

Attracting students to research training

Financial considerations

- 5.1 The Committee recognises that financial considerations play a decisive role in contemplating enrolment in postgraduate research. Many people still have a large Higher Education Contribution Scheme-Higher Education Loan Programme (HECS-HELP) debt to repay from their first degree. Some are ready to purchase a home or start a family.
- 5.2 Furthermore, taking on a research degree entails forgoing up to four income-generating years, and associated accruing benefits, such as leave entitlements, superannuation, and promotion and networking opportunities. The value of the lost income can, in some cases, be very high; starting salaries in the booming mining sector in South Australia are around \$100 000 per annum.¹
- 5.3 It is evident that the postgraduate research sector is in direct competition with the workforce, particularly at the graduate and entry levels, in the current climate of low professional unemployment. In comparison, the Committee heard evidence that many European countries, such as Germany, pay their PhD students a salary equivalent to a junior academic level, in recognition of the skills required to be accepted for doctoral studies.²

1 Adelaide, *submission 79*, p. 1.

2 UQ, *transcript of evidence 18 August 2008*, p. 60.

- 5.4 IRUA highlighted that recent graduates are faced with a choice between attractive salaries or 'very modest support through a postgraduate award'.³ This 'modest support' is currently at a level below⁴ the average starting salary in most industries. Australian National University described this situation as counter-productive:
- ... the very lowest graduate starting salary in Australia is offered to some of our very best graduates who choose to do a PhD.⁵
- 5.5 Moreover, many potential higher degree by research candidates have already established their profession, and face postponing their career trajectory for a fraction of their previous salary.
- 5.6 The Committee heard that many postgraduate research students choose research over employment due to a personal and intellectual desire or passion rather than financial reasons.⁶ However, the ACDA argued that:
- The notion that there is eventual personal gain and hence stipends can be less than market value would seem outdated when the nation needs to invest in the best for the nation's benefit.⁷
- 5.7 In any case, research degrees do not necessarily lead to better gains. The Group of Eight provided figures showing that the median full-time salary in 2006 for higher degree by research graduates was lower than the median salary received by coursework Masters graduates.⁸
- 5.8 The need to increase the value of the Australian Postgraduate Award is argued at length in Chapter Four and will not be discussed here. However, the Committee recognises that any further financial disincentives to undertaking postgraduate research studies should be removed.
- 5.9 The Committee was advised by several submitters that although full-time Australian Postgraduate Awards are exempt from income tax, part-time awards are not, and nine submissions recommended that

3 IRUA, *submission 51*, p. 7.

4 ANU, *submission 23*, p. 3; UQ, *submission 100*, p. 5.

5 ANU, *submission 23*, p. 3.

6 AAH, *submission 61*, p. 15, CAPA, *submission 90.1*, p. 22; Group of Eight, *transcript of evidence 25 June 2008*, p. 10; ATSE, *submission 6*, p. 8.

7 ACDA, *submission 57*, p. 3.

8 Group of Eight, *submission 55, attachment*, p. 3.

this inequity be removed.⁹ The Committee agrees that taxation of part-time awards 'is a major impediment to improving equity participation rates'.¹⁰

- 5.10 The Committee recommends eliminating this financial disincentive by exempting all postgraduate research scholarships from assessable income tax.

Recommendation 20

The Committee recommends that postgraduate research scholarships be exempt from assessable income for taxation, including part-time awards.

- 5.11 Four submissions recommended a financial incentive to increase domestic postgraduate research enrolments and completions in the form of a HECS-HELP loan remission, awarded upon successful completion of a postgraduate research degree.¹¹ IRUA suggested that:

Specifically, a completed PhD might result in full remission of the debt, or a research masters, 50 per cent of the debt ... Such a provision would represent a significant offset to income foregone for students undertaking research training programs, and create an incentive to drive higher completion rates. For reasons of fairness, some consideration would need to be given to compensating research graduates who paid their HECS debts fully or partially upfront.¹²

- 5.12 The Committee supports this scheme, and recommends that a tax deduction be guaranteed to successful research graduates who have already paid their HECS-HELP fees.
- 5.13 As discussed in the previous chapter, a National Priority Postgraduate Research Scholarship Scheme that offers attractive stipends to research candidates in areas of national research skill shortage is also recommended. Such a scheme would offset the

9 CAPA, *submission 90*, pp. 34-35; VU, *submission 15*, p. 2; UNSW, *submission 31*, p. 10; NTEU, *submission 53*, p. 18; NTEU-UQ, *submission 59*, p. 2; ATN, *submission 54*, p. 5; UniMelb, *submission 56*, p. 3; SUPRA, *submission 66*, p. 4; UQ, *submission 100*, p. 6.

10 UQ, *submission 100*, p. 6.

11 Murdoch, *submission 38*, p. 3; La Trobe, *submission 48*, p. 3; Deakin, *submission 73*, p. 2; Griffith, *submission 80*, p. 4.

12 IRUA, *submission 51*, p. 9.

disparity between the cost of research training and the available starting salaries in growth industries.

Recommendation 21

The Committee recommends a full remission of the HECS-HELP debt for successful research PhD graduates and a partial (50 per cent) remission for successful research Masters graduates, awarded upon conferral, and a tax deduction for successful research graduates who have already paid their HECS-HELP fees.

Flexibility of study arrangements

5.14 The Committee believes that research training opportunities in Australia should be flexible in order to accommodate the greatest number of high-quality postgraduate research candidates, regardless of circumstances.

5.15 The Committee notes that some postgraduate research students will benefit from simultaneous enrolment at two institutions, due to the nature and available resources of the research field. At present, the RTS does not recognise joint enrolment:

Joint PhD programs are gaining profile and relevance internationally but nationally the RTS does not credit completion to more than one university. This is a strong disincentive to cross-institutional co-supervision and collaboration, a hindrance to the mobility of Australian research and the national research workforce, and a barrier to the broadening of the PhD experience.¹³

5.16 The Committee believes that higher degree by research students should be able to enrol jointly at two universities to take advantage of the best access to infrastructural and supervisory resources.

13 DDoGS, *submission 72*, p. 4.

Recommendation 22

The Committee recommends that the Research Training Scheme guidelines be amended to enable higher degree by research students to enrol jointly at two institutions, with student load and completion credited to both institutions.

- 5.17 The Committee is apprised of the diversity of postgraduate research students and recognises that a one-size-fits-all model is not suitable for developing Australia's research capacity and strength. Many students, for many reasons, elect to undertake higher degrees by research on a part-time basis, or need to convert from full-time to part-time status. Postgraduate research scholarships should reflect these needs.
- 5.18 Professor Terry Evans, Dr Peter Macauley and Ms Margot Pearson argued in their submission that Australia currently has:
- ... a monocular policy focus on younger, full-time, scholarship holders "preparing for work" which is blind to the needs and potential of the many candidates who are older and often mid-career, part-time, salaried and in a good job ... We believe that diversity is a strength of Australian doctoral education and we call for policy that eschews homogeneity and which values diversity and flexibility.¹⁴
- 5.19 CAPA added that:
- The majority of postgraduate research students are over 30, and are subject to the commitments that typically accompany the middle decades of many peoples' lives ... Postgraduate research students have partners, children, mortgages, debt repayments, employment commitments, and aging parents.¹⁵
- 5.20 However, the Commonwealth Scholarship Guidelines allow for part-time allocation of Australian Postgraduate Scholarships only in the instances of:

14 Professor Terry Evans, Dr Peter Macauley and Ms Margot Pearson, *submission 46*, pp. 1-2.

15 CAPA, *Implementing the Research Training Scheme: The consequences for postgraduate research students*. CAPA Research paper, November 2002, p. 25.

... exceptional circumstances [that] relate to significant caring commitments or a medical condition which limits the student's capacity to undertake full-time study.¹⁶

5.21 NTEU submitted that the option of part-time study would have better results for on-time completions.¹⁷

5.22 Research Australia discussed some of the benefits of offering more flexible study options in the medical field:

More part-time and flexible learning (e.g. distance) options for study would not only make study alongside continuing clinical practice more attractive financially, it would enable health professionals to remain embedded in the health system, progressing within their organisation and maintaining currency of skills and knowledge.¹⁸

5.23 Moreover, postgraduate research scholarships should be more flexible in allowing changes between part- and full-time status during the term of the award. University of Melbourne argued that scholarships should also 'allow short periods of full-time activity by part-time students'.¹⁹

5.24 The Committee is of the opinion that flexible arrangements, which take into account work, family and financial obligations, should be implemented to encourage higher enrolment in postgraduate research programs. Specifically, the Committee recommends amending the Commonwealth Scholarships Guidelines' restrictions on part-time approval.

Recommendation 23

The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Scholarship Guidelines be amended to give award recipients greater flexibility in undertaking all or part of a higher degree by research on a part-time basis.

16 *Higher Education Support (Commonwealth Scholarships Guidelines) Act 2003*, p. 10.

17 NTEU, *submission 53*, p. 19.

18 Research Australia, *submission 70*, p. 9.

19 UniMelb, *submission 56*, p. 3.

Equity

Eligibility

- 5.25 The Committee believes that the ranking criteria, based largely on a standard of first-class Honours, for postgraduate research places and scholarships are too narrow, resulting in the danger that suitably-qualified candidates may be overlooked to Australia's detriment.
- 5.26 The Cooperative Research Centres (CRC) Association indicated that CRCs have broader eligibility criteria, and thus play an important role in facilitating research training for high-quality students who would not be accepted by universities.²⁰
- 5.27 The Committee heard directly from a recent PhD graduate whose second-class Honours was insufficient to secure an APA, essentially preventing him from pursuing research training. However, he was subsequently accepted by a CRC. He completed his PhD on schedule at a standard equivalent to the highest 10 per cent at a major university, published several papers, and made a contribution to Australia's scientific knowledge that has resulted in a patent.²¹
- 5.28 Furthermore, the standard of first-class Honours varies considerably across disciplines:

Across the country we talk about honours H1 [first-class] as if we know what we are talking about but, in fact, in any single university between disciplines there could be differences in the way that they measure honours H1, and to get honours H1 in history can be quite different from getting it, say, in engineering; even in terms of the required grade point average. [And] there are also nationally agreed upon behaviours about how many honours H1s you hand out; in particular, law. All agree to hand out not more than five per cent honours H1s to their law graduates, almost regardless of what marks they get. So you can find that you have very few law graduates that qualify for honours H1, whereas you will have lots of mathematicians or physicists.²²

20 CRCA, *transcript of evidence 3 September 2008*, pp. 13-25.

21 CRCA, *exhibit 11*, p. 1.

22 UWA, *transcript of evidence 12 August 2008*, p. 45.

- 5.29 Certain professional sectors, such as teaching and nursing, argued that their research postgraduate student profile tends to comprise mid-career professionals with a practical or clinical background.²³ Thus education and health applicants generally eschew the Honours year for work experience and, later in the career, a Masters degree. However, they are disadvantaged by the primary importance of Honours in the ranking criteria.
- 5.30 The Committee is concerned that the pool of postgraduate research applicants is limited by out-of-date and inconsistent standards. This is of particular concern in light of the need to increase Australia's research force. Thus the Committee recommends that the ranking criteria for higher degree by research places and scholarships be reviewed for greater equity between disciplines and a less rigid interpretation of potential eligibility.

Recommendation 24

The Committee recommends a review of the ranking criteria for Research Training Scheme places and Australian Postgraduate Awards for greater consistency and to account for diverse backgrounds and entry points.

Regional universities

- 5.31 The Committee heard that many of the challenges facing Australian universities in terms of attracting and retaining research students are having a greater impact on regional universities.
- 5.32 This may be due to a perception of status. Southern Cross University noted that Australian universities can be compared unfavourably to overseas institutions and, within Australia, regional universities unfavourably to metropolitan universities.²⁴ NTEU-CQU observed that 'regional universities are often regarded as second-rate institutions', possibly due to disparities in resources.²⁵

23 AARE, *submission 64*, p. 7; CDNMA(ANZ), *submission 69*, p. 1.

24 SCU, *submission 12*, pp. 5-6.

25 NTEU-CQU, *transcript of evidence 19 August 2008*, p. 3.

- 5.33 The Committee recognises the importance of research into regional issues for regional development and future national skill requirements, and believes that incentives should be introduced to promote research enrolment at regional universities.

Recommendation 25

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government introduce a scheme to fund relocation costs for students who choose to undertake research training in regional universities.

Under-represented groups

- 5.34 The Committee recommended, in Chapter Three, a priority scholarship scheme that targets those who are under-represented in Australian research training, such as Indigenous Australians and students from rural and regional Australia.
- 5.35 Innovative Research Universities Australia submitted data on the different levels of postgraduate participation across Australia:
- The 2006 ABS Census indicates that 6.7 per cent of non-Indigenous Australians ... held a postgraduate degree, compared with only 1.4 per cent of Indigenous Australians.²⁶
- 5.36 James Cook University claimed that more attractive stipends would encourage higher enrolments from Indigenous Australians, who generally find high-paying opportunities immediately after obtaining an undergraduate degree.²⁷
- 5.37 The Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education argued that research training needs to be flexible and supportive since 'there is a larger economic and social cost for Indigenous Australian students who engage in research training'.²⁸

26 IRUA, *submission 51*, p. 3.

27 JCU, *submission 22*, p. 6.

28 Batchelor, *submission 42*, p. 2.

- 5.38 Universities Australia submitted that the number of Australians from regional areas undertaking a higher degree by research had not increased very much in the period 2001 to 2006.²⁹
- 5.39 The 2006 Census also reported that six per cent of Australians aged 25-54 possess a higher degree by research:
- The equivalent figure for Sydney is 8.7 per cent and Brisbane 6.7 per cent. In contrast, the Hunter Statistical Division in NSW records a figure of only 3.4 per cent and the Northern Statistical Division in Queensland records a figure of only 3.7 per cent ... and the figures are much lower for Divisions further removed from regional cities and large centres.³⁰
- 5.40 Murdoch University recommended the introduction of programs to encourage students from rural and regional Australia to undertake research higher degrees and to support them for successful completion.³¹
- 5.41 SUPRA agreed that 'it is essential that there is an increased focus on recruitment and retention of students from equity backgrounds'.³²
- 5.42 The Committee believes that all Australians, regardless of geographical or ethnic background, should have equal opportunity to pursue research training.

Recommendation 26

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government develop and implement appropriate measures to encourage the recruitment of Indigenous, regional and rural Australians to higher degrees by research.

29 Universities Australia, *submission 82*, p. 3.

30 IRUA, *submission 51*, p. 3.

31 Murdoch, *submission 38*, p. 2.

32 SUPRA, *submission 66*, p. 6.

International postgraduate research students

5.43 The Committee is of the strong opinion that first and foremost Australia should encourage and enable Australian students to access and benefit from research training. Australia needs to strengthen and expand its national research and innovation capacity without undue reliance on importing knowledge.

5.44 The Committee is cognisant of Australia's research labour shortage and emphasises that the factors leading to the current decline in domestic research training and teaching must be addressed to guarantee Australia's future innovation capacity. Edith Cowan University argued that:

While it is clearly in the nation's interest to focus research training on Australian citizens, [the] recent move to increase the number of highly skilled migrants reflects the shortfall of highly qualified personnel in the broad workforce.³³

5.45 However, the Committee also appreciates that, for the foreseeable future, Australia requires the benefits that international researchers-in-training, researchers and academics bring to Australia's standing in the global knowledge economy. Furthermore, Australia should capitalise on the current strong interest from international students.

5.46 While domestic enrolments in higher degrees by research are plateauing, international demand is high.³⁴ University of Western Australia indicated that their international postgraduate student body is growing faster than other cohorts.³⁵ The university further noted that whereas not a single Australian student applied in 2007 for a PhD in earth sciences - an area of great significance to the national economy - there was strong interest from international applicants.³⁶

5.47 Australia is in fact trailing behind countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States in terms of the proportion of international students in research training. International students in Australia comprise only 18-22 per cent³⁷ of the higher degree by

33 ECU, *submission 20*, p. 5.

34 Universities Australia, *submission 82*, p. 3.

35 UWA, *submission 96*, p. 7.

36 UWA, *transcript of evidence 12 August 2008*, p. 34.

37 DIISR, *submission 50*, p. 18; FASTS, *submission 37*, p. 6.

research cohort, compared to the UK and the US, with 40.2 per cent and 33.3 per cent, respectively.³⁸

- 5.48 The Committee acknowledges the dual responsibility of the Australian Government to equip domestic students with internationally-competitive research skills, and to attract high-quality students from overseas to support Australia's research effort.
- 5.49 There are several advantages to Australia's investing in international students. One is an ambassadorial force of students who return to their homelands, spreading Australia's higher education reputation and strengthening global academic ties. Second, graduates who choose to remain and work in Australia help fill the pipeline that feeds a growing research environment.

Scholarships

Number

- 5.50 The Committee is of the opinion that international students should not be recruited at the expense of Australian students. As such, the Committee supports the current separate research scholarship program specifically targeted at international students and does not believe that the Australian Postgraduate Awards should be opened to international students, as some submissions have recommended.³⁹ The Committee notes that eligibility for Australian Postgraduate Award (Industry) has been extended to international students.⁴⁰
- 5.51 The Australian Government, through the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, implements the Endeavour International Postgraduate Research Scholarships (IPRS) program. IPRS awards are allocated for Masters and Doctorate by research degrees for two years and three years, respectively.⁴¹
- 5.52 There are currently 330 annual scholarships available, last increased in 2002 by 30 places.⁴² The Group of Eight submitted that in contrast

38 FASTS, *submission 37*, p. 6.

39 UOW, *submission 25*, p. 3; RSPSE-ANU, *submission 49*, p. 2; ACDS, *submission 13*, p. 4; FASTS, *submission 37*, p. 1; Flinders, *submission 78*, p. 2; CUT, *submission 18*, p. 2; ATN, *submission 54*, p. 6.

40 ARC, *transcript of evidence 25 June 2008*, p. 14; RSPSE-ANU, *submission 49*, p. 2.

41 <www.endeavour.deewr.gov.au/australian_institutions/international_postgraduate_research_scholarships.htm>, viewed 7 November 2008.

42 DIISR, *submission 50*, p. 7; DDoGS, *submission 72*, p. 6.

to the relatively static number of scholarships, international enrolment in higher degrees by research has increased four-fold since 1997.⁴³

5.53 Numerous submissions recommended increasing the number of IPRS places to accommodate the growing number of international students undertaking higher degrees by research. Dr Adam Cawley noted the importance of increasing the number of IPRS for building human capital in Australia.⁴⁴

5.54 IRUA argued that the IPRS program should be increased five-fold.⁴⁵ University of Southern Queensland indicated that the current number of IPRS places is 'totally inadequate' and recommended a three-fold increase, while University of South Australia suggested 'at least a doubling'.⁴⁶

5.55 Edith Cowan University suggested that:

It would be prudent for the universities and Government to facilitate the movement of suitably qualified overseas applicants into the research training system in order to maintain the research capacity during the period of low domestic demand for places. Making more IPRS available would help to attract qualified researchers from overseas and provide a pipeline effect of skilled researchers for the broader workforce.⁴⁷

5.56 Regional and smaller universities face even greater challenges in attracting international higher degree by research students because the IPRS funding formula favours larger and more established institutions.⁴⁸ Southern Cross University is allocated only two IPRS places each year, despite receiving a high number of international applications.⁴⁹

43 Group of Eight, *submission 55*, p. 5.

44 Dr Adam Cawley, *submission 92*, p. 7.

45 IRUA, *submission 51*, p. 11.

46 USQ, *submission 11*, p. 1; UniSA, *submission 32*, p. 7.

47 ECU, *submission 20*, p. 5.

48 The formula for IPRS allocations is based on a 50 per cent weighting for higher degree by research completions, a 40 per cent weighting for research income and a 10 per cent weighting for research publications, each taken over the two most recent years for which data are available, according to DIIRS, *submission 50*, p. 34.

49 SCU, *submission 12*, p. 3.

- 5.57 The Committee recommends a doubling in the annual number of IPRS awards to attract a greater number of international students to Australia.

Recommendation 27

The Committee recommends a doubling in the annual number of IPRS awards to accommodate a greater number of international students.

Value

- 5.58 The Committee notes that although the IPRS program purports to cover tuition fees, several submissions refuted this. University of Queensland noted that the average tuition fee shortfall from IPRS funding is \$11 000 per annum.⁵⁰
- 5.59 University of New South Wales argued that the funding model for IPRS grants ‘greatly penalised Universities that are dominated by high-cost disciplines’.⁵¹ This resulted in the university only being able to:
- ... offer IPRS Scholarships to about 5% of applicants with the IPRS grant covering only 65% of tuition fee costs, while other Universities are unable to fill their places and report surplus funds.⁵²
- 5.60 The Group of Eight said that IPRS funding covers 69 per cent of the established tuition costs, and University of Queensland estimated the funding allocation at 60 per cent of the average cost of tuition.⁵³
- 5.61 The Committee notes that Australian universities often provide their own top-up or living-allowance stipend as incentives to potential international candidates.⁵⁴

50 UQ, *submission 100*, p. 9.

51 UNSW, *submission 31*, p. 9.

52 UNSW, *submission 31*, p. 9.

53 Group of Eight, *submission 72*, p. 6; UQ, *submission 100*, p. 8.

54 See, for example, UQ, *submission 100*, pp. 8-9 and USQ, *submission 11*, p. 1.

5.62 DDoGS argued that Australia is:

... competing against well-funded scholarships at international universities and hampered by inadequate and under-funded international scholarship schemes. As well as the Canadian Georges Vanier Scholarships which have been described as a “marquee graduate scholarship program aimed at attracting young academic superstars to Canadian campuses”, the move by the New Zealand government to attract international students by reducing fee rates to domestic levels also places Australian universities at a significant disadvantage.⁵⁵

5.63 The Australian Council of Deans of Science explained that Germany does not impose any tuition fees on higher degree by research students, and the United States provides financial incentives for international students to enrol in postgraduate courses.⁵⁶ In contrast, international postgraduate research students in Australia must meet high fees (with the exception of scholarship recipients) and growing living expenses, with very little income-generating opportunity.⁵⁷

5.64 The Committee recommends that the value of the IPRS be increased to fund the full cost of the postgraduate research program it supports.

Recommendation 28

The Committee further recommends that the value of the IPRS be increased to fully fund the tuition fees for each course of study.

Variety

5.65 In addition to the IPRS, numerous other scholarships are available under the Endeavour umbrella.⁵⁸ Eleven key submissions, including that from DDoGS, argued that:

55 DDoGS, *submission 72*, p. 6.

56 ACDS, *submission 13*, p. 4.

57 See MUPRA, *submission 68*, pp. 3-6 for first-hand accounts of international students at Macquarie University struggling to make ends meet, particularly with rising accommodation costs.

58 <www.endeavour.deewr.gov.au/international_applicants/>, viewed 7 November 2008.

... the suite of international postgraduate scholarships offered under the Endeavour program is complex, confusing and poorly targeted.⁵⁹

- 5.66 The Committee recommends rationalising and simplifying all Australian postgraduate research scholarships available to international students.

Recommendation 29

The Committee recommends that Endeavour international postgraduate scholarships be rationalised and simplified for greater accessibility and competitiveness.

Visa arrangements

- 5.67 The restrictive and inflexible nature of visa policies relating to international students was cited by many submissions as an obstacle to promoting Australia as an educational and research destination.
- 5.68 The Committee heard evidence from international students at a public hearing of the costly and bureaucratic experience of extending, renewing, or changing a student visa.⁶⁰
- 5.69 University of Western Australia noted that the visa arrangements permit less flexibility than that enjoyed by domestic students, such as the ability to suspend their study for a period of up to 12 months or to undertake their higher degree by research on a part-time basis. Thus, international students are unable to supplement their income with part-time employment, suspend their studies for family reasons, or make flexible arrangements for child-caring.⁶¹

59 USQ, *submission 11*, p. 1; JCU, *submission 22*, p. 7; UNSW, *submission 31*, p. 9; Murdoch, *submission 38*, p. 1; LaTrobe, *submission 48*, p. 5; IRUA, *submission 51*, p. 11; UniMelb, *submission 56*, p. 4; DDoGS, *submission 72*, p. 6; Deakin, *submission 73*, p. 2; UWA, *submission 96*, p. 7; UQ, *submission 100*, p. 9.

60 Mr James Manicom, Mr Jun Kimura, Mr Cyle Duane, *transcript of evidence 6 August 2008*, pp. 58-59.

61 UWA, *submission 96*, p. 7; UWA, *transcript of evidence, 12 August 2008*, p. 45.

- 5.70 According to Victoria University's submission to the inquiry, international students must return home if taking personal leave of more than four weeks, or when ill.⁶²
- 5.71 University of Wollongong explained that the rigid visa regime also affects Australia's ability to enhance international research collaboration, given the difficulty in organising visas for brief visits or academic exchanges.⁶³
- 5.72 The Committee recognises that the imposition of current visa policies for international postgraduate research students detracts from Australia's ability to compete effectively in attracting high-quality international research students, and recommends that the policies be amended.

Recommendation 30

The Committee recommends that international student visa policies relating to higher degree by research programs be amended to allow greater flexibility for further research and employment.

- 5.73 Other, non-visa, measures can be put in place to attract international postgraduate students to Australia. The Committee commends the Victorian Government's policy of waiving primary and secondary public school fees for dependents of international students enrolled in higher degree by research programs in Australian universities.⁶⁴
- 5.74 University of New South Wales and the Group of Eight noted that school fees are a financial disincentive to international students with children. James Cook University recommended that the waiving of such fees be implemented as a national policy.⁶⁵
- 5.75 The Committee supports a national policy of fee-exemption at public schools for dependents of international postgraduate research students.

62 VU, *submission 15*, p. 6.

63 UOW, *submission 25*, p. 3.

64 IRUA, *submission 51*, p. 12.

65 JCU, *submission 22*, p. 7; JCU, *transcript of evidence 19 August 2008*, p. 17; UNSW, *transcript of evidence 5 August 2008*, p. 51; Group of Eight, *transcript of evidence 25 June 2008*, p. 6.

Recommendation 31

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with the States to ensure that the dependents of all international higher degree by research students enrolled at Australian universities are subject to the same fee levels as local students at government primary and secondary schools.