

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

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

Outcome 3 - Tertiary, Skills, International and Indigenous Strategy

DEEWR Question No. EW0636_12

Senator Nash provided in writing.

Question

Agricultural enrolments in universities

"Following up on Question on Notice reply from budget estimates on agricultural enrolments in universities -

http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/eet_ctte/estimates/bud_1112/answers/EW0193_12.pdf

The dept refers to an Issues Paper to inform development of the Government's proposed National Food Plan that was released on 23 June 2011. It considers 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.

- What is the timeline for the completion and roll out of the National Food Plan? (NOTE: this was not specifically answered in questioning by Senator Back during supplementary budget estimates on 20 Oct, 2011)
Refer to Question C – The dept states 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. It says the Government's 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. The Diversity and Structural Adjustment Fund website states over \$200m was allocated to support projects from 2008-2011 yet only details for the 2008 funding round are available.
- Can the dept explain?
- And is there evidence of progress in the 2008 projects that specifically focus on regional communities and their education/training/labour/workforce needs? "

Answer

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry has carriage of the development of the National Food Plan. While the Department of Education,

Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) provided input into the development of the Issues Paper, questions on this matter would be better addressed to the appropriate department.

The Diversity and Structural Adjustment (DASA) Fund was established in 2008. DASA's objectives were to promote structural reform by eligible higher education providers that supports greater specialisation among providers, more diversity in the higher education sector and better responsiveness to labour markets operating in the local or national interest.

The \$200 million of DASA funding was allocated through the single competitive round in 2008. 188 Expressions of Interest were received. From these, 49 projects were successful. The projects spanned the 2008-2011 funding period.

Of the 49 projects that were funded, 32 aim to improve regional communities and address their broader workforce needs across, for example, the engineering and science, primary industry, health/allied health, and education sectors.

DEEWR requires that universities regularly report on their project's progress and outcomes. The reports received to date suggest that DASA projects are having a positive effect in their local communities.

For example:

The *Building Capacity for Early Childhood Education*' (Early Childhood Education Workforce Capacity Project) delivered by Charles Sturt University has developed training pathways that are accessible and locally supported with a particular emphasis on development of appropriate programs within inland and Indigenous communities. The university launched their teach-ec website on 26 October 2011.

The Engineering Hubs and Spokes joint project between the Australian National University and the University of South Australia has seen high levels of completions in Intelligent Manufacturing Systems, Supply Chain Management and Solar Energy Technologies.

The La Trobe Rural Health School was established in 2009 across La Trobe University's regional campuses in Bendigo, Albury-Wodonga, Mildura and Shepparton. Enrolments in physiotherapy, health science, speech pathology and paramedics and nursing are increasing.

The Health Hubs and Spokes joint project between The Australian National University and the University of South Australia has seen new pathways opened for students into a range of careers in health care including: medicine, physiotherapy, occupational therapy and dietetics. There has been an increase in clinical placements for health students in regional and remote communities.