

Response from the Executive to the Project for the Advancement of Research Careers (PARC) Report, Stage 1.

During 2005 Dr Vera Morgan was asked to undertake a review of the working environment for research staff. Several key issues were causing some difficulty for some members of the research staff, and the report – Project for the Advancement of Research Careers, or PARC - was able to outline these and suggest some ways forward.

This paper summarises the Executive response to the PARC report. Before looking at each individual recommendation it is worth considering the key themes of the Report.

1. Funding for NHMRC Fellows

It should be noted that this response is being formulated at a time when the NHMRC is still finalising the details of its new funding schemes. All researchers should view the NHMRC website and acquaint themselves with the mooted changes.

When the NHMRC invented the PSP system as way of managing the costs (to it) of Fellowships, it defined costs in a limited way and ignored the relationship between movements in salary levels at different universities (EB related pay increases) and the range of PSPs on offer for Fellows. The system was also set up in a way that increased competition for Fellowships and encouraged applicants to apply ‘down’ for Fellowships compared with their actual seniority and university status. Hence a NHMRC PSP driven gap appeared for Fellowships. The University responded to this by supplementing Fellow salaries by 7.5% from central funds and requiring schools and faculties to meet any additional gaps as they emerged in the life of the Fellowship.

As part of the PARC process Research Services went back to basics and recalculated the links between Fellow PSP levels and academic and general staff equivalents. For NHMRC Fellows it was clear that the 7.5% supplementation was still adequate to cover actual equivalent salaries at UWA although one anomaly was identified.

2. NHMRC Project Grants.

The PARC report also considers the PSP components of project grants, in particular the salary and conditions of people employed on the grants.

When the University decided to supplement Fellow salaries, it decided initially to supplement the salaries of those employed on grants. However, this scheme ceased in 2004. The financial management of the grant was then left in the hands of grant holders, and meeting the inevitable shortfalls in funding was to be their responsibility. The one rule was that grants could not be overspent by grant holders and that if they were, then this would be a School or Faculty liability.

This position was adopted because, like it or not, under the Australian system there will almost always be a gap between funding and the costs of the research project on any grant, not just the NHMRC. These gaps, usually triggered by movements in salaries in universities as a result of enterprise bargains, are to be managed by the grant holder by modifying the conduct of the grant.

There has been concern on our campus about meeting these salary gaps –formerly known as EB gaps, now known as Collective Agreement gaps – and that not to do so might breach the Funding Deed with the NHMRC.

In this regard, it should be noted that, a few years ago, the NHMRC changed the way in which the budget lines for grants were described. Although PSP rates were used for preparing the grant budget, the funding was awarded as a one-line budget and although there is a requirement to acquit salary spending, this is not related to any set of PSPs. In effect the NHMRC recognised the role of grant holders in managing their grants, and that meeting funding gaps between what was sought and what was received was not constrained by rules about PSPs. The onus here has therefore been on grant holders to manage their grants.

This has now changed for grants commencing in 2007 although there is still flexibility in the management of the grant. The NHMRC has awarded funding for next year by identifying an amount to be spent on PSPs, although it has not indicated what PSP level(s) has been funded. For example, one grant this year requested 100% of PSP5 and 50% of PSP1 totalling \$102,000 per year but was awarded \$85,000. Notionally this \$85,000 could be spent on 100% of a PSP3 and 50% of PSP1, or it could be spent on 100% of PSP5 with a small amount to be used to fund a short term contract. The only condition imposed by the NHMRC is that no more than the PSP allocation of \$85,000 can be spent on salaries.

Nonetheless, in recognition of the large academic salary increase at UWA in 2006 (7%), a small supplement of 2% of non-NHMRC and ARC fellowships salaries has been paid as a one –off allocation for all ARC and NHMRC grant holders in 2006.

There is still scope for lobbying the NHMRC to get rid of PSPs for people employed on project grants and to quote appropriate institutional rates in applications while still funding with a one-line budget. There is also an anomaly in the description of PSP levels and the terms used to describe them. For example, there is a junior post doc rate cited for a salary level of a research officer. This produces confusion. We have also lobbied the NHMRC to fix up the descriptors and remove this anomaly.

This lobbying has been underway by UWA and the other Group of Eight universities for more than a year, and it is hoped that the changes being introduced into the NHMRC scheme may reflect the views that have been expressed.

Careers

The issue of careers for research-only staff remains, and job insecurity is a real problem. The safety net scheme is a good scheme and it works effectively. People who have been employed on grants and who fall off a sequence of grants and are of value to the research group are given financial support by the University while seeking further grant funding. Provided that research-only staff funded on grants seek further grant funding, they know that if they are unsuccessful in one round, then they will be supported by the University for a year while other sources of grant funding are sought. As details of the scheme have become better known, research groups are increasingly careful to apply for a sequence of research grants to allow for both continuity of employment and career progression. When things go wrong, as occasionally they will, the safety net scheme is there to provide support. As a response to the PARC report the scheme will now be tweaked and enhanced to provide greater certainty.

It is also important that the University continues to use offers of continuing employment to underpin the work of a growing number of key researchers on NHMRC and ARC fellowships. This does give a greater degree of certainty even if the pressure of competing to find salary (and prestige) remains.

In the Western Australian context, we can not forget the payments made from the West Australian Government's Medical and Health Research Infrastructure Fund. The University

pays this support directly to its NHMRC fellows (and other CIs) and these can be used to reduce the impact of any grant funding shortfalls.

Conditions

All the matters that concern conditions of employment for research-only staff can be dealt with through the usual processes for dealing with issues of employment policy and Collective Bargaining (formerly Enterprise Bargaining). Since the report was completed the Federal Government has introduced its *WorkChoices* industrial relations legislation, which has required the University to introduce a greater level of uniformity between academic and general staff leave requirements and entitlements, which will also impact upon research staff. All employment issues are with Human Resources for further deliberation and analysis, but some issues are clarified in the attached Executive response.

Executive Response to Phase One of the PARC report.

The Project for the Advancement of Research Careers (PARC) Phase 1 Report was completed in 6 October 2005. Below is the full set of recommendations (in italics) plus suggested executive responses in bold.

1) *That a person be appointed to follow-up the recommendations in the PARC Report Phase 1 and monitor progress on work arising out of the recommendations with a view to producing a Phase 2 report reviewing outcomes by July 2007.*

Has been actioned, and implementation plan provided to Executive

2) *That the PARC Report Phase 1 be circulated among the University community including the UWA Researchers Association, the Academic Consultative Committee, Organisational Staff Development Services, Human Resources, Financial Services, Research Services as well as Deans of Faculties, Heads of Schools, School Managers, Directors of Centres, chief investigators and research staff for further comment and clarification.*

Actioned: on the web, together with this response

3) *That a separate project be set up to look at payment and recovery processes for annual leave, sick leave, long service leave and redundancy/severance payouts to ensure that the cost is spread equitably across the project grant cost centres contributing to salary at the relevant times, and with consideration of the fact that payment of entitlements out of project grant cost centres will be a further drain on those project budgets where on-costs are not fully funded.*

A project is underway with Financial Services, Research Services, Human Resources and the University Managers Group to look at the central 1% long service levy and how this might be allocated to cover liabilities of externally research funded staff in the schools. A more general discussion is being held about whether this levy should be increased and should continue to be collected centrally, as well as what other leave liabilities it should cover.

4) *That standardisation of annual leave, sick leave, and long service leave entitlements across academic and general streams be raised and considered in enterprise bargaining discussions, bearing in mind that access to better and cumulative leave entitlements may provide research staff with an additional buffer against funding gaps.*

To be considered as part of the next Collective Agreement negotiation process. Some standardisation has already occurred as a result of the *Work Choices* legislation, as per all-staff email pertaining to annual leave and sick leave.

5) *That those recommendations in the PARC Report Phase 1 with substantial budget implications be given careful consideration and be included in the 2006 budget discussions by the University Executive.*

Items with budget implications (e.g. training) will be picked up in the relevant divisional budgets.

6) *That specific issues be followed-up in the 2006 Working Life survey where appropriate.*

Additional issues arising from the Working Life Survey will be considered in 2007, and specific analysis of research staff responses undertaken.

Grant Funding

Grant holder miscalculation / Requested budget not supported by funding body:

7) *That project management training be provided for Chief Investigators to ensure that indexation and on-costs are built into grant applications wherever possible and that staff employed under research grants are employed at appropriate levels in order to minimise shortfalls due to budget miscalculations and grant body funding shortfalls which remain the grant holder's responsibility.*

Current training courses will be reviewed, and project management training for CIs is now being offered through OSDS in association with Research Services as part of the package of development schemes. It will also be included as part of HoS/ School managers and Faculty managers training. Research Services currently run annual research budget workshops and will look to increase these to twice yearly

8) *That Research Services develop a better grant budget template to help reduce budget miscalculations.*

A new grant budget template has been completed and is now on the Research Services website.

ARC discovery and linkage project grants and ARC fellowships:

9) *That ARC grant applicants, Heads of Schools, and Deans of Faculties be informed that, for ARC grants, on-costs in excess of 26% (covering severance pay and long service leave) must be budgeted for from a source outside of the grant.*

ARC on-cost rate is now 28%. Research Services to ensure greater understanding of the issue and the means of managing it, through training programs.

10) *That the University, through the Faculties and the Schools, continue to meet the known gap between institutional on-costs and ARC-funded on-costs.*

Heads and Directors to be directed to existing policy on Research Services web-site. Senior Managers' Forum to receive presentation by Research Services.

NHMRC project grants:

11) *That the University lobby NHMRC to change its budget policy so that it funds salaries, including on-costs, at the institutional level (as is currently the case with ARC)*

Agreed - on-going

12) *That the University clarify with NHMRC the skills and experience assumed at each PSP level in its current funding policy*

Agreed - on-going

13) *That a mapping exercise be undertaken, in discussion with experienced grant holders, to see how well NHMRC PSP salary levels, as awarded, reflect institutional salary levels. Entry level PhDs should be used to set the first mapping point. This will provide documented evidence as to the extent of any mismatch, and support a case to be made for the need for NHMRC to pay salaries at institutional levels.*

NHMRC fellowships:

Mapping of NHMRC PSP rates to UWA institutional rates completed; to be kept up-to-date.

14) *That the University lobby NHMRC to provide additional fellowships for senior researchers*

Note 2006 Federal Budget initiative

15) *That The University of Western Australia lobby the NHMRC to set firm eligibility rules about the level of experience required in each category of NHMRC fellowship, so as to avoid the situation where experienced researchers apply for more junior fellowships. In the meantime, in cases where senior researchers apply for more junior fellowships, it is important to ensure that this is identified at the application stage and that there is a signed commitment from the relevant School and/or Faculty that the salary gap will be funded locally.*

Agreed re lobbying of NHMRC – ongoing. Confirm requirement for sign-off on salary gaps and on-cost responsibilities at application stage through green and gold forms for the 2007 application round

16) *That The University of Western Australia continue to meet the known gap for some categories of NHMRC Research Fellowships at the 7.5% level in the short term, while assessing what further adjustments are appropriate and possible in the longer term.*

Agreed

One-off lag in indexation due to Collective Agreement salary increases:

17) *That The University of Western Australia consider making a one-off contribution towards projects whose budgets were calculated prior to Enterprise Bargaining agreements in order to ease shortfalls arising out of one-off Enterprise Bargaining-related salary increases.*

Supplementation of 2% of the non-fellow salary component of ARC and NHMRC grants was provided in 2006

Short term contracts

18) *That 'Recommendation to Offer New Employment Contract' forms for fixed-term contracts under 24 months include additional questions to ascertain, in cases where the*

position is externally-funded, whether funding is available for longer than the period indicated and, if so, why a longer contract is not sought.

Agreed. HR to implement in 2007.

Safety Net Scheme

19) *That clarification be provided on key elements of the Safety Net Scheme including the evidence required (i) to show that continuation of the staff's position is of strategic importance to the group and (ii) to substantiate claims that the person is normally supported by external research grant income but an individual or group has failed to obtain continued funding for their position.*

Agreed. Individuals will be advised that they will receive a year's salary in between grants. Application criteria to be simplified and communicated to research staff, and Heads of School.

20) *That Deans, Heads of Schools and School Managers be informed of the existence of the Scheme and that they disseminate this information to their research staff.*

Agreed. Deputy Vice Chancellor (R&I) to advise.

21) *That a separate source of funding be identified for the continuation of the Safety Net Scheme in anticipation of the increased access to the Scheme.*

Monitor use of scheme and respond if needed.

22) *That the use of the Scheme be monitored over the next 12 months and a recommendation be made at the end of that period regarding further changes, if any, to the Scheme.*

Agreed

23) *That Faculties be encouraged to supplement the University-wide Scheme with Faculty-specific Schemes.*

Not to be implemented, given existing budget pressures within Faculties.

Register of researchers to meet short-term needs

24) *That funding be provided to set up and maintain a web-based register of early career researchers who are available to meet short-term research needs.*

25) *If the register is established, that a decision be made as to the most appropriate area to maintain the register, and funding be provided to ensure its maintenance.*

26) *That the use of the register be monitored to ensure it is not used to create a casualised research workforce to replace longer, fixed-term research positions.*

Director Human Resources to investigate and advise on the establishment of a register of early career researchers, on short term contracts to meet short term research needs, and ensure HR data is accurate in terms of research staff.

Leave and Entitlements

Superannuation:

27) *That the University support a change in policy to make staff eligible for superannuation after a period of 24 months of continuous service, notwithstanding whether the period was covered by one or more contracts, and that it enters into discussions with UniSuper to bring this policy into effect.*

There are issues here to do with the UniSuper Deed of Covenant. Contracts must be of two or more years' duration to allow for 17% superannuation. Director HR to pursue this issue with Group of Eight HR Directors, and advise on an approach to UniSuper.

Annual Leave:

28) *That contracts for academic research staff include a tick box to indicate that they are aware that accumulated annual leave must be taken within the period of the grant.*

29) *That Human Resources remind fixed term academic research staff to take any outstanding annual leave when they send out the expiry of contract notice three months prior the expiry of the contract, with a copy of the notice to the chief investigator.*

30) *That school managers and chief investigators be trained in policies and procedures related to annual and other leave practices for research staff.*

31) *That payment and recovery processes for annual leave be centralised, with annual reconciliation, so that the cost is spread across the project grant cost centres contributing to salary at the relevant times, rather than be drawn from the current project grant cost centre, or that an alternative method of calculating liability be developed to ensure that a current project grant cost centre does not contribute more than its actual liability*

32) *That the differences between all general and academic staff in their annual leave entitlements be raised and considered in enterprise bargaining discussions.*

Leave conditions for research staff are being reviewed as part of WorkChoices implementation. All staff will be advised of requirements for clearing leave. HR to investigate a more streamlined method to manage payment and cost recovery for annual leave.

Sick Leave:

33) *That payment and recovery processes for sick leave be reconsidered and either centralised, with annual reconciliation, so that the cost is spread across the project grant cost centres contributing to salary at the relevant times, rather than be drawn from the current project grant cost centre, or an alternative method of calculating liability be developed to ensure that a current project grant cost centre does not contribute more than its actual liability.*

As above

34) *That an actuarial study be undertaken to determine what levy could be applied to research grants should the University decide to centralise payment of any sick leave in excess on one week.*

Not agreed – there will be no centralised sick leave scheme

35) *That differences between general and academic staff in their sick leave entitlements be raised and considered in enterprise bargaining discussions.*

Agreed

Long service leave:

36) *That payment and recovery processes for long service leave be centralised, with annual reconciliation, so that the cost is spread across the project grant cost centres contributing to salary at the relevant times, rather than be drawn from the project grant cost centre current at the time of application.*

The central collection of the LSL levy is under discussion, although the management of LSL payment remains the responsibility of the School.

37) *That any-one who has served at The University of Western Australia long enough to be eligible for long service leave be considered eligible for an ongoing appointment.*

Part of a separate review that is currently being undertaken

38) *That the substantial differences between all general and academic staff in their long service leave entitlements are raised and considered in enterprise bargaining discussions.*

Agreed

Parental Leave:

39) *That the University develop a protocol for the payment of parental leave that does not levy project grant cost centres and may include Central and School contributions.*

The centre currently funds 50% of the return-to-work bonus. Other parental leave payments remain at the Faculty/School level. This issue will be considered by HR, as it pertains to all staff on fixed-term contracts.

Redundancy / Severance Payouts:

40) *That, in the course of enterprise bargaining discussions, consideration be given to changing the minimum eligibility criteria for severance pay to continuous service of 12 months or more rather than continuous service of over 12 months in order to maximise access of research staff to severance payments and in view of the fact that employment contracts are generally for standard periods such as 12 months.*

These are not only questions for research staff but for all staff on fixed term contracts. They are under consideration and form part of the normal discussion and preparation of collective agreement negotiations Severance payouts have been increased in the current Collective Agreement.

41) *That payment and recovery processes are centralised, with annual reconciliation, so that the cost is spread across the project grant cost centres contributing to redundancy / severance payout entitlements at the relevant times, rather than be drawn from the current project grant cost centre*

Human Resources is investigating the implications of this recommendation.

Classification and tenure

Identifying research staff at The University of Western Australia:

42) *That, for internally-contracted research staff, there be a tick box on the Recommendation to Offer New Employment Contract form asking whether or not the person will be undertaking research duties, in addition to whether or not it is a research- or externally-funded position.*

A project is underway to accurately record the research status of relevant employees to make sure that an accurate list of research-only staff can be generated from the HR system.

43) *That, for externally-contracted research staff, annual reports of affiliated Centres and Institutes to the University include a section on research staff listing the number of research staff (other than teaching-and-research staff), their positions and levels, and whether their contracts are likely to continue for a further 12 months.*

Centre/Institute Directors to consider

General versus academic classification:

44) *That the University consult with The University of Western Australia Researchers Association and develop appropriate guidelines on the criteria for classifying research staff as either general or academic.*

45) *That the classification guidelines be included in project management and human resources training programs.*

See response to Recommendation 42 above. The procedures for classifying research staff as academic or general staff members is being standardised and will be publicised shortly.

Titles:

46) *That changes be implemented as soon as possible to ensure a consistent approach to the use of titles across academic research and teaching-and-research streams in the interests of parity of opportunity and status between the streams.*

47) *That the University move as soon as possible to a 3 or 4-tiered system of academic classification levels and that, at the very least, the new system retain comparability of titles across academic research and teaching-and-research streams but also consider the use of a single stream of titles.*

Under review as part of a review of the academic structure

48) *That a separate field be created on the human resources management system to identify fellowship recipients and the fellowship type (e.g. NHMRC, ARC, Wellcome, Federation etc).*

Agreed - HR to consider implementation

49) *That NHMRC, ARC and other fellowship recipients use an alternative designation following their title and name to identify their fellowship status.*

Under review as part of a review of the academic structure

Tenure:

50) *That a working group including Lou Landau and Bill Ford supported by Diane Christensen be set up to look at the feasibility of offering ongoing appointments to career researchers who have been at the University for an extended period.*

Working group was established; final report not yet submitted. University of Bristol precedent to be examined by Director Human Resources and Director Research Services

51) *That Heads of School be encouraged to exert greater management capacity in order to make tenure decisions based on a School's strategic needs, not on whether the staff is research or otherwise.*

52) *Professional Development Review and "Heads of School" training programs be revised to include this change in direction*

To be incorporate in the Heads-Up program for 2007

Training, development and participation

Staff development and training:

53) *That appropriate training programs for better research project management be developed and provided regularly for chief investigators of research grants, administrative staff supporting research activities (school managers, key persons in human resources, financial services, Research Services finance staff, superannuation office etc), and research staff employed under research grants. Programs should cover: research budgets including on-costs; research staff conditions and entitlements; and guidelines for general versus academic classification.*

OSDS in consultation with Research Services have developed a series of workshops to be delivered at the end of 2006 and during 2007

54) *Given their success, that the University re-introduce leadership and career development programs specific to research staff, and include streams for early career, mid-career and senior level researchers.*

Support for mid career researchers will be considered by a Research Committee working party. Data is to be collected and analysed.

55) *That Schools support research staff to attend relevant staff development workshops and programs.*

Agreed

Conference leave and funding:

56) *That minimum levels of travel support be provided by Schools for research staff to attend national/international conferences at which they have had abstracts accepted.*

Faculties to review access by research staff to Faculty travel schemes

57) *That the University provide more University-wide travel grants for researchers at all levels to attend national/international conferences at which they have had abstracts accepted.*

All central travel grants were devolved to the Faculties some years ago. There is no central scheme other than the Travel Grants for New Academic Staff administered by the Research Committee and the General Staff Development Grants administered by OSDS

Academic study leave:

58) *That the University revisit the issue of academic study leave for research staff in the future.*

No changed proposed at this time. Study leave specifically addresses the need for staff to be relieved of teaching in order to pursue research. It would appear to be redundant for research staff.

Eligibility for internal grant funding at The University of Western Australia:

59) *That researchers be correctly classified as academic so those on an academic career path are not excluded from applying for internal grants.*

Eligibility for internal research grants is under review as are the criteria for appointment as an academic or general staff research appointment

60) *That The University of Western Australia establish a policy stating that internal grants are available to all academic staff, not just teaching-and-research staff.*

Eligibility for internal research grants is under review

Access to the infrastructure funding from the research quantum:

61) *That research quantum distribution models within Faculties, Schools and other units apply equally to research and teaching-and-research staff, with some acknowledgement that the equitable distribution of research infrastructure may increase the sustainability of research programs and research staff employed within those programs.*

This is a matter for decision by Heads of School after negotiation with all staff.

Performance Management:

62) *That reporting lines at the School level include research staff to ensure that they are covered by the Professional Development Review process, regardless of contract length .*

Agreed. To be included in Senior Managers' Forum discussion

63) *That research staff be included as Professional Development Review reviewers and that Professional Development Review training covers issues specific to research staff.*

OSDS to address

64) *That research staff be encouraged to use the annual reviews to develop and pursue an appropriate career development program.*

Agreed

Participation in university decision making:

65) *That an audit of all University-wide committees (Academic Board, Research Committee etc.) be undertaken to assess the level of research staff representation and to ensure that there are mechanisms in place to ensure elected representation of research staff.*

Agreed

66) *That Faculty boards include at least one elected member of research staff.*

67) *That Schools include all members of academic staff, including academic research staff, at their School level academic meetings, as well as at least one representative of general research staff.*

Agreed. To be raised at Senior Managers' Forum

One staff

A "one staff" policy:

68) *That The University of Western Australia move towards one enterprise bargaining agreement for both academic and general staff.*

This is under investigation by Human Resources. This does not necessarily mean identical conditions, under any new format for the collective agreement/s.

69) *That the University provide teaching-and-research and research staff with one uniform and simplified career structure and one set of titles.*

Under review with review of academic structure

70) *That ongoing employment be a priority for all staff, including research staff.*

Review underway to look at feasibility of implementing this recommendation

71) *That, in keeping with a multidisciplinary approach to research, greater mobility of staff across disciplines be encouraged.*

The University is committed to a 'one staff' approach and work on these issues is ongoing and will consider Research staff mobility as part of the review of the Mobility programme