

EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TRAINING

SENATE LEGISLATION COMMITTEE - QUESTIONS ON NOTICE 2004-2005 BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING

Outcome: 1
Output Group: ARC

DEST Question No. E009_05

Senator Carr provided in writing.

Refers to DEST Question No E818_04, E819_04, E820_04, E821_04, E825_04, E826_04

Question:

At the last estimates round I asked a series of questions about the unusually high success rates under various competitive programs, specifically:

- Federation Fellowships (increasing rate);
- Indigenous Researchers' Program;
- Linkage – Fellowships;
- Linkage – International; and
- Linkage – Infrastructure: Equipment and Facilities.

- (a) Has the ARC undertaken a systematic evaluation of the programs with unusually high success rates and/or unusually low application rates?
- (b) When was each of these programs last evaluated formally? Can reports be provided? What was recommended to improve the programs, in particular their popularity?
- (c) In the case of those programs that involve co-funding or sponsoring by industry, has industry been consulted about the attractiveness or otherwise of the programs? What has been the response? Can reports be provided?
- (d) What measures will, or has, the ARC put in place to attract higher numbers of applicants to each of these programs?
- (e) Which, if any, of these programs will be subsumed in, or replaced by, new programs announced in the BAA II package?

Answer:

Success rates: fellowships and grants

The ARC has provided the following response.

- (a) & (b) Each element of the National Competitive Grants Program (NCGP) is subject to regular ongoing review. Following the completion of funding rounds each year, program elements are evaluated by the ARC to ensure that they are meeting their objectives and being administered efficiently. These evaluations are a routine aspect of the ARC's administration of the NCGP and do not lead to the preparation of reports.

In recent years, for example, a number of changes to program elements listed above have been made as the result of such reviews, including:

- Federation Fellowships – In the funding rules for funding commencing in 2004, a statement was introduced to indicate that ‘a clear preference will be given to early- to mid-career researchers who will play a leadership role in building Australia’s internationally-competitive research capacity’. In the funding rules for funding commencing in 2005, some applicants will be eligible to apply for a research project grant of up to \$400,000. This is to enable fellows relocating from overseas to quickly establish their research programs, offsetting the lag between the award of fellowships and the ability of recipients to access funds through other program elements.
- Indigenous Researchers’ Development – In the funding rules for funding commencing in 2003, the minimum amount of funding that could be requested was changed from \$3,000 to \$10,000 per annum, and a Research Cadetship award was introduced to provide a bridge for Indigenous researchers who have completed a PhD to establish a research track record strong enough to compete for an Australian Postdoctoral Fellowship.
- Linkage International – In the funding rules for Linkage International Fellowships funding commencing in 2005, the number of fellowship categories has been expanded to include fellowships to fund overseas researchers to work in Australia, or Australian researchers to work in overseas institutions. A mechanism for collaborative funding with overseas funding organisations has also been introduced.

In 2003 the ARC also commissioned an independent assessment of the ARC’s implementation of Government decisions from *Knowledge and Innovation* and *Backing Australia’s Ability (BAA)*. A copy of the report is available on the ARC’s website at <www.arc.gov.au/publications/arc_publications.htm>.

- (c) In 1998–99 the ARC and the then Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs commissioned an evaluation of the ARC’s industry-linked research schemes – at that time Collaborative Research Grants and Australian Postgraduate Awards (Industry) (the predecessors to Strategic Partnerships with Industry–Research and Training which, in turn, was the predecessor to Linkage Projects), and Key Centres for Teaching and Research. The report of the evaluation – *University and Industry Research Partnerships in Australia: An evaluation of ARC/DETYA industry-linked schemes* – is available on the website of the Department of Education, Science and Training (at <http://www.dest.gov.au/highered/pubgen/pubsalph.htm#U>).

Industry respondents to the evaluation were positive about their experiences with the schemes, identifying a range of major benefits including access to specialist expertise, improved capacity to solve problems, and ‘industry focused’ research training.

On the other hand, the evaluation found that long delays between initial contact between university-based researchers and their collaborating partner organisations and the outcome of applications for funding was a source of irritation to many participants. As a consequence, in the 2002 application year the ARC introduced two rounds of applications under Linkage Projects to address industry concerns that long lead times for funding had been affecting the development of collaborative partnerships between researchers and partner organisations.

- (d) The National Competitive Grants Program (NCGP) has a high profile within the Australian research community. The ARC communicates with university research offices on a regular basis to advise on program developments, including such information as closing dates for applications for funding. Information about the NCGP that is important to prospective applicants for funding is displayed prominently on the ARC website. The ARC also conducts visits regularly to universities around the country in order, among other things, to disseminate information and receive feedback about the NCGP.

When inviting applications for the most recent round of Federation Fellowships (for funding commencing in 2004), the ARC promoted this program element through online expatriate networks as well as in advertisements in both national and international journals and newspapers (for example, the Chronicle of Higher Education in the United States).

- (e) Options for implementing the Government's recent Budget measure affecting the National Competitive Grants Program are expected to be a subject of discussion at the ARC Board meeting in October 2004.