

UNSW



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

Our Ref: DM08/00036

By email: committee.reps@aph.gov.au

Dear Mr Chafer,

Inquiry into Research Training and Research Workforce Issues in Australian Universities

On behalf of the Medical Deans Australia and New Zealand, I wish to make a submission to the Inquiry into Research Training and Research Workforce Issues in Australian Universities.

1. The contribution that Australian Universities make to research training in Australia

Universities with Medical Schools attract approximately 80% of medical research funding and approximately 90% of the public health research funding available through the NHMRC.

These Universities undertake the training of medical graduates for employment primarily in the health workforce but also prepare medical graduates for careers in full time or part time health and medical research. In addition the research infrastructure present in the Faculties of Medicine provides a critically important training ground for research students undertaking Honours and PhD programs. Most PhD candidates are students with Science degrees with a smaller number of medical students undertaking such PhD programs. These PhD graduates then move on to complete postdoctoral studies either within Australia or overseas and ultimately move into careers in academia or industry.

The research - teaching nexus is critically important in medicine.

Firstly, we need to have the capacity to train research active medical and science graduates to generate discoveries that feed into both commercialisation and improvements in health care.

Secondly, in an era of rapid medical advances it is critical that our medical graduates are trained in research methodologies so that they are in a position to assess these advances and integrate them in an effective way into producing health care improvements.

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A recent study from Imperial College, London, showed that there is significantly lower hospital mortality at hospitals with strong University affiliations compared to non teaching hospitals.

<http://www1.imperial.ac.uk/medicine/about/divisions/ephpc/pcsm/research/drfosters/>

2. The challenges Australian universities face in training, recruiting, returning high quality research graduates and staff

We face problems generated by short falls in funding at all levels and lack of a discernable research career structure.

At the student level, the current level of support for PhD students is barely sufficient to attract good science graduates and falls well short of what is needed to attract the best of medical graduates.

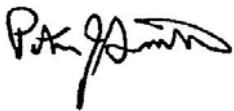
There is a need for better defined and funded postdoctoral positions that may transit to the ARC/NHMRC Fellowship program, to a University academic career or to a career in industry. At mid career level the new Future Fellowships will help fill the career gap for career researchers.

At Medical School level, there is a worsening problem of attracting young doctors to careers as medical academics since this requires specialist training, usually of 6 years, and further 3-4 years to obtain a PhD. At the end of this the remuneration is less than that of a hospital staff specialist and usually much less than that of a colleague in private practice.

The major challenge is developing a career path, structure and remuneration package to continue to attract high quality science and medical graduates to careers in health and medical research.

Should you have any queries or wish to discuss our submission further, I would be more than happy to speak with you.

Yours sincerely,



Professor Peter J Smith
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