

**Senate Standing Committee on Education Employment and Workplace
Relations**

**QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Budget Estimates 2011-2012**

Outcome 3 - Higher Education

DEEWR Question No.EW0193_12

Senator Nash provided in writing.

Question

Agricultural Enrolments In Universities

- a) There are various sources stating the demand for qualified graduates for the agribusiness sector far outweighs the supply. The most recent figure quoted at an industry forum in Canberra (organised by Senator Back) is 4500 jobs advertised each year compared with 700 graduates each year. If the govt/dept aware of this situation? Has it done its own analysis?
- b) What, if any measures are in place to specifically address the shortfall in graduates in light of the multibillion dollar contribution agribusiness makes to the national economy and in food production and food security? Is this shortfall being considered in the govt's National Food Plan? Has the minister raised the issue with the agriculture minister, Senator Joe Ludwig?
- c) An article in The Australian (16 November 2010) reported that from 2001 to 2006, the demand for undergraduate agriculture positions at university dropped about 20 per cent – is the govt aware of these figures? What is being done to reverse this trend and encourage more young people to study agriculture?
- d) The Muresk Old Collegian's Association Incorporated based in WA proposes there be a formal process or funding mechanism that directly connects industry demand needs to the supply of higher education outcomes – is this something the govt would consider?

Answer

- a) Yes, the Department does monitor the labour market for skilled occupations through its ongoing skill shortage research. The Department publishes an annual report titled 'Australian Jobs' that provides labour market information on all industries and their requirement for skilled workers. The Department's assessment of the labour market for agricultural science professions shows labour market tightened in 2010 in line with general tightening in the skilled labour market.
- b) An Issues Paper to inform development of the Government's proposed National Food Plan was released on 23 June 2011 and is available (on the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry website) for public comment. The Issues Paper does consider the shortfall in agricultural graduates and is seeking feedback on ways to grow student interest in agriculture through student's interest in environmental sciences. DEEWR contributed to the development of the Issues Paper.

The Department is not aware of any formal representations made by the Minister

for Education to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry on the shortfall of agriculture graduates.

- c) Yes, the Government is aware that student demand for undergraduate places in the broad field of agriculture, environmental and related studies declined during the period from 2001 to 2006.

The Government has introduced a range of measures to support agriculture and encourage students to study agricultural science and related disciplines. Through the former Diversity and Structural Adjustment Fund, the Government has provided funding for individual projects to encourage better pathways and more information for students to participate in agricultural science. For example, the Government is providing \$3.6 million over 2009-2011 to the Primary Industry Centre for Science Education (PICSE). PICSE has the goal of attracting students to ongoing science education and primary industry careers.

The Government provides funding to eleven Industry Skills Councils and Automotive Training Australia to support high quality training and workforce development and provide integrated advice to Government, Skills Australia and enterprises on workforce development and skills needs. Agrifood Skills Australia (ASA) is the Industry Skills Council covering the rural and related, food processing (including beverages, wine and pharmaceuticals), meat, seafood, and racing industries. ASA is undertaking several initiatives that seek to address training, skills and workforce development needs of their industry sectors, including in regional Australia.

- d) From 2012, public universities will be funded on the basis of student demand. The Government will fund Commonwealth supported places for all undergraduate domestic students accepted into an eligible higher education course at these higher education providers. Under the demand driven funding system, providers will decide how many places they will offer and in which disciplines. Providers will be able to increase the number of Commonwealth supported places they offer in particular disciplines in response to employer and student demand. Industries can work with schools, universities, and organisations like PICSE, to encourage students to complete courses which employers need.