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Industry, Science and Innovation Committee Report 3 December 2008

I am very pleased to be able to speak to the report by the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Innovation titled *Building Australia's research capacity*. I would like also, as the previous members that have spoken on this report have done, to congratulate and thank the secretariat for their hard work, and I also thank the other members of the committee including the chair, who all put in a significant amount of work.

The committee received submissions and heard evidence from a wide variety of people including universities, students and other research training facilities. There was a lot of diverse information provided to the committee, but at the same time there were a lot of recurring threads throughout the evidence that was provided to the committee. Many of those themes form the basis of our recommendations.

One of the messages coming through loudly is that Australia should not drop the ball on its research or its research capacity. It came through very clearly that we need to be building our research in Australia. We need to continue to strive to be—and this is an old turn of phrase by a previous Prime Minister—the 'clever country'. This was certainly something that came through in the evidence we heard.

A number of different areas were covered in this report and I will go through each of those areas, highlighting some of the main issues as I see them. The first was research funding, which is of critical importance. The theme that came out of this part of the report is that we do need to fund the real cost of research. This is incredibly important. I want to stress the importance of ensuring that the funding for research provides students with a minimum standard of supervision and resources. The committee heard that some students doing higher degree research had a lot of resources at their disposal that allowed them to pursue their careers, whereas other students perhaps did not have the same level of resources. So ensuring the maintenance of minimum standards of supervision and resources is, I think, of critical importance, and that comes down to us funding the full amount of the cost of research.

Another critical element that emerged in this area of the inquiry is reflected by the committee's recommendation that research training funding be disbursed partially at the beginning, partially at a specific benchmark and partially at the end. An important point to come through from the universities

was that, although they certainly appreciate receiving the funding, it does not necessarily come at the time it is needed, when the student is about to start work and requires the resources for their research project. This is something that would not cost the government any more to remedy but could benefit universities. The other element that came out in this area was the transferral of the research that we do into industry and encouraging those industry partnerships. I know that my local university, the Flinders University of South Australia, is doing a lot of research into medical devices. Certainly that is an area with great potential for transfer into a commercial environment.

The second area of the report looked at support for the students themselves. We have heard a lot about that, including increasing by six months the period of candidature for PhD students and increasing the stipend. The evidence, which formed part of the deliberations of the committee, was quite overwhelming. We do really need to look at the length of PhDs and the level of payment because we are seeing the average time extending well beyond the three years of the stipend and a little beyond the four years of the training candidature. That is most important. Part of the reason for the proposed extension is that a lot of students run out of money, and so it was unanimously agreed by the committee, and certainly by the submissions that we received, that the stipend needed to be increased and regularly adjusted to keep up with the cost of living. So I am very pleased that the committee recommended not only a 50 per cent increase but that it be fully indexed.

The third broad area was attracting students to research training. It was recognised by the universities as well as by the committee that there is a challenge in making research an attractive career path. We need to ensure that our brightest students are attracted to developing the future of our country, so the committee came up with a number of recommendations. Remission of HECS debts for successful research PhD graduates is a very important incentive that could encourage a lot of people to choose a research option. This fits in with the government's policy of remission of HECS debts for students in areas of need, such as maths, science and early childhood education. This recommendation accords with the direction that this government is taking.

The final area that I want to touch on is promoting research careers. We heard a lot of evidence of bright students being attracted to PhDs, enjoying their PhDs and struggling through on very low incomes but then, when it got to furthering their research careers, deciding that it was not worth going on. They were often snapped up by the private sector. So we need to ensure there is development for research careers. We also heard a lot of evidence that research careers had changed. A lot of research careers were very short term because they were based on some sort of grant or researchers were employed casually by the university. Actually developing these careers is incredibly important. There are a number of recommendations for how, after a student has successfully completed a PhD, they can continue. I would like to draw attention to recommendation 34. It reads:

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government implement a postdoctoral fellowship scheme targeted at early-career researchers who are up to five years out from PhD completion.

That is one of the many recommendations to really promote research careers.

Overall, as the previous speakers have said, there was a lot of enthusiasm in this inquiry. We had very robust debate but in the end came to a solid conclusion and some solid recommendations. This is such an important topic. Australia cannot drop the ball when it comes to research. Therefore, I commend this report and thank everyone involved.

Debate (on motion by **Mr Hayes**) adjourned.