



Background to ABSTUDY

ABSTUDY (Secondary) Population Statistics

The following tables shows the number of school students receiving ABSTUDY – Secondary during financial years 2013-14 to 2017-18. This includes all ABSTUDY secondary students, and is not limited to those studying away from home.

	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Number of ABSTUDY Secondary recipients	21,947	19,063	20,526	19,332	18,984

Source: 2015-16 *DSS Annual Report*, 2016-17 *DSS Annual Report* and 2017-18 *DSS Annual Report*.

Data for the 2017 calendar year indicates that approximately 6,000 recipients are identified as being 'Dependent – Away From Home'.

ABSTUDY (Secondary) Annual Expenditure

ABSTUDY - Secondary estimated expenditure from 2017-18 to 2020-22.

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
\$m	152,680	160,079	167,680	174,130	178,902	183,743

Source: 2017-18 *DSS Annual Report* and the *DSS Portfolio Budget Statements 2019-20*.

History of ABSTUDY

The Aboriginal Study Grants Scheme (ABSTUDY), the precursor to the current ABSTUDY scheme, was introduced in 1969 as part of the then Commonwealth Government's commitment to implement special measures to assist Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to achieve their educational, social and economic objectives through financial assistance to study.

ABSTUDY became available to Indigenous students in tertiary studies from the beginning of the 1969 academic year in response to the lack of participation of Indigenous peoples in higher education. Eligible full-time students received a Living Allowance, with higher rates applying to partnered students and where there were dependent children. Compulsory course fees were also paid, as well as a book and equipment allowance. Travel costs were paid for students who needed to study away from home.

Initially, the Australian Government clearly identified that primary and secondary education was the responsibility of the States and Territories. However, it became evident during 1969 that many Indigenous students were not eligible for entry to tertiary education, and hence for ABSTUDY assistance, because of the gap between the cessation of compulsory schooling and normal commencement of post-secondary education. Because of the low numbers of Indigenous students staying at school past the compulsory period, the scheme was extended to mature age secondary students to enable them to advance to matriculation studies and to gain entry into a tertiary course.

To promote the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in secondary education so that they were able to continue on to tertiary studies, the Aboriginal Secondary Grants Scheme (ABSEG) was introduced at the beginning of 1970. In 1973, ABSEG was extended by Government decision to include all Indigenous students attending secondary school. This decision recognised that these Indigenous students needed additional assistance and encouragement prior to leaving school to realise their educational potential, as it was evident that many did not undertake senior secondary studies.

Further developments were mainly in the post-secondary area with extension of entitlements to Indigenous students undertaking short courses, assistance with tutoring and eligibility for students undertaking studies by correspondence.

It became apparent that many Indigenous students wishing to undertake post-secondary courses often lacked the necessary educational preparation to undertake post-secondary studies in formal institutions. Family commitments also prevented many others from leaving isolated communities to pursue studies. The schemes were therefore broadened to provide a wider range of opportunities, both in education institutions and through specially arranged courses provided for groups of Indigenous students.

In 1975 and 1976, ABSTUDY was extended to enable special courses to be established for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in remote areas who did not have access to the usual range of education and training opportunities. Where local experts were not available to run these courses, specialist instructors were brought in to the local communities.

In 1988, the two schemes were amalgamated into the current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Study Assistance Scheme (ABSTUDY), which has two components, ABSTUDY Tertiary and ABSTUDY Schooling. A major revamp of the ABSTUDY scheme was undertaken in 1989 and 1990 following the introduction of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (AEP).

Recent Changes to ABSTUDY

From 1 January 2017, the Government increased the means tested component of ABSTUDY Group 2 School Fees Allowance by 50 per cent, from \$1,533 to \$2,322.

In the 2018-19 Budget, the Government delivered the 50 Years of ABSTUDY measure, which is an investment of \$38.1 million over five years to increase support for Indigenous students who need to travel away from home for education. The measure includes five key components which, from 1 January 2019:

- improve school attendance through safer, fairer and more flexible travel arrangements;
- provide consistent ABSTUDY Living Allowance rates for students studying away from home, by combining the ABSTUDY Under-16 Boarding Supplement with Living Allowance;
- simplify the requirements for approval of scholarships under ABSTUDY; and
- provide ABSTUDY payments in instalments to boarding providers so students will have continuous ABSTUDY support if they change schools during the term.

As announced in the 2019-20 Budget, from 1 January 2020 the Government will provide \$36.4 million over five years to extend Family Tax Benefit (FTB) to families receiving ABSTUDY with a child aged 16 and over studying away from home. This will provide greater assistance to families of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who study away from home, by allowing these families to continue to access FTB payments until the student finishes Year 12.