

South Street, Murdoch
Western Australia 6150
Telephone: (61-8) 9360 6758
Facsimile: (61-8) 9360 2931
J.A.Reynoldson@murdoch.edu.au

30 May 2008


Standing Committee for Industry, Science and Innovation
House of Representatives
Ms Maria Vamvakinou MP, Chair
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Ms Vamvakinou,

Please find attached the submission of Murdoch University to the Parliamentary Inquiry on Research Training and Research Workforce Issues in Australian Universities.

Yours Sincerely,



 Professor Jim Reynoldson,
Deputy Vice Chancellor, Research.
Murdoch University

MURDOCH UNIVERSITY SUBMISSION TO THE HOUSE STANDING COMMITTEE ON INDUSTRY, SCIENCE AND INNOVATION FOR THE INQUIRY INTO RESEARCH TRAINING AND RESEARCH WORKFORCE ISSUES IN AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES

26 May 2008

Murdoch University welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Research Training and Research Workforce issues in Australian Universities conducted by the House Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Innovation, chaired by Ms Maria Vamvakinou MP.

In preparing this document we acknowledge the paper that will be submitted by the Innovative Research Universities Australia (IRUA) for this Inquiry and the submission by the Deans and Directors of Graduate Studies (DDOGS) to the Innovation Review.

Background

Murdoch University is located in Perth, Western Australia. It is a multi campus institution located across 3 sites, at Murdoch, Rockingham and Peel, and has three international study centres in Singapore, Malaysia, Japan with a fourth study centre opening in Dubai in September 2008.

Murdoch University is committed to its vision of being a prominent and influential research intensive university renowned for its teaching quality and research excellence; promoting intellectual independence and social and scientific critique within a supportive and sustainable environment for postgraduate research candidates and staff; and engaged with and benefiting local, national and international communities. One of the key success factors of Murdoch's research efforts is attracting and retaining top quality postgraduate research candidates and researchers.

Murdoch is a member of the Innovative Research Universities Australia, a consortium of seven research-intensive universities (IRUA). Murdoch fully supports the submission of the IRUA to this Parliamentary Inquiry and in particular the following recommendations:

1. Increase the APA stipend to \$ 30,000 per year to attract more high quality postgraduate research candidates with an annual indexation to ensure the APA stipend keeps pace with inflation and the cost of living. Increase the length of the stipend to at least 3.5 years.
2. Introduce a HECS – HELP debt remission scheme for Australian students completing research higher degrees.
3. Introduce programs to encourage Indigenous Australians, students from rural and regional Australia and disadvantaged Australians to undertake research higher degrees and to support them for successful completion.
4. To increase the number of International Postgraduate Research Scholarships (IPRS) by a factor of 5 and give universities the option to allocate these scholarships for fees or living allowances or a combination of the two. Review and simplify the Endeavour Scholarship Programs. Introduce greater flexibility to international student visa policies and practices.
5. Increase the RTS funding to Australian universities to reflect the actual number of domestic postgraduate research candidates enrolled in research degrees.
6. Undertake a review to determine the full cost of research training across discipline groupings and fund universities accordingly.
7. Revise policy to enable co-supervised PhD candidates to enrol simultaneously at two universities.
8. Encourage the international mobility of domestic PhD candidates through policy and targeted funding support to universities.

Murdoch University provides the following comments for consideration of the Standing Committee.

Benefits of Research and Research Training Programs to Australia's Economy

Australia's advancement in the global economy of knowledge and innovation is determined by its capacity to generate, propagate and apply new knowledge and is thus reliant on a strong and vibrant culture in research and research training. Both the rate and speed of return from research increase as the global knowledge economy develops. Major changes in economic, environmental and social development have emanated from the work of the world's leading universities.

Australia's research and research training capability is not keeping pace with that of other nations and has declined in recent years relative to the rest of the world. It is Murdoch's opinion that a key to a competitive Australia lies in increased investment in research and research training.

Real Cost Adjustment for Core University Funding

The Commonwealth Block Grants currently do not cover the full costs of delivery of universities' research training programs nor does it fully cover the maintenance and update of the universities' research infrastructure. Progressive erosion of the Commonwealth Block Grant funding for universities is impeding the capacity of our supervisors to main quality and the ability of our universities to remain internationally competitive.

Proposal 1:

Murdoch University urges strongly that the government undertake a review of the real costs of research training delivery, the number of HDR enrolments and research infrastructure maintenance/update and adjust commonwealth funding to cover the real costs in order to sustain and grow Australia's research capacity.

Attracting and retaining top quality postgraduate research candidates

To attract high quality domestic and international postgraduate research candidates, Australia has to compete globally with countries that offer greater access to financial support. In order to compete successfully Murdoch University strongly agrees with the recommendations from the IRUA and the DDOGS to increase financial support to postgraduate research candidates, and also in the case of international candidates, look at simplifying policy and process for visa requirements.

The stipend rate for Postgraduate research candidates will drop below the poverty line by the end of 2008.¹ A Postgraduate candidate would be forced to increase work hours in order to make ends meet. An increase in work hours in the APA conditions would not be a course of action Murdoch wants to promote since this would jeopardise the time to completion and completion rate of Degree Awards.

Proposal 2

That the Government provide a range of financial incentives, including a significant increase in the APA stipend to \$30,000 and an expansion of the APA awards for the duration of 3.5 years with the option of a six month extension to attract high calibre domestic postgraduate research candidates.

¹ DDOGS submission to the National Innovation Review April 2008

Proposal 3:

That the Government make Australia a more competitive destination for high quality international research higher degree candidates by expanding the Endeavour International Postgraduate Research Scholarship scheme to include additional awards, transport and family member education concessions and greater flexibility as well as look at more flexibility with visa policy and practices for internationally funded scholarship holders.

Proposal 4:

Suitably qualified Australians should be able to reduce their HECS debt by completing a postgraduate research higher degree at an Australian university.

In the interests of attracting top quality research candidates and preserving a vibrant and flexible research culture it is important to maintain a clear role for merit selection independent of field of intended research.

Attracting and retaining top quality researchers

The best way to have a vibrant and active research culture is to attract and retain top quality researchers as well as postgraduate research candidates. This presents an increasing challenge in the current booming national economy and global competition for talent which is increasingly mobile in nature.

Australia needs to consider what measures might be taken to attract and retain international and domestic high profile researchers across the whole career base and so strengthen the Australian research capacity. The objective here is to reach critical mass in research and innovation where high profile researchers are attracted to Australia by its scientific facilities and dynamic research environment.

Proposal 5:

That the Government provide funding to recruit internationally recognised, high calibre mid and late career researchers with research programmes and strong publication records to optimise international competitiveness. This funding should support research facilities, large equipment and postgraduate research candidates.