

ARC Future Fellowships Consultation response proforma

The ARC *Future Fellowships* Consultation Paper is available at:
http://www.arc.gov.au/ncgp/futurefel/future_default.htm

Responses to the consultation paper should be submitted electronically, using this proforma, to the ARC by **cob 27 June 2008**.

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Issues for Specific Feedback

1. Should “mid-career” be defined as researchers who have between 5 and 15 years research experience since the award of their PhD (or equivalent research qualification or experience)? Any such definition would need to allow flexibility to extend the post-PhD period to take into account periods during which the researcher had child-rearing and/or carer responsibilities or the equivalent.

Response:

- **The definition of ‘mid-career’ researchers should be sufficiently flexible to allow for periods of post-PhD personal responsibilities to be taken into account. Allowing flexibility in the definition of the 5 to 15 years research experience should encompass child rearing and other responsibilities, especially for aspiring female research leaders.**

2. Should Future Fellowships be available as both part-time and full-time fellowship positions ranging from 0.5 to 1.0 FTE?

Response:

- **Future Fellowships should be available as both part-time and full-time positions.**
- **Female researchers in Australia are faced with institutional obstacles that appear to prevent them from reaching their full potential. Offering Future Fellowships as a part-time option would be an enlightened step towards removing the 'glass ceiling' that many perceive to be encountered by mid-career and senior female researchers.**
- **Offering Future Fellowships on both a part-time and full-time basis may allow for a recipient to integrate better their research and educational activities. The ARC, with its current research-only brief, appears to be unwilling to include postgraduate**

educational activities into research-based fellowships. The quality and quantity of postgraduate supervision in Australian institutions is vital for the maintenance of research excellence. The emphasis on research as a promotion criterion in Australian universities is leading to an increasing number of academics spending more time on research and less on returning to the postgraduate educational system benefits they themselves most probably received. A cultural shift in which education has a higher value in the education/research nexus is required to counteract this trend. Future Fellowship recipients should offer, or be offered (by their host institution), educational components in their employment plans.

- Part-time fellowships may in special cases be appropriate when they involve industry participation.

3. Should there be a limit on the number of *Future Fellowship* proposals that an administering organisation is allowed to submit, e.g. 30 proposals per administering organisation?

Response:

- There should not be a limit to the number of Future Fellowship proposals that an organisation is entitled to submit. The Academy expects that the process will be self-limiting, as the administering organisation will need to provide additional infrastructure and administrative support for each recipient as well as commitments to longer-term post-fellowship employments. Organisations will need to offer post-fellowship employment, thus further limiting their capacity to sponsor applicants for Future Fellowships.

General Feedback

The ARC also welcomes feedback on any other aspect of the proposed administrative arrangements for the new *Future Fellowships* scheme.

- The Australian Academy of Science welcomes the decision to establish the Future Fellowships scheme. The Academy's policy statement released in September 2007, *Research and innovation in Australia*, recommended the expansion of research fellowship awards for mid-career researchers. This was a matter the Labour Party embraced in its election platform.
- The need to replace the aging population of research scientists is urgent in Australia. The mid-career fellowships provide a bridging mechanism that allows institutions to plan ahead. The Academy believes that institutions, when accepting the fellowships, must make long-term commitments to continue appointment at the end of the fellowship under the usual institutional conditions.
- The Australian Academy of Science believes the scheme should not be limited to university researchers alone. It should be available to Government research organisations, including CSIRO, Geoscience Australia, ANSTO, and others, as well as be open to industry participation, particularly when the projects cross institutional boundaries.
- The Future Fellowship scheme represents a major step forward in creating greater career opportunities than are currently available in the research sector. However, when 200 Fellowships each year are divided by eligible institutions and spread across disciplines, concentrations of critical mass in emerging fields of science and technology may not be reached. Nor will the number of Fellowships be adequate to replace the anticipated retirement in the next decade. In the longer time frame, the numbers of Fellowships will need to be increased.
- Mid-career researchers will in some research fields need significant research funding. The Academy welcomes the scheme's commitment to research funding of up to

\$50,000 per year, but recognises that this may not be adequate to establish new laboratory facilities. The duration of the Fellowships is too short to use ARC DP funding and the institutions receiving the Fellowships must make commitments to provide this funding from the time a Fellowship is taken up.

- The corollary of the above point is that new research funding needs to be found. Failure to do this will make the Fellowships less attractive to applicants who hold well funded positions overseas but who wish to continue their research careers in Australia. This will also be necessary in order to avoid distortion of the ARC research funding schemes. The pool of new mid-career researchers will be highly competitive in ARC research funding schemes, thereby reducing the likelihood of success of other proposals. In the end, there would not be a net increase in research output, only a shift in who carries out that research.
- Thus, size of the research infrastructure block grant (RIBG) made to universities needs to be dramatically increased to enable guarantees of the continued employment indicated in the Future Fellowships prospectus. For many research institutions there is no RIBG from the Federal Government, so the situation for them is even more perplexing than for a university. This must be remedied. For example, a new RIBG scheme linked to the Future Fellowship scheme may be an option for these organisations.
- Structuring the scheme so fellowships are integrated into the existing university (or institute) environment, thereby creating a new position using the funding, would help to provide the much needed job security. Thus, the positions would join existing job structures and provide a researcher with a definite career ladder. The Canada Research Chair scheme and the British Royal Society Fellowships operate in this way.
- It has become clear that 'quality of life' alone is insufficient to attract and retain top researchers in Australia. Having made the first step of introducing the Future Fellowship scheme, it will be critical to recognise that a long-term commitment to the scheme is required. The Academy of Science advises that the investment must continue for the indefinite future.
- The Academy of Science welcomes the capacity of the Future Fellowships scheme to partner with private organisations from industry and with overseas research institutions. This new capacity is a positive step towards encouraging collaboration between the university sector and industry both in Australia and overseas.
- The scheme proposes that current ARC Fellows may apply for a Future Fellowship only in their final year. This has the potential to create breaks in research funding. As a guiding principle, applicants should be compared on their academic merits alone, and not on their current position.
- The "Alignment of Future Fellowships proposals with the eligible organisation's research strategy" should not be overemphasized. One purpose of the Fellowship Scheme is to produce the key researchers for the future in new areas of science and technology. Thus, it will be the *best young scientists* who will determine the research direction of the host institution.