



Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on
Industry, Science and Innovation

Inquiry into research training and research workforce issues
in Australian universities

Submitted by the Council of Deans of Nursing and Midwifery
(Australia & New Zealand)

June 2008

This submission specifically addresses the terms of reference of the inquiry.

- **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;**
- **The adequacy of current research training schemes to support Australia's anticipated future requirements for tertiary-qualified professionals in a wide range of disciplines;**
- **Adequacy of training and support available to research graduate students in Australia;**

They are excellent in theory but unfortunately the schemes have not been adapted to suit the modern generation of hopeful researchers.

There is a university wide problem that scholarships are not attractive enough for the highest achieving graduates. This is both in the areas of Australian Postgraduate Awards (APA) for doctoral studies and post doctoral fellowships. The stipends are low compared to salaries immediately available in the workforce - the long term career opportunities and commensurate salaries are unattractive.

These issues are accentuated in professional disciplines such as medicine, nursing etc. Professional practice should be encouraged, because professional experience is required to design research studies and translate findings into practice. A raft of initiatives that provide more flexible opportunities for scholars and post doc fellows to work and research at the same time need to be included in the range of traineeships. The first class honours, or equivalent, criteria for APAs is inappropriate for health disciplines and reflected in the very low uptake of APA in these disciplines. This is primarily because the majority of students want to get clinical experience before embarking on research (in the case of nursing, most of which is applied clinical research).

- **Factors for graduates that determine pursuit of a career in research;**

Comparable salaries with clinicians and a career trajectory that makes a research career a tempting one for academically gifted nurses.

Recognition of the value of applied research and structures and processes that support fieldwork as opposed to laboratory work (we may not need expensive equipment but support for protracted periods in the field need to be adequately financed).

- **Opportunities for career advancement for research graduates and staff;**

There is an urgent need to have attention paid to clinical research careers. Currently researchers get stuck as research assistants who most commonly take an academic position with a heavy teaching load – research takes second place to teaching and the acquisition of a teaching qualification.

- **Factors determining pursuit of research opportunities overseas;**

Family and job security.

- **Australia's ability to compete internationally for high quality researchers; and**

Reputation and achievement. We do attract academics from the UK but we do not know of one who has transferred a research program.

- **Whether Australia's academic workforce is ageing, and its impact on research capacity.**

There needs to be some deliberate targeting of younger Early Career Researchers for fast tracking – however they need to develop as leaders and managers also.

Research however is an excellent way to keep older academics in the workforce as long as they are prepared to support and enable the up and coming researchers. Fellowship to retain the services of retiring successful researchers could be considered.