

**Senate Standing Committee on Education and Employment - Education**

**QUESTIONS ON NOTICE  
Supplementary Budget Estimates 2014-2015**

**Outcome 3 - Higher Education, Reform & Support**

**Department of Education Question No. ED0704\_15**

**Senator Carr provided in writing.**

**Question**

***SRE Financial Data Return***

SRE red tape reduction The Department has advised universities that it will not require the submission of the SRE Financial Data Return and will not be running a staff survey to support the next round of SRE funding. (a) How much will this save the Department? (b) How much will it save universities? (c) The advice indicates that the department will be using 2011 staff hours and 2012 indirect costs data for 2015 allocations. How accurately do you expect these data to reflect the reality in 2015? (d) How will this decision affect universities that have made a substantial effort to grow their research capacity over recent years? (e) When will the next staff survey and financial data returns be required?

**Answer**

(a) No Departmental savings have been calculated.

(b) Estimated regulatory savings in relation to the Sustainable Research Excellence (SRE) Research Hours Staff Hours Survey are \$2.127 million and savings in relation to the SRE Financial Data Return are \$0.236 million.

(c) Data collected annually through the SRE Financial Data Return in 2011, 2012 and 2013 (for 2010, 2011 and 2012 years) shows that the allowable indirect costs for universities to support research are very stable from year to year as a percentage of total university income.

A trial Staff Hours Survey was conducted in 2010 with the first full survey undertaken in 2011. Data collected from the trial and the Staff Hours Survey in 2011 shows a strong correlation between the amount of academic effort (FTE) spent on conducting research and a university's research income. Historical data shows that the relative performance of institutions in gaining research income remains stable over time, so the proportion of time spent by their academic staff on competitive grant research is likely to be similarly stable.

(d) This decision will have little effect on universities that have made substantial effort to grow their research capacity in recent years. Any such activities that result in an increase in a university's share of Category 1 income would be reflected in an increase in SRE funding as Category 1 income is the primary determinant of SRE funding.

The Staff Hours Survey and Financial Data Return, in practice, produce a very modest variation to the initial allocations determined by Category 1 income.

In 2014, these data collections led to a total redistribution of \$718 000 in SRE funding, which is significantly less than the cost to the sector of collecting the data.

(e) The department will continue to assess the need for the Staff Hours Survey and Financial Data Collection annually.

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