



Comments on Consultation Paper on NHMRC's Research Fellowships Scheme – 25 May 2009

Name:	Professor Robert Williamson
Organisation:	Australian Academy of Science
Position:	Secretary Science Policy

Please type your comments to the questions and issues raised in the Consultation Paper directly into the table below. If you have no comments please enter “No Comment” in the table for this question or issue.

Questions and Issues for Comment:	
1. Aims of the Research Fellowship scheme Comment:	No comment - refer 'Other comments' section
2. Alignment between the aims of the scheme, selection criteria, scoring and ranking processes and feedback report to the applicants Comment:	No comment - refer 'Other comments' section
3. Position Classification Statements Comment:	No comment - refer 'Other comments' section
4. Numbers of Fellows at different Fellowship levels Comment:	The overall numbers of Fellowships has been increasing appropriately during the past five years, particularly at the Career Entry and Career Development levels.
5. Are the current four levels of Fellowship appropriate? Comment:	The funding that is allocated by NHMRC for each Fellowship does not cover full costs of salary at appropriate grading for many Fellows. Fellows, whether working in a University or a Medical Research Institute, will be paid according to the agreed scales of the institution, which are almost always higher than the scales used by NHMRC. As a result, the non-salary component of the package is used for “top-up”, and the Fellowship no longer delivers a significant research cost component to the institution. We recommend that the NHMRC ensure that full salary costs are paid for Fellows, and the non-salary component is re-instated. If Fellowships are to be regarded as the appropriate means of appointing the most accomplished of our medical researchers, then it is essential to provide them with support for their research as part of their Fellowship.
6. Fellows re-applying for appointment Comment:	As recently as 15 years ago, Fellowships were seen as tenured posts which continued (more or less automatically) until retirement. However, there has been increasing emphasis on the fact that a Fellowship (at any level) is not a tenured post. All present NHMRC Fellows, when

applying for renewal, enter with the same status as any new applicant (the “level playing field principle”). While this is appropriate, it must be accompanied by measures that ensure that training and mentoring throughout scientists’ careers emphasize flexibility and skills acquisition in the context of possible moves into and out of other careers, both within and outside the University/MRI sectors. It must be accompanied by a willingness to offer flexibility to Fellows for joint appointments and funding; Fellowships should not only encourage part-time, deferred and overseas periods, but also joint Fellowship between NHMRC and MRIs, Universities, CSIRO, ARC or industry.

7. Application process

Comment:

No comment - refer ‘Other comments’ section

8. Early re-application

Comment:

No comment - refer ‘Other comments’ section

9. Fellowship interviews

Comment:

No comment - refer ‘Other comments’ section

10. Seventh year Grant-in-Aid support for unsuccessful applicants

Comment:

No comment - refer ‘Other comments’ section

11. Head of Department Report

Comment:

No comment - refer ‘Other comments’ section

12. Career Development Awards and the NHMRC Fellowship scheme

Comment:

No comment - refer ‘Other comments’ section

13. ARC Future Fellowship Scheme

Comment:

The problems referred to in the response to Question 5 will be exacerbated when appointments are made by ARC to persons in biomedical and clinical research under the (new and more generous) “Future Fellowships” scheme. This is another aspect of the general issue of provision of funding to cover the full costs of research.

14. Gender imbalance

Comment:

No comment - refer ‘Other comments’ section

15. Increasing the flexibility of the Research Fellowships Scheme – Fellows able to suspend award for up to two years.

Comment:

No comment - refer ‘Other comments’ section

16. Proposed Emeritus Fellowship

Comment:

No comment - refer ‘Other comments’ section

Other Comments:

This submission has been prepared on behalf of the Australian Academy of Science by Professors Robert Williamson and Bronwyn Kingwell (Chair of the Academy’s National Committee for Medicine).

In providing these comments, the Academy has elected not to provide comment on the

operational details of the schemes. Consistent with encouraging research of the highest standard in Australia, our observations have been confined to general points relating primarily to issues raised by questions 4, 5, 6 and 13.

Please return this form by **5pm AEST 29 June 2009** by email to:
Fellowships.Consultation@nhmrc.gov.au or by Fax to: 02 6217 9135 or by mail to:
Fellowships Consultation Paper Submission
Building Capacity Section
NHMRC
GPO Box 1421
Canberra ACT 2601