

**AGENCY/DEPARTMENT:** DEPARTMENT OF INDUSTRY, TOURISM AND RESOURCES  
**TOPIC:** BUSINESS SKILLS AND COMPLIANCE EDUCATION  
**REFERENCE:** WRITTEN QUESTIONS

**QUESTION No.BI-71**

**Senator Sherry** asked:

Were there any measures in the 2006-07 Budget regarding business skills education and compliance education for small business owners and managers?

**ANSWER**

There were no new measures in the 2006-2007 Budget for the Office of Small Business to implement in relation to business skills or compliance education for small business owners and managers. However, as set out in 2006-07 Budget Paper No 2, the Department is working with the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations to conduct an education campaign for small businesses on the costs and benefits of incorporation.

**QUESTION No.BI-72**

**Senator Sherry** asked:

What are these measures and funding for 2006-07?

**ANSWER**

As outlined above there were no new measures in the 2006-07 Budget for the Department to implement in relation to business skills or compliance education for small business owners and managers. The costs of the education campaign for small businesses on the costs and benefits of incorporation will be met from within existing resources.

**QUESTION No.BI-73**

**Senator Sherry** asked:

Would you agree that there are big efficiencies to be gained through red tape by encouraging small business owners and managers to use the Internet and IT?

**ANSWER**

Yes. That is why the Australian Government is undertaking a range of initiatives to encourage the uptake of IT and Internet use by small businesses in their dealings with government. These initiatives include encouraging small businesses to use the Government's main business gateway [www.business.gov.au](http://www.business.gov.au) to access information and services. [www.business.gov.au](http://www.business.gov.au) is designed to save businesses time and money and reduce their administrative burden.

The [www.business.gov.au](http://www.business.gov.au) website won the 2006 United Nations Public Service Award for e-government, demonstrating the Australian Government's strong achievement in the area of e-government and making it easier for businesses to deal with government.

In 2005 there were more than 2.1 million visits to [www.business.gov.au](http://www.business.gov.au), a 12 per cent increase from the year before. There were also more than 42 million ABN Lookups conducted during the same period, a 60 per cent increase from 2004.

In May 2006, the Australian Government announced \$29.6 million in funding for electronic validation, authentication and notary services, making it easier for regional and small business operators to deal with government agencies. This funding is aimed specifically at reducing the compliance and red tape requirements for businesses making online government transactions. This is in addition to the \$27.4 million provided over the next three years for [www.business.gov.au](http://www.business.gov.au).

In November 2005 the Australian Government launched Forms Manager, a new feature of Transaction Manager, a desktop tool available through [www.business.gov.au](http://www.business.gov.au). Forms Manager allows businesses to manage forms in a more efficient way, freeing up more time to do business.

#### **QUESTION No.BI-74**

**Senator Sherry** asked:

Would you also agree with the Council of Small Business Organisations of Australia, that small business is often the last to pick up on these new technologies?

#### **ANSWER**

Uptake of new technologies is dependent on a number of factors, including business size. The uptake of new technologies by small businesses is increasing. The 2005 Sensis e-Business Report indicates that 94 per cent of small businesses own desktop computers and 87 per cent of small businesses use the Internet. Of the small businesses using the Internet, 61 per cent have broadband access. (Source: Sensis 2005 *e-Business Report: The Online Experience of Small and Medium Enterprises*)

#### **QUESTION No.BI-75**

**Senator Sherry** asked:

Do you have data indicating how many small businesses don't use the Internet to meet their compliance obligations and if so, is that data available?

#### **ANSWER**

Only limited data is available in relation to use of the Internet by small businesses for meeting their compliance obligations. The ABS report *Business Use of Information Technology 2004-05* indicates that, as at June 2005, 47 per cent of small businesses that use the Internet undertook electronic lodgements with government organisations. Electronic lodgement of payments (e.g. for rates, licence fees) was the most common electronic lodgement activity during the year ended June 2005, with 30 per cent of small businesses using the Internet to make payments to government in this way.

**QUESTION No.BI-76**

**Senator Sherry** asked:

How much funding has been allocated to the [www.business.gov.au](http://www.business.gov.au) website, since its inception?

**ANSWER**

The following table sets out the funding that has been allocated to the [www.business.gov.au](http://www.business.gov.au) website.

<b>Period</b>	<b>Funding</b>
1996-97 to 2000-01	\$12.7 million
2001-02 to 2004-05	\$36.1 million
2005-06 to 2008-09	\$36.6 million
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$85.4 million</b>

**QUESTION No.BI-77**

**Senator Sherry** asked:

How much funding has been allocated for the website for 2006-2007 and what will it be used for?

**ANSWER**

Funding in 2006-07 for the [www.business.gov.au](http://www.business.gov.au) initiative, including the website and its associated sub-sites and services is \$9.1 million. This will support:

- advice on setting up a new business, including a home based business;
- practical help on how to manage and expand a business;
- a one-stop-shop for government forms for business;
- online searches of Australian Business Number information;
- syndication of [www.business.gov.au](http://www.business.gov.au) content to other websites which have regular business clients; and
- development of *SmartForms* – interactive, dynamic electronic government forms.

**QUESTION No.BI-78**

**Senator Sherry** asked:

Will any of the funding be used to make the site more user-friendly?

**ANSWER**

The Department is committed to the continual improvement of the interface, functionality and content of the [www.business.gov.au](http://www.business.gov.au) website and its services. These are evaluated on a regular basis to ensure they reflect current web trends and are meeting user needs. The most recent evaluation of the site, carried out in the last quarter of 2004, recommended that it be redeveloped with the following key deliverables:

- improve the overall useability and functionality of the website;
- simplify navigation to information;
- improve the website branding, including promoting its objectives and authority;
- provide a new graphical design; and
- review and improve website content by addressing end-user needs.

These recommendations were implemented and the redeveloped website was launched on 7 June 2005. The next evaluation is expected to be undertaken in 2007-08.

**QUESTION No.BI-79**

**Senator Sherry** asked:

Do you have data on the number of 'hits' on the website per month or year and if so, is that data available?

**ANSWER**

In the period July 2005 to May 2006, [www.business.gov.au](http://www.business.gov.au) had 2,179,862 visits from users, up 19.6 per cent over the previous corresponding period.

**QUESTION No.BI-80**

**Senator Sherry** asked:

Do you know how many of these 'hits' are small business owners and managers?

**ANSWER**

Visits to the [www.business.gov.au](http://www.business.gov.au) website are tracked by Internet protocol addresses, which do not provide any information about the business size.