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The [Early- and Mid- Career Researcher \(EMCR\) Forum](#) of the Australian Academy of Science welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the consultation paper “*Research block grant reform to boost incentives for greater university and industry collaboration*” by the Department of Education, Skills and Employment. Following a review, the EMCR Forum:

- Is not supportive of the proposed changes to the RBG funding
- Is concerned that the redistribution of research funding at the expense of fundamental research will result in a degradation of Australia’s globally recognised research capability, increase incidences of conflict of interest and increase discrimination in hiring practices
- Is supportive of the Academy’s view that an alternative strategy of industry-side incentives may be more impactful.

The EMCR Forum recognises the importance of demand-driven research and is supportive of an intention to promote industry collaboration and research commercialisation. In addition to the advantages outlined in the consultation paper, increasing industry-based research also increases job security amongst EMCRs by promoting career mobility between industry, academia, and government.

However, the EMCR Forum supports the Academy of Science’s position, as outlined in a separate submission, that commercially driven research must not be promoted at the expense of fundamental research. The potential impacts of neglecting fundamental research include:

- 1) Loss of skills / brain drain
 - a. Society is faced with numerous environmental, technological, and medical challenges, and development of new knowledge is critical for designing and tailoring appropriate solutions. Such knowledge can be created only through promoting and funding fundamental research.
 - b. The transition of research staff to industry-based research will impair the ability of Australia’s research sector to explore and implement new ideas and technologies, thereby compromising Australia’s ability to respond to future challenges. This will have a significant long-term impact as the development of skills, knowledge and facilities to conduct fundamental research can take decades to develop, with the impact of these discoveries potentially not necessarily obvious at the outset.
 - c. Australia has invested significant resources over many decades to develop fundamental research capacity the quality of which is recognised across the globe. The shift away from fundamental research will invariably create a brain drain, forcing researchers to take their knowledge and skills overseas, or to leave active research altogether. In addition to being a poor return on investment for their training, this shift could result in a contraction of the research workforce which may take a generation to reverse.

- 2) Increased incidences of conflict of interest
 - a. Increased pressure to produce outcomes on the generally shorter time-scales expected in commercial settings may lead to poorer quality research and a degradation of research integrity;
 - b. Restrictions on publishing outcomes of industry-based research due to intellectual property and confidentiality restrictions will reduce the overall research output for Australia;
 - c. EMCRs are particularly vulnerable given that they are predominantly on short term contracts and are often at a life stage when they undergo extensive career breaks due to caring responsibilities or need flexible work conditions;
 - d. The proposed changes may worsen the leaking pipeline of women employed in the STEM sector.

- 3) Discrimination in promotion/retention/hiring
 - a. With institutions prioritising building capability in commercially driven research, research funding will be skewed towards researchers with industry links and connections, at the expense of researchers with a demonstrated track record of high-quality, high-impact fundamental research. This bias will disproportionately impact EMCRs, who typically have limited opportunities to forge industry collaborations. This would create equity issues in promotion, retention and hiring of research staff.

With the above in mind, the EMCR Forum is not supportive of the proposed changes to the RBG funding. The Forum also strongly supports the Academy's view that a blanket, untargeted incentive for universities to increase industry-based funding may not necessarily translate to valuable outcomes for stakeholders, and that an alternative strategy of industry-side incentives may be more impactful.

To discuss or clarify any aspect of this submission, please contact Mr Zach Ghirardello, Director Diversity and Inclusion at zach.ghirardello@science.org.au.