

**Senate Standing Committee on Economics**  
**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**  
Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education Portfolio  
Additional Estimates Hearing 2011-12  
15 February 2012

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**AGENCY/DEPARTMENT:** AGENCY NAME OR DEPARTMENT OF INDUSTRY, INNOVATION, SCIENCE, RESEARCH AND TERTIARY EDUCATION

**TOPIC:** Practical Experience in Regional Areas

**REFERENCE:** Question on Notice - Written Question – Senator McKenzie

**QUESTION No.:** AI-47

- Are there any programs that encourage tertiary students to seek practical experience, such as a medical internship, in a regional area?
- Where can students find out more about these programs?
- How successful are these programs?

**ANSWER**

The Department of Industry, Innovation, Science Research and Tertiary Education does not manage any programs for students wishing to undertake an internship or placement in a regional area as part of their tertiary studies.

The Department of Health and Ageing operates the Medical Rural Bonded Scholarship (MRBS) and Bonded Medical Places (BMP) schemes

The MRBS Scheme commenced in 2001 and is a long-term initiative to increase the number of doctors working in rural and remote areas of Australia. The BMP Scheme was implemented in 2004 to address the shortage of doctors in outer metropolitan, rural and remote areas of Australia. Both schemes provide Commonwealth supported university places to first year medical students.

Students who accept an MRBS Scheme place receive an annual scholarship for the duration of their degree and in return agree to work in a rural or remote area of Australia for up to six continuous years, following the attainment of their Fellowship. Students who accept a BMP Scheme place agree to work in a district of workforce shortage (DWS) of their choice (outer metropolitan, rural and remote areas for GPs and including inner metropolitan areas for other specialists) on completing their medical studies. The BMP Scheme does not provide a scholarship.

Under the BMP Scheme, the Return of Service Obligation (RoSO) only becomes compulsory once a participant gains Fellowship of a specialist college. However, BMP participants may elect to complete up to half their RoSO during prevocational or vocational training in a district of workforce shortage.

From the information available 983 BMP participants are currently undertaking prevocational and vocational training. 108 participants have had applications approved to count their training

towards their RoSO in districts of workforce shortage. Of these 108 participants, 77 are undertaking prevocational and vocational training in districts of workforce shortage in rural and remote areas.

Under the MRBS Scheme, participants only commence their RoSO in a rural or remote area of Australia once they have obtained Fellowship of a specialist college. While participants are not actively encouraged to work in rural or remote areas while they are training, a number may consider gaining experience in these areas before they commence their RoSO. There are currently 16 MRBS participants undertaking their RoSO in rural and remote areas.

It is expected that the Schemes will be successful in meeting their aim of increasing the number of doctors working in districts or workforce shortage and rural and remote areas of Australia. However due to the long lead time before participants are required to undertake their RoSO, only a small number of participants have commenced working in these areas. It is anticipated that the number of BMP and MRBS participants working in areas of workforce shortage will continue to grow.

More information on the BMP and MRBS schemes is available on the Department of Health and Ageing website at: [www.health.gov.au](http://www.health.gov.au).