2003 – 2008 towards initiatives intended to improve boys' educational and social outcomes. Several specifically address Indigenous boys' education. Three are listed below.

Boys Education Lighthouse Initiative

The *Boys Education Lighthouse Schools* (BELS) project aims to improve educational outcomes for boys in Australian schools by establishing effective teaching and learning practices in groups or 'clusters' of schools. In Stage One of this initiative, 230 Australian schools working on 110 individual projects were granted up to \$5,000 each to identify and document their successful practices in education boys.

Stage Two of BELS is a schools-based approach to the development and testing of strategies for improving learning outcomes for boys. In this stage, 51 clusters of schools are receiving grants of up to \$100,000 to develop strong projects and subject these to a rigorous evidence-based test of their effectiveness in raising the learning outcomes of their target group of boys. BELS 2 cluster's projects will be finalised by December 2005, and the Department will receive a final report on BELS 2 in June 2006.

Findings from Stage One of BELS are described in the report *'Meeting the Challenge: Guiding Principles for Success from the boys' Education Lighthouse Schools Programme Final Stage One 2003*. The mix of schools presented in the report reflected schools from a range of contexts including: schools in different States and Territories; government and non-government schools; primary and secondary schools; rural, regional and metropolitan schools; and schools with high numbers of students from challenging socioeconomic circumstance, linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds, Indigenous students, students with disabilities and students deemed 'at risk'. The report draws on examples from the selected schools to discuss successful teaching and learning practices. Throughout the report initiatives addressing Indigenous boy's education practices are discussed. The report can be downloaded from;

http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/school_education/publications_resources/profiles/meeting_the_challenge_final_report.htm

Success for Boys Initiative

In June 2004 the Australian Government announced funding for a new national \$19.4 million dollar project, *Success for Boys*. The primary objective of Success for Boys is to develop a critical mass of schools with the capacity to improve boys' learning outcomes and engagement in learning.

Success for Boys aims to improve educational outcomes for boys and to support boys at risk of disengaging from schooling, including boys from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The initiative will have a particular focus on the three key intervention areas that evidence from the BELS initiative has found are of particular benefit to boys: giving boys opportunities to benefit from positive male role models and mentors; effective literacy teaching and assessment; and using information and communication technology (ICT) to improve boys' engagement with active learning.

Success for Boys will have an emphasis on meeting the needs of Indigenous boys, particularly though addressing the important area of Indigenous boys' transition from primary to secondary school.

In the first phase of Success for Boys (2005), the Department has engaged James Cook University and Curriculum Corporation to develop a professional learning programme for teachers and trial it in 40 schools across Australia.

In the second phase of Success for Boys (2006 – 2007), up to 1,600 schools across Australia will receive funding grants to help them access this professional learning. Schools will receive average grants of \$10,000, which they will be able to use to purchase the professional learning and implement activities intended to help them embed the professional learning in their daily practice.

Motivation and engagement of boys: research evidence

A third project, *Motivation and engagement of boys: Evidence-based teaching practices for boys in the early and middle years of schooling: A synthesis of the research evidence* is funded under the Quality Teacher Programme. The project will synthesise the Australian and international research evidence on factors impacting on the motivation, engagement and learning outcomes of boys in the early and middle years of schooling, particularly for boys at risk of disengaging from school-based learning activities.

It will also identify and describe evidence-based teaching practices in the early and middle years of schooling which have proven effective in motivating and engaging boys, and improving boys' learning and social outcomes.

The particular target groups for the project is boys in the early and middle years of schooling who are considered to be at risk of under-achieving such as those who are identified as belonging to one or more of the following categories:

- low-performing;
- low-SES backgrounds;
- Indigenous; and
- from regional and rural areas.

A set of case studies have identified factors within or connected to a number of schools which produce improved motivation and engagement, and academic and social outcomes for boys, particularly those from low-performing, Indigenous, low SES and rural/regional backgrounds. The case studies will develop a set of principles that will inform both teachers' professional learning and school improvement programs that would aid improved educational outcomes. Findings are being incorporated into a formal report.

(d) See answer to (b).

(e) Several published research projects funded by the department on boys education also address Indigenous boys' education. For example, a (2000) report undertaken by Deakin University and funded by DEST 'Factors Influencing the Educational Performance of Males and Females in School and their Initial Destinations after

Leaving School' investigates factors affecting Indigenous boys' post-school education choices.

These publications are located on the DEST internet at:

www.dest.gov.au/sectors/school_education/policy_initiatives_reviews/key_issues/boy_education/boys_education_research_and_websites.htm.

A forthcoming briefing paper by the Australian Council of Educational Research presents findings from The Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth including research on the study activities of Indigenous males and females. The Paper, titled 'Education and labour market outcomes for Indigenous young people' found that the proportions of Indigenous students who commenced year 9 in 1995 but did not progress to complete Year 12 were similar for males and females. Indigenous males were less likely than Indigenous females to leave school prior to year 11, but were more likely to leave school after year 11.

This report will be available on the Australian Council of Education Research web site on September 2 at www.acer.edu.au.