

---

The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia

# Research Training in Australian Universities


**An Interim Report**

House of Representatives  
Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Innovation

October 2008  
Canberra

---

© Commonwealth of Australia 2008  
ISBN 978-0-642-79109-2 (Printed version)  
978-0-642-79110-8 (HTML version)



## Membership of the Committee

Chair Ms Maria Vamvakinou MP

Deputy Chair Hon Fran Bailey MP

Members Mr James Bidgood MP

Mr Michael Johnson MP

Mr Nick Champion MP

Mr Rowan Ramsey MP

Mr Darren Cheeseman MP

Ms Amanda Rishworth MP

Dr Dennis Jensen MP

Mr Mike Symon MP

## Committee Secretariat

Secretary	Mr Russell Chafer
Inquiry Secretary	Mr Anthony Overs
Research Officer	Ms Natalya Wells
Administrative Officers	Ms Naomi Swann
	Mr Angus Hogg



## Terms of reference

The Inquiry will examine:

1. The contribution that Australian universities make to research training in Australia, including:
  - a) The contribution of research training programs to Australia's competitiveness in the areas of science, research and innovation;
  - b) The effectiveness of current Commonwealth research training schemes; and
  - c) The adequacy of current research training schemes to support Australia's anticipated future requirements for tertiary-qualified professionals in a wide range of disciplines.
2. The challenges Australian universities face in training, recruiting and retaining high quality research graduates and staff, including, but not limited to:
  - a) Adequacy of training and support (including income support) available to research graduate students in Australia;
  - b) Factors for graduates that determine pursuit of a career in research;
  - c) Opportunities for career advancement for research graduates and staff;
  - d) Factors determining pursuit of research opportunities overseas;
  - e) Australia's ability to compete internationally for high quality researchers; and
  - f) Whether Australia's academic workforce is ageing, and the impact this may have on Australia's research capacity.



# Research training in Australian universities – an Interim Report

## Introduction

- 1.1 Planning for the Australian Government's 2009-2010 Federal Budget is currently underway. The committee has decided to release this interim report so that particular recommendations arising from the inquiry may be considered for that Budget period.
- 1.2 The committee will prepare a full report with further recommendations in due course.
- 1.3 Some of the major issues raised during the inquiry included:
  - Increased funding is needed for research and development;
  - Funding is needed for the full cost of research;
  - Financial support for postgraduate students is inadequate; and
  - Career pathways for researchers are limited.
- 1.4 This report simply outlines some of the key recommendations for the Australian Government's consideration. The committee's final and more comprehensive report will feature full discussion of the issues and arguments raised throughout the submissions made to the inquiry and the evidence gathered during the committee's series of public hearings.

## National funding for research and development

### Recommendation 1

The committee recommends that the Australian Government increase funding for research and development by raising incrementally the Gross Expenditure on Research and Development as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product over a ten year period until it equals the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development average.

## Full cost of research to be funded in a timely manner

### Recommendation 2

The committee recommends that the Australian Government fund the full cost of each higher degree by research program at Australian universities through the Research Training Scheme and within all national competitive grant funding programs. This funding should take into account:

- the provision and maintenance of a minimum standard of supervision, infrastructure and resources;
- expenses associated with supporting national and international mobility of Australian PhD students; and
- the removal of the high cost/low cost funding differential that currently exists between research disciplines, subject to interim arrangements to ensure that no discipline is disadvantaged.

### Recommendation 3

The committee recommends that research training funding be allocated, partially prospectively, to institutions according to a staggered formula: 30 per cent on enrolment, 20 per cent at a specified benchmark and 50 per cent on conferral.



## Research Training Scheme

### Recommendation 4

The committee recommends that the Australian Government apply a weighting to research training funds for regional universities and regional campuses of metropolitan universities, taking into account the additional burden of travel and accommodation, and the capacity of regional universities to support a researcher's career path.

### Recommendation 5

The committee recommends that the Australian Government introduce a National Priority Postgraduate Research Scholarship Scheme that provides competitive stipends to outstanding students in areas of national significance and skills shortage.

### Recommendation 6

The committee recommends that the Australian Government apply a weighting to research training funds for universities that increase higher degree by research completions by minority or under-represented students.

## Research grant programs (Australian Research Council and National Health and Medical Research Council)

### Recommendation 7

The committee recommends that the Australian Government double the funding pool for Australian Research Council and National Health and Medical Research Council grants to enable a 40 per cent success rate for applicants.

**Recommendation 8**

The committee recommends that the Australian Government specify that National Health and Medical Research Council grants fund the full cost of research in the program to which it has been allocated.

**The Australian PhD****Period of candidature****Recommendation 9**

The committee recommends that the Australian PhD candidature period be extended to three and a half years (full time equivalent), with the possibility of two six-month extensions.

**Recommendation 10**

The committee recommends that the Australian PhD candidature be nominally extended beyond thesis submission until degree conferral.

**Scholarships and awards****Duration****Recommendation 11**

Commensurate with an extension in the period of PhD candidature, the committee recommends that the duration of all federal postgraduate awards with stipends for PhD students be increased to three and a half years (full time equivalent) with the option of two six-month extensions.

## Rate

### **Recommendation 12**

**The committee recommends that stipend rates for all federally funded postgraduate awards be increased by 50 per cent.**

## Indexation

### **Recommendation 13**

**The committee recommends that stipends for all federally funded postgraduate awards be fully indexed with CPI.**

## Post-submission scholarships

### **Recommendation 14**

**The committee recommends that all federally funded postgraduate awards feature an additional scholarship period for students, covering the period between thesis submission and degree conferral, thereby providing income support to students so that they may publish papers, prepare grant applications and complete generic skills training.**

## Flexibility

### **Recommendation 15**

**The committee recommends that federally funded scholarship and award guidelines be amended to give award recipients greater flexibility in studying part time.**

## Tax

### **Recommendation 16**

**The committee recommends that all scholarships and awards be exempt from assessable income for taxation and income support purposes including, importantly, part time awards.**

## Additional income support

### Recommendation 17

The committee recommends that the Australian Government work with State Governments to support postgraduate students through the reduction of certain living expenses, in particular, through the provision of concessions for public transport travel. Access to transport concessions should be made available to all full time students, regardless of type of enrolment or the level of course in which they are enrolled.

## International students

### Recommendation 18

The committee recommends that the Australian Government review, rationalise and simplify the suite of international student scholarship programs, thereby improving accessibility and international competitiveness of the programs, while recognising that Australian students must remain our priority.

### Recommendation 19

The committee recommends that the Australian Government double the number of International Postgraduate Research Scholarships to reflect the growth in the international student cohort.

### Recommendation 20

The committee recommends that the Australian Government increase the value of International Postgraduate Research Scholarships so that each award fully funds living and research training costs for international students.

**Recommendation 21**

The committee recommends that visa conditions for international postgraduates be amended to allow greater flexibility and opportunity, especially in cases where those students conclude a course of study in Australia.

**Industry links with research training****Recommendation 22**

The committee recommends that the Australian Government retain the Commercialisation Training Scheme for a minimum of three years, and conduct a review of the effectiveness of that scheme during the latter part of that period.

**Recommendation 23**

The committee recommends that the Australian Government develop and implement an additional industry partnership program, modelled on Knowledge Transfer Partnerships, that will further facilitate connection between business and research institutions.

**Recommendation 24**

The committee recommends that the Australian Government waive Fringe Benefits Tax incurred by businesses or institutions that employ staff undertaking higher degrees by research.

**Maria Vamvakinou MP**

**Committee Chair**

**October 2008**

## Statement by the Deputy Chair

- 1.5 Opposition Members supported the Chair's wish to publish an interim report in order to bring forward recommendations that have budget implications. We therefore support recommendations 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16 and 21. We do not believe that other recommendations needed to be included in an interim report until a full committee discussion has taken place.
- 1.6 This is a vital report and deserves the scrutiny of the full committee. It is disappointing that the Government members (some of whom had never attended a public hearing outside Parliament House) insisted on voting on party lines on a day when neither the Chair nor the Deputy Chair could be present. This is not in the spirit of the long-held tradition of the Standing Committee being a Committee of the Parliament and not a rubber stamp of the Government of the day.
- 1.7 The issues being reviewed and analysed by the committee are vital to the future success of Australia's role in innovation and research and we regard it as imperative that there should have been an opportunity for at least one discussion by the full committee. There has been no committee meeting held to discuss these recommendations.
- 1.8 Recommendations 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23 and 24 have been included in the interim report in haste and deserve a more thorough analysis. It is for these reasons that Opposition members reserve their right to further review these recommendations and do not believe that with such limited discussion and lack of scrutiny by the committee that they should be included in this "interim" report.

**Hon Fran Bailey MP**

**Deputy Chair**

**October 2008**