

**Senate Standing Committee on Economics**  
**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**  
Innovation, Industry, Science and Research Portfolio  
Additional Estimates Hearing  
26 February 2009

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**AGENCY:** AUSTRALIAN RESEARCH COUNCIL

**TOPIC:** Dr Sheil

**REFERENCE:** Question on Notice (Hansard 26 February 2009, E135)

**QUESTION No.:** AI-69

**Senator ABETZ**—I have a few more controversial questions now, and it is a pity that Dr Sheil is not here to respond to them. I understand that Dr Sheil was reported in the *Australian* on 22 October 2008 as saying: ‘Researchers ask for more in the expectation they will be cut. What I think of as fully funded is about 80 per cent of the ask.’ Can you take that on notice as to whether Dr Sheil agrees that she made that comment, whether it is correct, because I am going on a media report. Then I would like to ask whether she was a funding recipient herself from the ARC previously and whether it is her personal experience that, in putting in an application, she stacked it by an extra 20 per cent in the expectation that it would be knocked down? Does she think that that statement has had any impact on the morale and confidence of researchers who are putting in for grants, that basically the message is: bump it up because you will get bumped down; those who put in a good, honest, sincere assessment get knocked down 20 per cent anyway? If Dr Sheil could provide me with some commentary on notice on that, I would be much obliged.

**ANSWER**

On 20 October 2008, Jill Rowbotham from the Australian interviewed Professor Margaret Sheil about ARC funding and success rates.

The ARC record of the interview indicates that Ms Rowbotham asked a question on how much funding is asked for [through applications] compared to how much is given out. Professor Sheil said “Researchers ask for more in the expectation they will be cut’ and that “ARC is funding around 55 to 60 per cent of what is asked for”. Professor Sheil then commented that “ideally she would like that figure to be 80 per cent”.

Regarding success rates, in the interview Professor Sheil acknowledges that success rates can discourage researchers if they get too low and in the interview in question said that “through its schemes, the ARC is encouraging collaboration and focus so we [the ARC] don’t think it’s a bad thing if ECRs collaborate with senior researchers”.

Ms Rowbotham also asked about funding the full-cost of research. Professor Sheil responded that “most people would be happy with 80–85 per cent, noting that people realise their budgets are likely to be cut when they put them together”.

Prior to her appointment to CEO of the ARC, Professor Sheil was Chief Investigator on ARC grants awarded to the University of Wollongong. Professor Sheil advises that she formulated her requests so that the relationship between requested items and anticipated progress was very clear.