

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: Regulation and compliance costs

REFERENCE: Written question - Senator Mason

QUESTION No.: AI-189

With reference to the response provided by the Department to a Question on Notice at the Supplementary Estimates hearings (Question No.SI-23) in relation to regulation and the compliance costs of universities arising from government regulations:

1. In regards to the specific instances contained in this response, does the Department have an estimate of the cost (in terms of man-hours or expenditure) that the university has to incur in order to provide that information or data?
2. Does the Department have any processes in place to monitor and review its information gathering activities to ensure that there is a balance between the Department's needs and universities' compliance workload, and if so please provide relevant details?
3. Are there any known instances where the same information that is collected by the Department is also collected by other departments or federal agencies, and have any institutions raised concerns about this with the Department since 2007 (and if yes, please provide relevant specifics)?
4. How will the recent transfer of responsibility for universities to the Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education (DIISRTE) affect the Department's information gathering process and requirements on higher education providers?

ANSWER

The previous information provided in response to Question SI-23 should have also referred to data collected for the Sustainable Research Excellence in Universities (SRE) program. The department collects information as part of the Transparent Costing (TC) exercise for SRE to determine the indirect costs associated with Australian competitive grant (ACG) research.

Two data collections underpinned TC - the Research Hours Data Collection (Staff Hours Survey) and SRE Financial Data Collection (Indirect Costs Financial Return). The Staff Hours Survey was run in 2010 and 2011 to quantify the effort of staff directed towards research. The Indirect Costs Financial Return requires universities to quantify their allowable indirect costs of research annually using a template provided to universities.

The below include references to the information collected for SRE.

1. The department does not collect any information regarding the estimated time and/or cost expended by higher education providers in submitting their data for the Higher Education Research Data Collection (HERDC) or TC. The HERDC has been in progress for over 15 years, and institutions have well-developed reporting systems. In 2010, \$20 million in implementation funding from SRE was provided to universities to defray possible costs associated conducting the Research Hours Data Collection (Staff Hours Survey) and completing the SRE Financial Data Collection (Indirect Costs Financial Return).
2. Between 2008 and 2011, the department has conducted a number of reviews examining components of the HERDC, during which institutions had the opportunity to comment. The Research Hours Data Collection (Staff Hours Survey) and SRE Financial Data Collection (Indirect Costs Financial Return) for TC were designed in close consultation with the sector.
3. The department is aware, that as part of the Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) initiative, institutions are required to submit research income data as is currently reported under the HERDC. However, for the purposes of ERA, this data is reported at a finer level of disaggregation, by Field of Research (FoR). The department is not aware of any instances in which an institution has formally raised a concern regarding this.
4. The HERDC is an independent and longstanding collection. The TC data is collected specifically for the purposes of SRE. The transfer of responsibility for universities at the undergraduate level to DIISRTE will not impact the collection of the data.