

**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. EW0840_12

Senator Back asked on 20 October 2011, Hansard page 88

Question

Science and Engineering Challenge Program

Senator BACK: Ms Paul, we have received correspondence to the effect that funding for the Science and Engineering Challenge has been severely cut. Are you familiar with that, or is one of your officers familiar with the Science and Engineering Challenge?

Ms Paul: Is it for schoolchildren or university students?

Senator BACK: University. The University of Newcastle organise it, I understand.

Ms Paul: Just looking around the room, I think we probably need to take it on notice.

Answer

The Science and Engineering Challenge is administered and funded by the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research (DIISR).

DIISR has provided the following answer.

The Science and Engineering Challenge is a national program comprising a suite of activities to give Year 9-10 students a hands-on experience in applying basic science principles to design-and-build activities, an opportunity to think creatively through problems to solutions, and an experience of working in teams. Run by the University of Newcastle, the program's goal is to address the skills shortage in science and engineering by changing the misconceptions amongst students about careers in science and engineering through team-based competitions. DIISR has provided funding support for the Challenge through the Science Connections Program (SCOPE).

Under the current funding agreement through the SCOPE program, the Science and Engineering Challenge was provided with \$1 million (GST excl) to support delivery of activities over the two calendar years 2010 and 2011. This funding agreement ends this year, due to the termination of the SCOPE Program on 30 June 2011. Meetings have been held to discuss future funding under the Inspiring Australia budget measure. The Challenge will be eligible to apply for funding support through a competitive grant round. Until the result of the grant process is known, it is not possible to state the change in the amount of Commonwealth funding for the Challenge.

In 2009, the Australian Government set up a process to consider a replacement for the terminating SCOPE program, resulting in the public release of the Inspiring Australia report in February 2010. In May 2011, the Government announced in the 2011/12 Budget that the Inspiring Australia budget measure of \$21 million over three years would replace the terminating SCOPE program to support a broad science engagement strategy consistent with the Inspiring Australia report. No funds have been returned to consolidated revenue – SCOPE funding was fully allocated and spent consistent with SCOPE funding guidelines. The \$21 million of new funding over three years for the replacement Inspiring Australia initiative is being allocated to the continuation of three programs (the Prime Minister’s Prizes for Science, National Science Week and the Australian Museum Eureka Awards), a new competitive grant round to further unlock Australia’s potential, and other initiatives to strengthen science engagement across Australia which are to be announced by the Government.