

EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TRAINING

SENATE LEGISLATION COMMITTEE - QUESTIONS ON NOTICE 2003-2004 ADDITIONAL ESTIMATES HEARING

Outcome: 1

Output Group: ARC

DEST Question No. E813_04

Senator Carr provided in writing.

Question:

You note in your Annual Report that, "as a condition of the commencement of the ARC Centre of Excellence and the ARC Centres", a number of existing Special Research Centres and Key Centres of Teaching and Research "were required to be relinquished in 2003." (Annual Report p. 176, p. 195)

- (a) On p.195 you list the Key Centres that lost funding. How were they selected?
- (b) Where do you provide information about the Special Research Centres that lost funding?

Which were they? How were they selected?

- (c) Is it the Government's general policy to replace the Special Centres and Key Centres programs by its new programs for Centres?
- (d) What is the rationale for this? What are the important differences in approach and emphasis between the two older research concentration programs on the one hand, and each of the new ARC programs on the other?

Answer:

Relinquishment of Special Research Centres and Key Centres of Teaching and Research

The ARC has provided the following response:

- (a) The participants in the relinquished Key Centres were successful applicants under the ARC Centres of Excellence program. The Funding Rules approved by the Minister state that 'the ARC does not duplicate funding assistance for research that has been already funded by the ARC'. The relevant Centre of Excellence applicants had acknowledged the duplication between the research programs of their Key Centres and their proposed Centre of Excellence research programs, and had structured their Centre of Excellence applications to account for relinquishment of the Key Centre. The applicants therefore agreed to relinquish the Key Centre grants as required by the Funding Rules for Centres of Excellence.
- (b) The information requested is at the bottom of page 194 of the ARC 2002-03 Annual Report.

The Special Research Centres which were relinquished prior to the commencement of new Centres of Excellence were: SRC for Third Generation Photovoltaics, SRC for Quantum Computer Technology and SRC for Integrated Dynamics and Control.

The Funding Rules approved by the Minister state that 'the ARC does not duplicate funding assistance for research that has been already funded by the ARC'. The relevant Centre of Excellence applicants had acknowledged the duplication between the research programs of their Special Research Centres and their proposed Centre of Excellence research programs. The applicants therefore agreed to relinquish the Special Research Centres grants as required by the Funding Rules for Centres of Excellence.

- (c) There has been no decision by the Government to replace the programs that fund Special Research Centres and Key Centres of Teaching and Research with programs that fund more recently established centres.
- (d) Special Research Centres have been funded by the ARC on the basis of research excellence and potential to contribute to the economic, social and cultural development of Australia.

Key Centres for Teaching and Research have enabled education to respond to emerging national needs for the development of expertise in fields important to national development. Key Centres have linked teaching, applied research and more basic research and have formed partnerships with industry to provide trained personnel, are raising the level of applied research skills, and are undertaking some fundamental research on which requests of industry for specific problem-solving can be based.

In recent years, changing social, cultural, environmental and economic circumstances have prompted discussions about emerging areas of need for research in Australia. In response to this, the Government has formally identified priorities for publicly funded research. In January 2002, it identified four areas of priority for funding in the ARC's 2003 new funding round. Subsequently, in December 2002, it announced four national research priorities for Commonwealth-funded research generally.

The establishment of ARC Centres of Excellence was in direct response to the Government's identification of priorities for the ARC's 2003 new funding round. These Centres aim to build the scale and focus necessary to maintain and develop Australia's international standing in nano- and bio-materials, genome/phenome research, complex/intelligent systems and photon science and technology. Through highly innovative research that addresses challenging and significant problems in these areas, the Centres will build national research capability and produce outcomes of economic, social and cultural benefit to Australia.

Australia has outstanding investigators and research groups in many fields of research, but expertise is often scattered among many locations and institutions. A widely acknowledged need for Australian research is to reduce fragmentation and lack of cooperation. The ARC has identified the need to establish coherent, collaborative networks, especially to address national research priorities. While the ARC has cause to be very satisfied with its existing research centres, they are only partially effective in addressing this need. Other, more open, strategies to enhance coordination, collaboration and interdisciplinary approaches could add significantly to the value of the current investment in Australian research, and further enhance its international standing.

To address this need the ARC will also provide for a new scheme which will enhance collaborative research, known as ARC Research Networks. ARC Research Networks will encourage linkages and partnerships between investigators and institutions, supporting innovative, collaborative, cooperative and multidisciplinary approaches to research.