

Introduction

- 1.1 High quality research training is essential for a sound innovation system in Australia.
- 1.2 This inquiry aimed to identify the key flaws in the current research training system and this report suggests measures to remedy those flaws.
- 1.3 Despite Australian researchers' high standing in the international community, many high school and university students do not see the value in a career as a researcher.
- 1.4 The Committee hopes that a fully-funded research training system will encourage people to pursue a research career.
- 1.5 The Australian Government's doubling of the number of Australian Postgraduate Awards, for example, is a key step in increasing our commitment to effective research training.
- 1.6 It is hoped the measures outlined in this report will boost Australia's research training capacity significantly.

Policy reviews

- 1.7 Two significant policy reviews were conducted in 2008:
 - Review of Australian Higher Education (the Bradley review)
 - Review of the National Innovation System (the Cutler review)

- 1.8 It is envisaged that the recommendations from this report will complement these two reviews.

Background to the inquiry

- 1.9 The Committee agreed on 23 April 2008 to conduct an inquiry into research training and research workforce issues in Australian universities. The inquiry was referred to the Committee by Senator the Hon Kim Carr, the Australian Government Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research.
- 1.10 The Terms of Reference called for the Committee to inquire into the contribution that Australian universities make to Australian research training, and the challenges Australian universities face in recruiting, training and retaining quality research staff in Australia. In particular, the inquiry was to examine:
- The contribution that Australian universities make to research in Australia, including:
 - ⇒ The contribution of research training programs to Australia's competitiveness in the areas of science, research and innovation;
 - ⇒ The effectiveness of current Commonwealth research training schemes; and
 - ⇒ The adequacy of current research training schemes to support Australia's anticipated future requirements for tertiary-qualified professionals in a wide range of disciplines.
 - The challenges Australian universities face in training, recruiting and retaining high quality research graduates and staff, including, but not limited to:
 - ⇒ Adequacy of training and support (including income support) available to research graduates in Australia;
 - ⇒ Factors for graduates that determine pursuit of a career in research;
 - ⇒ Opportunities for career advancement for research graduates and staff;
 - ⇒ Factors determining pursuit of research opportunities overseas;
 - ⇒ Australia's ability to compete internationally for high quality researchers; and

- ⇒ Whether Australia's academic workforce is ageing, and the impact this may have on Australia's research capacity.
- 1.11 The inquiry was advertised in *The Australian* and the *Australian Financial Review* on 3 May 2008.
- 1.12 The Committee sought submissions from relevant Australian Government ministers and from state and territory governments. In addition, the Committee sought submissions from all of Australia's universities and a wide range of university and research peak and representative bodies.
- 1.13 The Committee received 106 submissions, and six supplementary submissions. These submissions are listed at Appendix A.
- 1.14 Submissions were received from most Australian universities. Key submissions were received from various university and academic representative bodies, as well as student advocacy bodies. Valuable submissions were also received from individual academics.
- 1.15 The Committee received 13 exhibits to the inquiry, which were provided in addition to written submissions, received during public hearings or sent to the Committee by other parties. These are listed in Appendix B.
- 1.16 The Committee held 14 public hearings across Australia, in Canberra, Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide, Brisbane, Townsville, Perth and Batchelor in the Northern Territory. The Committee called 64 witnesses. These witnesses are listed in Appendix C.
- 1.17 The Committee carried out a number of inspections at universities during the course of the inquiry. The Committee is grateful to those institutions that shared their research training experiences.

Structure of the report

- 1.18 The inquiry covered a wide range of research training issues, however the majority of issues related to the adequacy of funding.
- 1.19 Chapter Two provides a discussion on education in Australia, with commentary on developing interest in research, the quality of teaching and the value of the Honours years.
- 1.20 Chapter Three examines the key issues of funding for national research and development, funding for universities that provide

research training, and funding for research through competitive grants.

- 1.21 Chapter Four examines the critical issue of funding and support for postgraduate students, including adequate value of scholarship stipends.
- 1.22 Chapter Five discusses ways to attract students to research training, and the key issue of international students in Australia.
- 1.23 Chapter Six examines research career pathways and ways to address the ageing academic workforce issue.