



Australian Housing
and Urban Research Institute

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Our Ref: GOV/238

Mr Russell Chafer
Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Innovation
PO Box 6021
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Chafer,

Re: Submission from the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute

I note the terms of reference of the inquiry and observe the focus on 'research training and research workforce issues in Australian Universities'. The purpose of this submission is to inform the term of reference: the challenges Australian Universities face in training, recruiting and retaining high quality research graduates and staff.

The Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) funds research training opportunities in the area of housing and urban research via twelve participating Universities. Capacity building is achieved through the provision of top up funding for students with Australian Postgraduate Research Awards (or equivalent). AHURI jointly funds a postdoctoral fellowship in collaboration with these Universities, and includes capacity building as selection criteria for project funding. Postgraduates receive peer support through an annual symposium. The symposium brings AHURI postgraduates together to discuss their work with fellow scholars and leading researchers.

This capacity development program has successfully expanded the number of postgraduate research students and postdoctoral fellows actively working in the area of housing and urban research. The challenge that AHURI and its University partners now face is the retention of talented early career researchers within the universities beyond the post-doctoral and research fellow level (the limit of AHURI funding support).

About AHURI

The Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) is a national, not-for-profit organisation that funds and conducts high-quality research into housing and urban issues. It aims to inform the policy making of governments, industry and the community sector and to stimulate debate on these issues in the broader community.

Established in 2000 AHURI has completed over 100 research projects and published some two hundred plus reports on a wide range of housing policy issues. These include all aspects of the Australian housing system: homelessness, Indigenous housing, public housing, the private rental market, and home ownership. This research is not just about housing per se, but about the foundational role of housing in securing positive economic and social outcomes for the nation.

Primary funding for AHURI is provided by the Australian Government, all state and territory governments and the Institute's eleven university partners. In the 2006/07 year, AHURI invested over \$3 million in conducting and managing housing and urban research.

AHURI is organised as a network comprising a small management company, AHURI Limited, based in Melbourne, and seven Research Centres that span eleven universities throughout Australia. The role of AHURI Ltd is to lead the organisation, manage and coordinate the research and dissemination process, and stimulate policy debate.

Research capacity development programs at AHURI

A collaborative relationship between AHURI and the participating universities is essential to building postgraduate and postdoctoral capacity in the area of housing and urban research. The sustainability of a high quality, policy relevant housing research program is underpinned by AHURI's capacity building activities.

There are currently 33 AHURI supported postgraduate students and postdoctoral research fellows actively engaged in AHURI research. On an annual basis, and in collaboration with Australian Universities, AHURI funds seven postgraduate top-up scholarships, one postdoctoral fellowship, and a symposium for postgraduate students. This represents a financial investment of \$346,650 per annum or 12 per cent of AHURI's annual research budget.

An emphasis on capacity building permeates all of AHURI's funding activities. The AHURI assessment criteria for funding housing and urban research places a strong emphasis on research teams being made up of a balance of junior and senior researchers. Funding applications require researchers to identify how their project will support postgraduate students and early career researchers. Projects that support capacity building are given precedence over those who do not. Consequently, AHURI supported postgraduates and

early career researchers were included in research teams as chief investigators for 4 of the 11 successful applications in the 2008 AHURI funding round.

A particular challenge that AHURI faces is the retention of these high quality early career researchers by the participating Universities soon after they have completed their postdoctoral research (AHURI limits its funding support to those up to the postdoctoral level). It is still too early to identify any clear patterns in relation to the pathways of postgraduates supported by AHURI. Nevertheless we have recently observed the exit from housing research of a number of promising early career researchers after the postdoctoral level.

The considerable early investment made by AHURI in research skills development may not translate into early research career sustainability with the participating universities beyond the postdoctoral level. The retention of and career advancement for early career research staff has become particularly important because the senior academic workforce associated with AHURI are aging and this increasingly impacts upon AHURI's capacity to conduct research as leading researchers become ill and/or retire.

We would like to thank the Committee for its consideration of our submission and we would welcome the opportunity to elaborate further on the submission if it would assist the Committee in its deliberations.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'I. Winter', written in a cursive style.

Dr Ian Winter
Executive Director