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29th May, 2008

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

Dear Mr Chafer

Inquiry into Research Training and Research Workforce Issues in Australian Universities

I enclose Deakin University's submission to the Inquiry into Research Training and Research Workforce Issues in Australian Universities. I would be happy to discuss any aspect of this submission with the Committee.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "David Stokes".

Professor David Stokes
Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research)



DEAKIN UNIVERSITY

Submission to the Inquiry into Research Training and Research Workforce Issues in Australian Universities

Deakin University supports the submissions of the Australian Council of Deans and Directors of Graduate Studies ("DDOGS") of which it is a member.

In particular, Deakin University considers that a number of problems with the current system of research training require urgent attention. Deakin agrees with the DDOGS concerns that:

- The current system of partial RTS funding with subsidisation coming from undergraduate and graduate coursework activities is not sustainable;
- Funding for research training should meet real costs and be internationally competitive.

Deakin therefore supports the recommendations to:

- increase the number of RTS places available to Australian universities
- fund the full cost of each HDR program and abolish the high cost/low cost divide

In relation to the allocation of RTS places, Deakin has a particular issue relating to the basis on which RTS places are allocated between Australian universities. The current RTS system is based on a formula which began from an arbitrary base of the number of HECS exemptions allocated to universities for HDR candidates prior to the introduction of the RTS scheme, rather than the actual number of Commonwealth funded places. At that time a cap of 21,500 funded places was placed on the system

By operation of the formula which was introduced in 2000 and phased in over a number of years, Deakin's allocation of HDR places decreased from 525 Commonwealth places agreed through profile discussions to a target of 301.

Universities compete to increase their share of places through improved performance in the various elements of the formula in a zero sum game. This is not conducive to improving Australia's competitiveness in the international arena

The greatest weight in the formula (50%) is the number of completions. Because the number of completions is clearly related to the number of HDR enrolments, the Universities which started from a higher base were in a much better position to make gains.

At the same time, a cap on improvement was imposed so that no university could make an improvement of more than 5% over the previous year.

The cap on the number of places for the sector and the restrictive formula makes it difficult for a younger and more innovative university like Deakin University to reach the share of Commonwealth funded places needed to support its rapidly growing research effort.

Deakin University recommends that:

- the government takes a more flexible approach to funding higher degree by research places;
- the number of higher degree research places for an institution should be negotiated through the compacts in line with the objects of the university;
- each institution should demonstrate that it has adequate resourcing and support mechanisms for its proposed HDR cohort.

Scholarship Programs must provide stipends that are a realistic reflection of the living expenses of students. The value of Australian Postgraduate Awards has not kept pace with inflation. A significant increase is required as well as an indexation process to maintain parity for the future. Deakin supports the DDOGS recommendations that:

- APA stipends are increased by at least 30% per annum, tax free and are appropriately indexed in future
- That the length of APA funding be increased to 3.5 years with a six month optional extension.

In addition, Deakin recommends that top quality graduates be encouraged to pursue higher research degrees by introducing a waiver of their undergraduate HECS debt upon successful completion of their doctoral program. This would be a substantial incentive which would not impose any current increase in spending.

Programs to attract and support high quality international research students are inadequate and under funded.

Deakin supports the DDOGS recommendations for an increase in the number of IPRS awards to reflect the growth in the international student cohort and for IPRS awards to fully fund the fees payable by the student

For Deakin, as for other universities, the number of Commonwealth funded places for international students is crucial because there is not a sufficient local supply of PhD candidates in areas such as Science and Engineering.

Deakin University is currently allocated only five or six new IPRS awards annually, but attracts 10 times this number of top first class Honours equivalent international applicants to study in its premier research groups. Currently the Commonwealth provides only \$18.8m nationally for the IPRS program. A five fold increase is recommended to meet current needs for well-qualified PhD candidates.

Deakin also supports the DDOGS recommendations for:

- A review of the suite of Endeavour Scholarship Programs to improve the accessibility and international competitiveness of the scheme;
- Further understanding and flexibility from the Department of Immigration in relation to sponsored students.

Current resource provisions do not meet the true costs of research training. Deakin supports the DDOGS recommendations in relation to:

- a full review of the suite of government funded programs which provide support for industry links for PhD students;
- modification of the RTS scheme funding formula to allow the splitting of HDR completions between pairs of Australian universities in order to recognise joint provision of PhDs;
- development of standard IP templates for use within agreements involving government agencies.