



**Australian Council of
Deans of Education Inc.**

To: Ms Maria Vamvakinou
Chair, House of Representatives Industry, Science and Innovation Committee
House of Representatives, PO Box 6021, Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600.

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From: Professor Sue Willis (Chair) and Professor Peter Renshaw (Secretary/Treasurer) on behalf of the Australian Council of Deans of Education

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The Australian Council of Deans of Education (ACDE) welcomes the Inquiry into Research Training and Research Workforce Issues. We recognise the importance of the field of Education research to innovation and economic and social advancement, particularly at this moment in history. The ACDE is committed to enhancing the research capacity of staff and students in Schools and Faculties of Education, and recognises that it is the academic staff and postgraduate research students in Education who will provide the research expertise and evidence-base that policy-makers and practitioners will draw upon in advancing the complex agenda of innovation and development. The ACDE is keen to participate in forums or other consultative processes to expand on any of the issues outlined in this submission.

The ACDE is the peak association of the Deans of Faculties of Education and Heads of Schools of Education in Australian universities and other higher education institutions. It advocates for teaching and research and scholarship in the broad discipline of Education. Faculties and schools of education produce the majority of educational research and scholarship in Australia and, consequently, have a considerable stake in research training and the research workforce as both producers and consumers.

Many of the issues we would wish to be addressed by this Inquiry will be common across the fields in Higher Education and will have been drawn to your attention by our respective universities. There are, however, some matters which if not confined to the field of Education are of particular significance to it. We will, in this submission, focus upon the latter.

Australian researchers in Education do very well by international standards - Australia's share of international publications is greater in Education than in any other major field. The 2006/7 ARC Annual Report indicated that Australia's share of science and social science papers is 2.91% of the world total. Of those research papers with at least one author address in Australia, the field of Education had the highest percentage (5.44%), followed by Plant and Animal Sciences (5.30%) and Geosciences (5.02%) (ARC 2007, p56).

We believe, however, that there are emerging problems with the research workforce in Education that could have long-ranging consequences for Australian Education. As background to these, we offer the following summary national data based on 2005 statistics from DEEWR reports.

Few Honours Students in Education - 11.7% of all domestic students enrolled in Australian Universities are in the field of Education, but they comprise only 1.6% of honours students. In 2005, there were only 175 honours students in Education across Australia.

Few Doctoral Students enrol full-time - 8.7% of all domestic doctorate-by-research students are in the field of Education, but they comprise only 3.7% of full time research doctoral students, some 77% of them being enrolled part time.

Older Doctoral Students - Of all commencing research doctorate students in Education in 2005, 70% were 40+ and 27% were 50+. This compares with 31.1% and 11.6% respectively across all fields.

Older Academic Staff in Education - 40% of Education academics are over 55 years of age (25% for the sector as a whole), while only 11% are under 40 years (27% for the sector as a whole).

These statistics highlight that students who undertake research degrees are not necessarily young and full-time, proceeding more or less directly from undergraduate honours degrees, and without major personal financial commitments.

Alternative pathways for Education doctoral students need to be supported through specific funding mechanisms.

Very few Education students can complete an honours degree as part of the undergraduate program because they need to undertake professional placements, meet accreditation requirements, and often also complete a degree in their teaching specialisation. This means that, although they typically already have a four-year qualification, they need to undertake a masters program with a significant thesis component as a pathway to Higher Degrees by Research. Post-graduate coursework qualifications are, however, typically full-fee paying. In contrast, a typical Science undergraduate can undertake a four-year honours degree using a Commonwealth Supported Place, and then proceed directly to a fully funded research degree. Compare that Commonwealth-supported *science* pathway to the pathway into research for a *science teacher*. The science teacher also undertakes a four-year course but in order to gain access to a higher degree by research, they would then need to undertake a Masters by coursework, typically 1.5 years FTE inclusive of a research thesis, and paying full fees. Should they get assistance from an employer towards fees, fringe benefits tax will apply.

Alternative pathways are actually preferred in Education. Research in education is typically applied research that requires the research student to be familiar with a broad range of professional issues, and to grasp the complex interface between theory and contexts of policy formation and professional practice. The undergraduate honours pathway, by itself, is unlikely to provide this grounded professional expertise. It is recommended, therefore that sustainable and attractive research pathways be designed for teachers with about 5 years of professional experience in order to facilitate their transition into a research career relatively early in their working-life.

We need to encourage and enable Education professionals to engage in further research-related study at an earlier age and full-time.

The majority of Education research students need professional experience prior to or alongside their undertaking of further study and indeed would find it difficult to gain employment in Schools and Faculties of Education without the credibility of professional experience. They are likely to be older, mid career and have significant family and financial commitments. Few in Education are in high income brackets, there are few incentives to upgrade qualifications, and the costs are considerable. Few scholarships are available for postgraduate coursework qualifications and those that are, generally are not available for part time students. Without support they cannot give up their employment in order to complete post graduate qualifications for entry to research degrees. They cannot meet their commitments on the stipends that come with scholarships. This means that even the most highly committed have little alternative but to study part time and to fit the timing of their study around work, family and financial commitments. Often this means delaying the commencement of post graduate study until quite a late date and all of this is needed prior to admission to research degrees. It is not surprising, therefore, that almost all (>90%) Education doctoral students are 40+ years old.

We need to plan immediately for the renewal of the academic staff and researchers in Education

The move towards knowledge-based economies and the social and technical challenges associated with environmental sustainability have heightened the importance of initiatives in education research. There is an explicit commitment by State and Commonwealth Governments to evidence-based policy and professional practice.

The research required to build this evidence-base requires long-term planning for the workforce in education research. However, the part time enrolment status and age profile of commencing doctoral students suggest that researchers will be available to participate fully in the workforce in Education at a considerably later age than for the research workforce generally, and to have fewer years available to

develop their research programs and optimise the impact of their work. This is of critical importance to the field of Education if it is to maintain and improve its current level of productivity. The field is currently facing major workforce problems in simply replacing retiring staff in a number of sub fields of Education let alone generating growth. While most universities would wish their academics to be active researchers, many find it difficult to recruit research qualified staff at the salaries they can offer. It is essential that we provide the incentives and flexibilities to enable professionals in Education to become research qualified at an earlier age. In short we need to encourage and enable Education professionals to engage in further study at an earlier age and full-time.

Specific Suggestions

Increasing the number of scholarships available is unlikely to be helpful, until and unless the scholarships are sufficiently generous and flexible to make earlier and more concentrated study a realistic choice.

Some possibilities include:

- loosening up the rules for eligibility for scholarships so that part-time students could receive them but in a smarter way. For example, a PhD candidate in Education might enrol part-time but after 3 years win a 2-year full-time scholarship at a higher rate than the normal stipend thus completing well under the 8 years maximum. In areas such as Early Childhood Education, a priority area where we need to fast-track qualified people into the higher education workforce in order to also fast track them into the early childhood care and education sectors, the government could provide incentives for research students to do their degrees quickly. They might also receive a completion bonus. The government should also consider a waiver for any fringe benefit tax incurred by businesses or institutions that employ staff undertaking research degrees.
- developing partnerships with corporate and public sector groups where they are given incentives to provide the means for their staff to undertake preliminary post graduate qualifications without undue hardship. Perhaps a waiver for fringe benefit tax would represent an incentive for companies to support their employees
- reviewing the ranking criteria for APA and RTS places so that Masters coursework programs (with research component) in professional fields such as Education, are regarded as equivalent to undergraduate Honours.
- reviewing the number of and support for postdoctoral fellowships in Education. Postdoctoral fellowships are limited and not well paid. There are very few research-only academics in Faculties and Schools of Education, and there are significant problems in enabling early career Education academics to develop their research profile due to issues such as teaching loads and service responsibilities to the broader profession. Specific support for postdoctoral fellowships associated with key policy initiatives in Education would be welcomed. Also, in recent years there is increasing attention within the field of education to international comparisons and deployment of best practice initiatives across national boundaries. Programs of support for international collaboration and travel of research staff would also be beneficial in progressing the development of an evidence base for the Government's agenda in forwarding the *education revolution*.

We encourage the panel to consider the model established in the current NH&MRC suite of funding programs to support both emerging and established researchers. The progression from scholarships, through training (postdoctoral) fellowships to NCIS, New Investigator Fellowship Grants and Australia Awards is also supported by programs to enable travel and international collaboration. This comprehensive model has underpinned the success of research in the medical sciences and should inform this review of research workforce support programs.