

**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:** DEPARTMENT OF INDUSTRY, INNOVATION, SCIENCE, RESEARCH AND TERTIARY EDUCATION

**TOPIC:** Cancellation of UWS's Agriculture Course

**REFERENCE:** Written Question – Senator Nash

**QUESTION No.:** AI-53

Refer to ABC AM story regarding the cancellation of UWS's agriculture course at the Hawkesbury campus. <http://www.abc.net.au/am/content/2012/s3428900.htm>  
The story is on the cancellation of the course this year with student numbers falling from what used to be about 80 students a year to less than 10 enrolments this year. Professor Jim Pratley from the Australian Council of Deans of Agriculture (ACDA) is interviewed and comments on students' lack of interest in pursuing agriculture as a career.

1. What programs does the government have in place to specifically address the shortage of agriculture graduates
2. What is specifically being done by the govt to encourage students to study agriculture at a tertiary level and pursue it as a career
3. Has or would the govt consider ACDA's proposal for student scholarships for prospective students. (NOTE: ACDA says scholarships for other careers seem to be more attractive than any for agriculture.)
4. Has or would the govt consider improving conditions and career paths for research students and early researchers as called for by ACDA. (NOTE: ACDA says the latter are on short term soft money and thus there is high attrition out of the industry. PhD stipends are not competitive with industry salaries and hence the best students are not encouraged to stay with research)
5. What role if any is the government is playing in promoting 2012 as the Year of the Farmer and more broadly agriculture and related industries and as a future career opportunity
6. Has it been considered that the Prime Minister take a high profile stance on promoting agriculture and related industries during the Year of the Farmer (as the Governor-General has done) as the Prime Minister of Australia, to help raise awareness of not just the contribution of agriculture to the economy but as an industry with exciting career opportunities.

NOTE: Senator Nash touched on this issue during estimates but due to time constraints the questions above were not asked.

## ANSWER

The following responses address the questions 1, 2 and 5:

- What programs does the government have in place to specifically address the shortage of agriculture graduates,
- What is specifically being done by the govt to encourage students to study agriculture at a tertiary level and pursue it as a career, and
- What role if any is the government is playing in promoting 2012 as the Year of the Farmer and more broadly agriculture and related industries and as a future career opportunity

### Promoting Year of the Farmer (DAFF)

- The Government has supported the Australian Year of the Farmer from its inception by providing nearly \$160 000 in seed funding to develop the concept and attract commercial sponsors for the year.
- The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) is welcoming the Australian Year of the Farmer National Roadshow to the ABARES Outlook 2012 conference. Looking to the year ahead DAFF is also currently finalising a range of initiatives to celebrate the Australian Year of the Farmer throughout 2012.

### Promoting agricultural industries (DAFF)

Throughout 2012 the Government will continue to show its commitment to the long term viability and sustainability of Australia's agricultural industries.

- This year the Government will be developing Australia's first ever National Food Plan. The Plan aims to support the international competitiveness and enhance the productivity of Australia's farmers and food producers.
- The Government is continuing efforts to maintain and expand market access to Australia's farmers, by resolving specific technical market access difficulties as well as through bilateral and multilateral trade negotiations.
- Also in 2012 funds will be provided under the \$1.7 billion Land Sector Package of the Clean Energy Future plan. This package will support farmers and landholders to reduce emissions and store carbon in their land as well as enhancing biodiversity through land management practices.
- Further, the Government contributes significant investment each year towards agriculture and sustainable land management innovation. Last financial year, approximately \$207 million in matching funding was provided to the rural research and development corporations alone. This is an important part of addressing the major climatic and economic challenges facing our farmers now and into the future.

### Support for future careers in agriculture (DAFF)

Since 2009, \$3.6 million has been provided through 94 Next Gen Farmers grants to projects that seek to strengthen the leadership and representative capacity of young people in agricultural industries. This has included supporting the Primary Industries Education Foundation. The Government (through the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and research and development corporations) also funds a range of awards that promote young people in agriculture, such as Science and Innovation Awards for Young People in Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, and the Young Dairy Scientist Communication Award.

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry continues to work with key stakeholders to increase awareness of agricultural labour and skills needs.

### The Job Guide (DEEWR)

The Australian Government *Job Guide* provides an in-depth look at a range of occupations, and their education and training pathways. It is distributed annually to all Australian schools with Year 10 students. Schools are provided with class sets of *Job Guide* based on Year 10 enrolment numbers. Every Year 10 student has access to the *Job Guide* through these class sets, the *Job Guide* CD ROM and online. *Job Guide* is also distributed in small quantities to colleges with Year 11 and 12 students, career advisers at all TAFEs and universities, as well as youth-focused Australian Government funded programs that provide career advice and support to Year 10 students.

The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) has been working closely with the communications company delivering the Australian Year of the Farmer initiative, funded by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry to ensure a strong connection between the initiative and *Job Guide 2012*.

The cover of *Job Guide 2012* has a Year of the Farmer theme, and there are a number of additions throughout the publication that continue to highlight the industry.

*Job Guide 2012* includes a variety of employment profiles of opportunities within the agriculture industry. These opportunities are highlighted with the symbol of a tractor next to specific profiles indicating an 'agricultural job'.

Through promoting the Year of the Farmer, *Job Guide 2012* includes a page on 'Careers in Agriculture' that answers a wide range of questions students may have including what constitutes an agricultural job; the accessibility of agricultural jobs regardless of whether you reside in the city or rural areas; what qualifications are required for a career in agriculture; what the future holds for jobs in agriculture and pathways available to find a career in the industry.

In addition to this, *Job Guide 2012* highlights agriculture and related industries through the inclusion of a Rural Studies Bullseye which shows a selection of jobs in the industry and the four levels of education and training for entry into specific jobs.

### Australian Apprenticeships Incentives Program (DIISRTE)

Australian Apprentices undertaking an Australian Apprenticeship in an agricultural or horticultural occupation may be eligible for the Tools For Your Trade payments under the Australian Apprenticeships Incentives Program.

Agricultural Australian Apprentices must be undertaking an Australian Apprenticeship in any Certificate level II, III or IV qualification in agriculture anywhere across Australia.

Horticultural Australian Apprentices must be undertaking an Australian Apprenticeship in any Certificate II, III or IV qualification in horticulture in rural and regional areas of Australia.

## HECS-HELP Benefits for mathematics and science graduates (DIISRTE)

To be eligible for the HECS-HELP Benefit for mathematics and science graduates, a person must have graduated from an undergraduate natural and physical sciences course of study after 1 July 2008, have a HELP debt and be employed in a mathematics or science related occupation.

A natural and physical sciences course is a course that is listed under the 'natural and physical sciences' (Broad Field 01) in the ABS Australian Standard Classification of Education (ASCED) 2001. ASCED Broad Field 05 is 'agriculture, environmental and related studies' and currently does not attract HECS-HELP Benefit.

Eligible occupations for Mathematics or Science graduates applying for the HECS-HELP Benefit are as follows:

Actuary, Agricultural scientist, Agronomist, Biochemist, Biologist, Biophysicist, Botanist, Chemist (not dispensing pharmacist), Chemistry technician, Ecologist, Environmental scientist, Forester, Geologist, Geophysicist, Laboratory assistant, Laboratory technician, Life scientist, Mathematician, Medical laboratory scientist, Medical laboratory technician, Medical physicist, Medical technician, Metallurgist, Meteorologist, Microbiologist, Park ranger or ranger –environmental/cultural/guide, Physicist, Physiologist, Primary school teacher, Secondary school teacher of mathematics or science, Soil scientist, Soil technician, Statistician, Technical officer, Zoologist.

3. Student scholarships for particular industries are generally provided by relevant industry bodies and companies.

### 4. Conditions and career paths for research students and early career researchers (DIISTRE, ARC)

The Government has released a research workforce strategy (*Research Skills for an Innovative Future: a research workforce strategy to 2020 and beyond*) which examines, amongst other things, Australia's research training and research career support mechanisms, and includes a number of priorities for making improvements in this area.

As part of the implementation of the Strategy, the Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education (DIISRTE) has commenced a review of Australia's research training arrangements. A consultation paper, *Defining Quality for Research Training in Australia*, attracted 63 submissions, which will shortly be available on the DIISRTE's website. Submissions to this paper, together with further consultation on the Research Training Scheme which is expected to take place later this year, will help the Government to ensure that our research students are getting the best possible training to prepare them for their future research careers.

DIISRTE is also conducting work on career support for researchers, and has asked the Australian Council of Learned Academies (ACoLA) to develop a report on best practice in research career support. This report is expected to be publicly available towards the end of the year.

Through the Australian Research Council (ARC), the Australian Government supports the development of researchers in all disciplines. In 2012, the ARC introduced the Discovery Early Career Researcher Award scheme which supports research in areas of critical national

importance (including agriculture) by enabling outstanding Australian and international early-career researchers to conduct their research in Australia. It will provide more focused support for researchers and create more opportunities for early-career researchers in both teaching and research, and research-only positions.

#### Student stipends (DIISRTE)

This year the Government will meet its commitment to doubling the number of Australian Postgraduate Awards (APA) with an additional 3,500 commencing APA places allocated to institutions bringing the total number of APAs supported within the system to 9,778 up from 4,798 in 2008.

The 2012 APA stipend rate of \$23,728 is significantly higher than the 2009 stipend (\$20,427). The increase follows the Government's commitment to provide an additional \$51 million for APA stipends over the period 2009-10 to 2012-13.

In addition, the Government has introduced more generous indexation arrangements for the APA, which commenced in 2012. Due to these new arrangements, the APA stipend for 2012 is 3.8% higher than it otherwise would have been.

6. The Prime Minister is committed to promoting a strong agricultural sector and recognises the important contribution agriculture makes to the Australian economy as well as generating a diverse range of rewarding career opportunities across Australia.

The government has supported the Australian Year of the Farmer from its inception by providing nearly \$160 000 in seed funding to develop the concept and attract commercial sponsors for the year.

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry is welcoming the Australian Year of the Farmer National Roadshow to the ABARES Outlook 2012 conference. Looking to the year ahead the department is also currently finalising a range of initiatives to celebrate the Australian Year of the Farmer throughout 2012.