

## ***ARCFuture Fellowships* Consultation response proforma**

The ARC *Future Fellowships* Consultation Paper is available at: **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.**

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

Email: [ARC-FutureFellowships@arc.gov.au](mailto:ARC-FutureFellowships@arc.gov.au)

If you have any questions about the *Future Fellowships* scheme, please contact:

Professor Margaret Clayton, Executive Director  
Ph: (02) 6287 6685 or email: [margaret.clayton@arc.gov.au](mailto:margaret.clayton@arc.gov.au)

Ms Debbie Kirchner, Acting Assistant Director  
Ph: (02) 6287 6669 or email: [debbie.kirchner@arc.gov.au](mailto:debbie.kirchner@arc.gov.au)

### **Contact Details**

|                        |  |
|------------------------|--|
| Title:                 | <b>Deputy Vice Chancellor &amp; Vice President: Research &amp; Innovation</b>      |
| Name:                  | <b>Professor Caroline McMillen</b>   |
| Organisation:          | <b>The University of South Australia</b>   |
| Contact email address: | <a href="mailto:Caroline.McMillen@unisa.edu.au">Caroline.McMillen@unisa.edu.au</a> |

### **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 Future Fellowships Scheme provides an important opportunity to provide a template of the important elements required to build a contemporary research workforce for Australia. A critical element in the Scheme is the intent to ensure that the current ‘gap’ in career opportunities for researchers between the ‘early’ career stage and the more ‘senior’ stage is recognised. In this context, inclusion of 5-15 years research experience since the award of the PhD as a ‘guiding’ definition of mid career researcher would be appropriate. Given the complexity of research careers, it would be appropriate to leave this as a ‘guiding’, rather than ‘absolute’ definition and rather, ensure that the central issue will be for reviewers to consider ‘track record in relation to the whole of career research opportunity’.

It may be appropriate to consider the Future Fellows in 3 'bands' to allow for greater differentiation between researchers at different stages of their careers. The first band could represent the 'up to 8 years' post PhD and offer a pathway for the 'early mid' career researcher to be retained in Australia against the competitive forces of the current international 'war for talent'. The second band could represent 'up to 12 years' post PhD and the final band could represent up to 16 years post PhD - and include a more senior and established mid career group. These bands could equally well be distinguished by salary levels - rather than 'time post PhD' - taking the view that the selection criteria are likely to be a more relevant determinant of success than specific number of years of experience. In this instance it is critical that the salary levels are competitive i.e. that the salaries are set at a premium level higher than the top of the current senior lecturer, associate professor and professorial salary levels. This would ensure that the Future Fellow Scheme is viewed as a flagship scheme for Australia.

One major issue is to ensure that the Future Fellows scheme adds significantly to Australia's workforce capacity, rather than replaces the role of other fellowship schemes within the current landscape. It would be appropriate for an audit of the current ARC and NHMRC fellowship schemes to be undertaken in 2008 to ensure that at the end of the Future Fellowships scheme that there are at least 1,000 new competitive research fellowships available within Australia.

Factors other than child-rearing/ caring responsibilities could be considered to provide a more complete listing of career 'interruptions'. For example, academic staff often carry a significant teaching responsibility for long periods of their career and clinicians often carry a significant clinical load which can significantly impact their research capacity. It may no longer be helpful in framing the future research workforce profile for Australia to use the 'traditional' research career path as the benchmark. In particular, Australia needs to encourage talented, trained women to engage in research through pathways which enable them to realise their full career potential. It is the case that, for complex reasons, this does not occur in current fellowship schemes. This is an issue of workforce planning, rather than one of individual equity, and should be carefully addressed in the Future Fellowship scheme.

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

**Response:**

We strongly support the availability of Future Fellowships as both part-time and full-time fellowship positions. It is the case, however, that in a national competition, part time applicants are likely to be viewed as less committed to a research career. In this context it would be important to allocate a specific number of part time Fellowships and to underscore their value in the retention of individuals in a research career path. Whilst we would not advocate a 'mix and match' Fellowship system, ie: part time research, part time clinical practice, teaching or industry employment it would be helpful if full time Future Fellows could spend up to 10% of time contributing to their institutions through engagement in teaching or developing industry partnerships. This type of activity will help support a more rounded career development path.

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:**

It is difficult to envisage how a quality assessment process can be implemented in the face of an unlimited number of applications from each eligible institution. It is also difficult to envisage that institutions will take the time to identify those specific applications which align with their strategic mission if there is no compelling reason to limit the number of applications to be submitted.

One option might be to impose a set of institutional eligibility requirements for the scheme, ensuring that Future Fellows can realise their full potential in their host institution. These might include: demonstrable research concentrations (linked with national research priorities); demonstrated ability to provide research mentoring; appropriately established research infrastructure; access to senior undergraduate, honours and postgraduate students; and developmental opportunities around research leadership.

A second option may be to impose a limit on the number of times an individual can apply for a Future Fellow - if this was capped at 2 applications, this may provide an incentive for an applicant to consider the application process carefully before committing to an application in any one round.

**General Feedback**

The ARC also welcomes feedback on any other aspect of the proposed administrative arrangements for the new *Future Fellowships* scheme. One of the aims of the Scheme is to encourage collaboration within the sector, between universities and universities and industry.

1. One option is to have a separate group of Future Linkage Fellows - supported 50% by the ARC and 50% by an industry sponsor. The key requirement would be for the Fellow to work full time on a research project - but the project could relate directly to the aims and priorities of the

industry partner. The availability of such fellowships would enable a larger number of Future Fellowships to be offered for the same current level of investment in the scheme.

2. Currently it is not intended that assessment of the research project to be undertaken by the Fellow will represent a major component of the overall assessment. It would be important that a high quality researcher engages in a project which is assessed by their peers as representing a high quality project and one which provides excellent platform for a high calibre research career. Accordingly it may be appropriate to develop the criterion 'strategic alignment' from one which focuses on the strategic fit of the project with the institution to one which also includes the competitiveness of the proposed project in the international context. Thus the criteria under 'strategic alignment' could include:
  - i) Alignment of the research project with the research mission and strengths of the host organisation (including the contribution to the building and sustainability of existing or emerging strengths of the host organisation); and
  - ii) Significance and relevance of the research project in the context of the international field and as a platform for a high profile research career
3. A lack of clarity/ ambiguity was noted in the paper around whether the scheme is intended to develop and improve the capability of the individual researcher, or to improve the capacity of Australia and/or institutions; and to what extent applications from international researchers will be considered when so much of the intent of the scheme is couched in language about Australian researchers. No mention is made in the selection criteria of non-Australian applicants. It would assist institution to know how international candidates will be rated compared to Australian candidates in the selection process. *It is proposed that the selection criteria around Australian vs non-Australian applicants be more specific.*
4. The consultation paper proposes that 10% of the selection criteria be based on national priority areas. The exemplar areas of national priority cited are focussed more on the sciences than the social sciences and this should be addressed by broadening the range of exemplars cited, eg: the social aspects of sustainability (e.g. water law), terrorism, security and secularism etc.
5. The first criterion for the scheme is the capacity to conduct high quality, innovative research. The selection criteria for the scheme will need to be very carefully considered when assessing the record of high quality research outputs. The current Federation Fellow scheme results in few successes in the humanities and this should not be the outcome of the Future Fellows scheme. *It is proposed that discipline specific panels be used to judge capacity to conduct high quality, innovative research and that this be supplemented with external discipline experts.*

6. A template for reports of progress made and research outputs attained by applicants who currently or in the past have held ARC or NHMRC research fellowships is suggested. The outputs derived from previous fellowship funding by the ARC/NHMRC need to be carefully scrutinized.
7. It is highly likely that applicants will make more than one application in a given year for a range of competitive fellowships- this in itself should not be an issue and should not disadvantage an application. The only requirement should be for an individual to withdraw all other 'live' fellowship applications if they have been offered and accepted a Future Fellowship.