



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**NOTRE DAME**  
A U S T R A L I A

**SUBMISSION - KNOWLEDGE AND INNOVATION REFORMS**

*This submission emphasises the importance of maintaining flexibility in Commonwealth funding programmes supporting research at small and developing universities.*

*Institutional grants for research in emerging universities allow for growth at those institutions in the process of establishing a productive research environment for both staff and students. Optimal results from these modest institutional grants to small universities depend on maximum flexibility in the use of funds and on the imposition of a responsible minimum level of external reporting.*

*An expansion of the modest concessions to smaller institutions that allow for the provision of funds outside the performance-based funding regime is critical for the continuing growth of Knowledge and Innovation in Australia.*

## **Introduction**

The University of Notre Dame Australia is a young and growing university. It was established by an Act of the Parliament of Western Australia in 1990 and enrolled its first graduate students in 1992 and its first undergraduates in 1994. Notre Dame has grown rapidly since then and now has over 3000 students at its Fremantle and Broome campuses.

Notre Dame has sought to encourage and support Research and Research Training for its staff and students. The Research and Research Training Management Plan 2001-2005, as presented to the Commonwealth Government in October 2001, is still current, and the University has been pleased to be able to provide evidence of the successful implementation of some of the objectives listed in the Plan in succeeding yearly reports to the government. It is striving to produce world-class scholarly research that will benefit its staff and students and the Australian community in general. It has established areas of research concentration and is seeking partnerships with universities and others active in research.

While The University of Notre Dame recognises the logic of concentration and growth in the investment in identified research universities and of increasing the scope of the Australian Research Council's responsibility, it reminds government that the foundation of innovation is most often found in small enterprises.

## **Commonwealth Research Support**

In planning to establish a productive research environment for its staff and graduate students, The University of Notre Dame Australia (UNDA) has appreciated the support provided by the Commonwealth Government through the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST). UNDA has received support under the Research Training Scheme (RTS) Australian Postgraduate Award Scheme (APA) , International Postgraduate Scholarship Scheme (IPRS) , Institutional Grants Scheme (IGS) and Research Infrastructure Block Grants Scheme (RIBG).

The *Knowledge and Innovation* initiatives have linked funding for research to three outcomes that are reported to DEST each year. These outcomes are the amount of research income (from competitive and other government or industry grants), the number of research publications and the number of student completions in higher degrees by research. In addition, regular reporting on Research and Research Training and a variety of university policies is required in order to encourage a focus on good research management.

Notre Dame has benefited from the reporting requirements in that it has provided the impetus for the University to develop research management policies and to institute positive changes in the focus of the University in research and research training.

In seeking a more dynamic research participation from small universities, DEST must be aware of the impact of the cost impositions of reporting requirements designed for the large.

### **Reporting Requirements**

Small universities such as Notre Dame, constantly seek to lower administrative costs thus directing the highest possible proportion of income to the delivery of services. In order to deliver real research benefits from modest resources provided by the Commonwealth and internal university funding, Notre Dame is conscious that the funds currently provided must not be applied simply to the processes of reporting and administration. Currently UNDA deploys 1.6 full-time equivalent senior administrative/academic staff to administer internally and to meet the same reporting requirements as the larger institutions. It was an important concession when some of the reporting requirements for the funding schemes were reduced in 2003. But in their place UNDA was required to undertake a Quality Audit. These administrative burdens reduce the time and support that can be given to staff and students involved in research at the university.

The publications audit is a time consuming activity, for little return for a small institution such as UNDA. It is vital to encourage staff to increase publication rates. There are benefits in raising the awareness of the importance of publication rates. These flow from this data collection exercise. Notre Dame would, however, make the case against introducing more comprehensive and so more time-consuming research data collections within this and other research assessment instruments.

UNDA is aware of the push by other mostly larger universities in Australia to reduce the burden of reporting requirements for Commonwealth funding for higher education. Recognition of the increased burden for smaller institutions in this regard is of greater relative importance.

### **Institutional Grants Scheme**

The focus at UNDA is on building a strong, accountable, research environment. The University has a young staff heavily involved in teaching undergraduate courses. To encourage individual staff research projects, the Institutional Grants Scheme offers some funding opportunities for small research grants. The IGS offers some flexibility in the use of its funds; for example, the University uses some of this funding to provide incentives for research training through a research voucher scheme for staff involved in research supervision.

Yet the measures used to determine the level of IGS funding rely on the outcomes of an established productive research environment. To achieve the necessary measures of Research Income from grants and Publication Rates to create a significant increase in IGS funding demands the very level of research capability that small and new institutions aspire to develop. These research output measures do not cater for institutions such as Notre Dame that are still in the process of developing of a strong research culture. They are a reward for established research activity, not seed funding for the developing institution.

Notre Dame maintains that its growth in research training and investment in research teaching facilities and support warrant an increase in the Institutional Grants Scheme allocation in 2004. But support through the Institutional Grants Scheme and previous schemes has remained static at the level of approximately \$105,000 per year in 2000, 2001 and 2002, as determined through the performance – based funding system.

### **Research Training Scheme**

The Research Training Scheme provides funding that is again performance-based. As well as research income and publications measures determining RTS funding, the number of completions of students in higher degrees by research is also a significant factor. For developing institutions this is a real problem. Without continuing students completing degrees, few completions are registered and so the level of RTS support remains static. This measure favours established institutions with large research student bases fed by the availability of significant numbers of APA and IPRS places.

Notre Dame has been a recipient of support through the Research Training Scheme since 2001. Yet growth in full-time research training numbers has not been rewarded.

During 2000, in discussions with the then Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (now DEST), Notre Dame made the case that it was inconsistent with the treatment of other universities for Notre Dame not to be allocated RTS places for each of the scholars within the Australian Postgraduate Awards Scheme (APA). It was agreed to provide Notre Dame with its first three RTS places in 2001 linked to its APA scholars. This recognition continues in 2003 at three RTS places each year while Notre Dame is allocated one APA scholar per year.

In forward planning by the University these APA-linked RTS positions were expected to grow with an increase in APA places at UNDA.

In spite of submissions by Notre Dame in the category of a smaller institution to DEST in both 2001 and 2002, no appreciable increase in RTS support has been forthcoming. UNDA made its case for an expansion of funding based on performance under limited DEST support and on the contribution to the support of Australia's research outputs that derived from the tuition fees paid by research students and emerging support from independent sources.

DEST has acknowledged the substance of these submissions but to date has not responded to the case for the allocation of additional APAs or IPRSs in spite of UNDA's evident commitment to grow the university's research profile. In addition, with the commencement of the University's new School of Medicine in 2004, there will be a very significant impact on the research expectations of Notre Dame. These aspects of institutional growth justify continuing increases in all aspects of DEST research support.

In summary, the Department of Education, Science and Training has recognised the changing profile of Notre Dame through the provision of some support, in particular through the provision of places in the Research Training Scheme (RTS). This recognition has been important but modest. Notre Dame submits that the failure to recognise the justification for an increase in APA and IPRS scholarships in addition to the number of funded RTS places is a significant problem for the University in maintaining growth in its research services. Support under the RTS, APA and IPRS has been limited and instead of encouraging strong growth in research at the University, has actually hampered the development of new research programmes.

There is limited funding available to assist the "smaller institutions" in the RTS nominated by DEST and competition is fierce. There is no room for flexibility in the performance-based funding model to allow for encouragement of research through increased RTS, APA or IPRS places.

At the current scale of support, the ability to respond to professional demands and to meet the Commonwealth's expectations for cultural change within institutions is limited.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, The University of Notre Dame Australia submits that while there is wisdom in the approach taken by *Knowledge and Innovation* reforms in providing performance – based funding support for Research and Research Training at Australian universities, alone these initiatives are insufficient.

The *Knowledge and Innovation* reforms lack the flexibility to mobilise the research potential of the small, developing universities. Research at developing institutions needs the equivalent of seed funding that will maintain the growth of research outcomes in step with the growing human capital and physical capital within the institutions and the demand for research student places. It is problematic to try to maintain growth in research in a smaller institution, before significant research capability is achieved, while the current performance – based funding allocation system remains.

Universities must expect to be fully accountable for their use of public funds and for outcomes within the wider university expectation parameters. However, the Commonwealth must recognise that reporting requirements are onerous for the smaller institutions and lead to diseconomies in the application of funds.

Notre Dame respectfully submits that the *Knowledge and Innovation* reforms should be re-evaluated with an eye to allowing for a greater flexibility in dealing with the support of research for smaller and developing institutions.