

Charles Sturt University's Submission to the Evaluation of the Knowledge and Innovation Reforms

Introduction

Charles Sturt University (CSU) supports the retention of the dual funding system that allocates funding for research to universities using both block and competitive mechanisms. The current balance of funding between these two mechanisms should remain at 60:40. CSU does not support a significant shift of funding away from the block mechanisms to competitive granting agencies. The funding principles underlying the Knowledge and Innovation Reforms remain relevant and CSU supports performance-based funding and the ideals of excellence and contestability. However, there is an imperative for funding to be made available to support the development of new and emerging areas of research.

The Impact of RTS on CSU

In 2000 Charles Sturt University had approximately 180 EFTSU of Government funded Research Higher Degree (RHD) students, having admitted an average of 66 EFTSU for 1999 and 2000. The White Paper restructured higher degree training in Australia and recommended reducing the number of RHD students in the sector. The funding levels remained the same thereby increasing the level of per student funding. The Research Training Scheme commenced in 2001 with CSU agreeing to reduce its RHD load to 132 EFTSU over the ensuing three years. This required a reduction of about 50 EFTSU. The White Paper also changed the mechanism for funding Research Higher Degree Students using a formula based on Research Income, Research Publications, Student Completions and Separations. This system has been shown to favour universities who have a large on-campus, full-time, post-honours, scholarship cohort and it significantly disadvantages distance education, part-time, mature, professionally-employed students. Given CSU's location and mandate, the majority of our government-funded EFTSU admitted prior to 2001 were in this latter category. Unfortunately, students in this category are more likely to withdraw for personal, family, professional and career reasons or take extended leave of absence due to illness, family or work commitments. They also take longer to complete their degrees.

In keeping with this policy change CSU reduced its commencing load to 18 EFTSU for 2001 and provided each full-time PhD student with a Scholarship. In 2002 our RTS intake was 25 PhD students with all but four students being full-time scholarship students while for 2003 we admitted 22 full-time PhD students with scholarships and 16 part-time PhD students (8 EFTSU). CSU has admitted no Research Masters students since RTS was implemented. These decisions were taken because under the RTS funding model high completion rates and low net separations

are rewarded. Additionally, CSU has implemented strategies to support and assist our existing DE part-time cohort where, depending on the discipline, some 40-60% withdraw and do not complete. The strategies adopted included funding travel for students to meet with their supervisors twice a year and funding attendance at the Generic Skills and Thesis Writing Workshops. CSU has decreased its attrition rate from 43 students in 2000 to 23 students in both 2001 and 2002. These data indicate that CSU's strategies are reducing attrition. Interestingly, included in the separations for 2002 are seven full-time high-cost students who moved to another university when their supervisor changed employment. All of these students will graduate within the next 18 months from that University who will, in return, receive the completion after much of the work has been undertaken at CSU. These students count as attrition for CSU and the university to which they transferred will gain the completion and its accompanying funding. This scenario is of major concern to CSU.

The RTS has fundamentally changed the characteristics of the research students that CSU now admits. Moreover, the University is being financially taxed by the characteristics of the students who were admitted prior to 2001, most of whom were DE, part-time, mature professionals some of whom do not go on to complete. The admission of students with these characteristics prior to 2001 was consistent with our mission to serve students across Australia by providing access to higher degree programs in our areas of research strength using a distance education mode. The RTS has actively encouraged CSU not to admit mature, professionally orientated students wishing to undertake a research higher degree part-time by distance. This is an unfortunate paradox given the rhetoric relating to lifelong learning and encouraging professionals to upgrade their qualifications.

Recommendations regarding RTS

Charles Sturt University would like to recommend the following changes to the RTS.

1. Separations should be excluded from the formula. They are complex to calculate and therefore not clearly understood in the sector. Further, universities with a part-time mature age research student profile are disadvantaged in comparison to universities with a full-time internal scholarship student profile. Separations are also related to completions given that universities with high separations will have low completions.
2. If separations are to remain as a part of the formula, students who transfer to another university should be exempt from being shown as a separation because they remain in the system. CSU had at least 10 separations due to students going with their Principal Supervisor to another University.
3. Capping should remain for RTS, or another system devised, to smooth out the peaks and troughs of completions and separations.
4. Funding allocations should be made on a yearly basis.
5. Publications should be weighted more highly in the RTS. The formula should be Completions 50%, Research Income 25%, and Research Publications 25%. The rationale for this proposed change is presented below.

The Impact of IGS on CSU

Charles Sturt University has increased its IGS funding over the past two years as can be seen in Appendix 1. The University's IGS increased 38% from 2001 to 2002 and 28% from 2002 to 2003 but was capped at a 5% increase for both years. If there had been no capping on IGS, CSU would have received an additional \$617,136 over the two year period. This amount would have easily covered the \$144,545 paid to CSU as Regional Protection funding during that period (see Appendix 1 for CSU's data). Consequently, capping IGS has inhibited CSU from markedly improving its funding position. The University has not been rewarded for significantly enhancing its research performance.

Charles Sturt University favours the retention of research publications in the IGS formula and recommends its percentage weighting be increased. Research publications are the major output or end product of the process for generating new knowledge. Research publications that are peer reviewed in quality journals, books and conferences are the dominant vehicle for sharing new findings, discoveries and theories. Many argue that the new knowledge generation process comes to fruition only when the new knowledge is shared publicly with the global academic community for the betterment of society. CSU believes that quality indices that are relevant across disciplines should be developed for research publications. This could take the form of a Research Assessment Exercise similar to the UK system although this is an expensive and time consuming process with results in place for five years. CSU favours a system where expert discipline panels would rate journals, publishers, conference publications in a discipline area using a 1-10 scale and then publication points would be weighted accordingly. If this were undertaken the overall weighting for research publications in the formula could legitimately be increased.

Many of the major advances in new knowledge have not needed or been associated with large amounts of research income. Academics from the arts, social sciences and humanities argue that their contribution to new knowledge generation is not appropriately acknowledged under the current scheme that gives undue preference to research income over publications. Of further note here is the fact that not all funded research projects result in publications or a contribution to new knowledge. The weightings in the current formula advantage the science disciplines and science-based universities at the expense of the arts, humanities and social sciences. Given the disproportionate amount of funding given to sciences over arts, humanities and social science by the national competitive grant schemes, CSU does not support a return to the double weighting for national competitive grant funds.

Recommendations regarding IGS

Charles Sturt University would like to recommend the following changes to the IGS.

1. The IGS formula should be changed to Research Income 40%, Research Publications 40%, and Student Load 20%.
2. A quality assessment process for research publications should be implemented. Expert discipline panels should be established to rate journals, publishers, and conferences in a specific area, using perhaps a 1-10 scale and to publish their decisions as a Quality Index. Publication points would then be weighted according

to the Quality Index. Publications not rated would be excluded. Citation rates, journal impact factors, rejection rates and standing in the academic community could be considered when making decisions.

3. RTS and IGS funding should be considered separate funding schemes and not combined.
4. Capping should be removed from IGS but should remain on RTS given that funding is used to support research students.
5. Research performance should continue to be measured at the University level.

Other Recommendations

1. Funding for research grants should be provided on a full cost basis. Universities are research providers but increasingly the sector is being asked to fund research through matched funding, cash contributions and in-kind support. The ARC and NHMRC should fund the full cost of research projects including the researchers' salaries. BAA II funding and increased funding to the ARC and NHMRC should be allocated for this purpose.
2. The RIBG should remain as is and should not be attached directly to competitive grant funding.
3. The Regional Support package should be discontinued provided the capping remains on RTS.
4. Many regional universities need support to develop the necessary infrastructure to conduct cutting edge research in their designated areas of research strength. This matter has been raised with the Infrastructure review taskforce.
5. The Research and Research Training Management Reports have been streamlined in recent years and are now appropriate. They provide universities with a catalyst to reflect on the past and plan for the future. CSU supports their retention in the current form.

APPENDIX 1: CHARLES STURT UNIVERSITY IGS, RTS AND REGIONAL PROTECTION DATA

	2001 BENCHMARK	2002 BEFORE CAPPING	2002 AFTER CAPPING	2003 BEFORE CAPPING	2003 AFTER CAPPING
IGS	1,048,078 1,071,010 (2002 PRICES)	1,472,837 + 38%	1,124,560 + 5%	1,476,759 + 28%	1,207,900 + 5%
RTS	2,928,000 3,189,281 (2002 PRICES)	3,081,583 - 3%	3,081,583 - 3%	2,926,525 - 7%	3,059,799 - 5%
IGS+RTS (AMOUNT EARNED WITHOUT CAPPING IS SHADED)		4,554,420	4,206,143	4,403,284	4,267,699
REGIONAL PROTECTION			54,148		90,397
TOTAL RECEIVED	3,976,078		4,260,291		4,358,087