

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

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

TOPIC: Higher education base funding review

REFERENCE: Written Question – Senator Nash

QUESTION No: A1-52

Refer to Weekly Times story `Agriculture course fees to rise`.

http://www.weeklytimesnow.com.au/article/2012/01/09/427881_latest-news.html

The report refers to the Higher Education Base Funding Review recommendation for a 40:60 student/govt funding ratio.

http://www.deewr.gov.au/HigherEducation/Policy/BaseReview/Documents/HigherEd_FundingReviewReport.pdf

It specifically refers to a resulting 25 per cent increase in student fees for agricultural courses, that farming groups such as Victorian Farmers' Federation say will worsen the skills shortage in agriculture.

[Victorian Farmers Federation](#) Young Agribusiness Professionals committee chairman Aaron Sanderson is quoted in the Weekly Times saying the Higher Education Base Funding Review recommendation would have a detrimental impact on future enrolments. He says increasing fees for agricultural courses when the industry is already experiencing a lack of skilled workers is ridiculous and that it will place further limits on those who want to get an agricultural degree.

1. Does the govt/dept intend to monitor enrolments in courses where there is an evident skills shortage within the related sector, such as agriculture, to ensure enrolments don't decline further because of increased costs.
2. Has it, or will it seek advice and consult farming groups such as the NFF on this finding?

On skills shortages, the report states: *the Panel found no compelling evidence that lowering student contributions for the purpose of increasing enrolments in areas of skills shortages has any significant impact. Fee reductions for this purpose should therefore be removed.... (executive summary, pg xiv)*

3. Does the dept know what evidence this is based on?

Minister Evans states in his media release (dated 8 Dec 2011)

<http://www.ministers.deewr.gov.au/evans/base-funding-review-report-released>

there will be *targeted consultation with stakeholders who will have an opportunity to provide their feedback on the report and express their priorities for the future at roundtable discussions to be held in February and March 2012*’.

4. Can the dept detail the consultation process and will it go to regional centres?

The media release also states the government *intends to consider its response to the Review following the consultations and expects to commence its response in the course of 2012.*’

5. Can the dept give a more specific timeline for when the govt will announce its response.

ANSWER

1. The Department of Innovation, Industry, Science, Research and Tertiary Education (DIISRTE) monitors higher education courses with respect to national economic and labour market objectives. Additional details are provided in response to question A1-44.
2. In its consultations on the final report of the higher education base funding review, the Government will receive the advice of a range of stakeholders and university representatives, including student groups and representatives of agriculture programs. The Australian Council of Deans of Agriculture and the Victorian Farmers Federation Young Agribusiness Professionals Committee attended Government consultations in Melbourne on 28 February 2012.
3. The Panel investigated a range of evidence regarding the impact of changes in student contributions on demand for higher education courses. The Panel commissioned research by Deloitte Access Economics into the impact of changes in student contributions. This report is available at <http://www.deewr.gov.au/HigherEducation/Policy/BaseReview/Pages/Overview.aspx>

The Panel referred to research reports by Bruce Chapman and Chris Ryan (2003), Gary Marks (2007), and Yaakov Gilboa and Moshe Justman (2009) on page 127 of the final report.

The Panel noted that a number of submissions to the review raised the issue of the impact of student contributions on demand. The full list of submissions are available at <http://www.deewr.gov.au/HigherEducation/Policy/BaseReview/Pages/BackgroundToTheReview.aspx>

4. During February and March 2012, the Government conducted consultation meetings in Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne, Canberra, Adelaide and Perth. It conducted a meeting in Lismore, NSW, on 23 February 2012. Meetings included representatives from public universities, private higher education providers, professional organisations, industry groups and student councils.
5. No. This is a matter for Government.