

## 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. E286\_06**

Senator Carr asked in writing

#### **Question:**

During the Senate Inquiry into Student Income support on 13 May, evidence was given by DEST that a new study into non completion by university students is being conducted. Please indicate:

- Who is conducting the review
- The cost of the review
- The process to be undertaken (eg surveying students, sample involved, comparability to other studies etc)
- The likely timing of the findings
- The rationale for conducting such an inquiry

#### **Answer:**

##### **Who is conducting the review**

DEST is currently undertaking a study of first year attrition from university to improve our understanding of attrition and the reasons why students leave without completing a university course.

A major part of this study is a national survey of a representative sample of students and ex-students. The Centre for the Economics of Education and Training (CEET) at Monash University has been contracted to undertake the management and conduct of the survey.

A Steering Committee with representatives from DEST, AVCC and universities has been convened to oversee the study.

##### **The cost of the review**

The total cost of the survey is \$193,868, including GST, administrative and mail out costs.

##### **The process to be undertaken**

The aim of the survey is to collect national estimates of student movements across and from the university sector, the reasons for attrition from university, and the factors that make a difference to student's decisions to stay or leave.

A mail out survey will be used to canvass 13,500 students - made up of a representative sample of 8,500 people who commenced a university course in 2004 but did not re-enrol in 2005 (first year attrition group) and a corresponding group of 5,000 continuing students (control group). Students and ex-students will be selected from 14 universities randomly selected from universities who have expressed an interest in participating. Universities will

select the sample of students and ex-students from their administrative records according to strict specifications provided by CEET.

The questionnaire has been developed by CEET in close consultation with DEST, the Steering Committee and universities. Universities will mail out the questionnaire and follow ups but all responses will be returned and monitored by CEET.

The AVCC Board endorsed the study and the methodology in February 2005.

### **The likely timing of the findings**

We expect to complete this study by the end of 2005 with release in early 2006.

### **The rationale for conducting such an inquiry**

Due to gaps in existing information on the reasons for attrition, the need for national research has long been recognized by the AVCC, Universities and researchers.

There are no other national surveys in Australia that focuses on information on the reasons for attrition and none that has good estimates on the movements of students within and across the university sector. Whilst individual universities commonly conduct exit surveys they often do not publish results. Also, these surveys are generally focused on collecting information on issues related to the university and do not consistently address differences in the reasons for attrition across sub-populations. University exit surveys do not collect comparable data across institutions on where students go when they leave. The LSAY has included some questions on reasons for attrition but it is a small sample and restricted to young people only.

The DEST study seeks to fill this gap.