



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

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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:

We believe that the definition should be extended to 5 – 20 years to more accurately reflect the true range of mid-career researchers. We agree with the need for flexibility in this definition.

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

Response:

Yes, with a maximum limit of 6 years for tenure of the Fellowships as proposed. We believe that it is important to allow flexibility for family and other career responsibilities.

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:

No proposal limit should be applied to the number of fellowships supported by multiple institutions.

General Feedback

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

This submission is made on behalf of the Australian ITER Forum, a body spanning over 130 Australian scientists and engineers who support an Australian involvement in the international development of fusion energy via ITER project participation. The submission is the result of wide consultation with members.

The Australian ITER Forum welcomes the creation of 1000 Future Fellowships. We note that the funding level (\$200k per year) and funding mix (salary plus \$50k research support funding to the administering organization) is a good match to the Fusion Fellowships proposed in the fusion science and engineering strategic plan, which was released in August 2007. That strategic plan (available from www.ainse.edu.au/fusion.html) articulated the opportunities and benefits presented to Australia by joining other nations in the development of fusion power and proposes a new, multi-faceted Australian Fusion Initiative (“the Initiative”). This Initiative, if supported, secures Australian scientific expertise with a targeted fellowships scheme, provides appropriate support for Australian fusion science infrastructure, and yields Australian involvement in ITER through provision of an instrument or similar apparatus. The Initiative is budgeted at \$63 million over 10 years. To date, letters of support for the strategic plan and Initiative have been received the ITER organization, the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation, the H-1 Board, seven Australian Universities, and five Australian learned societies and Academies. The proposal also has growing support across Parliament and within Cabinet, some of which is in writing.

We believe the ARC Future Fellowships scheme provides opportunity for Australia to grow it’s footprint in strategic energy research, and consolidate the basis for ITER engagement proposed by our strategic plan. With regards the ARC’s Future Fellowships scheme, our specific recommendations are:

1. Future Fellowships be clearly differentiated from existing schemes in scale and

focus, forming a new distinct element of the National Competitive Grants Program, which better recognises the strategic value of coordinated research. Concomitantly, the ARC should seek broader advice in assessment of Future Fellowship competitive grants to put them in the context of strategic research.

Rationale: The objective of future fellowships, as described by Minster Carr is to make “Australia’s research effort more focused, internationally competitive, collaborative and interdisciplinary”. The Discovery scheme administered by the ARC is a diffuse blue-sky research fund, which is intentionally unfocused. We submit that the creation of a new independent scheme with a stronger strategic research remit would deliver a more focused outcome than Discovery. The inclusion of a strategic element would also better attract talent in internationally recognised strategic research fields such as fusion.

2. In the final guidelines, the ARC promote Future Fellowships applications from teams of researchers (both within and across institutions) who bring a range of expertise to bear on complex or cross-disciplinary problems. The researchers should be judged individually, but they should be encouraged to link their applications with other members in their team.

Rationale: Greater coordination, which would be enabled by teams of researchers, maximises impact on complex and cross-dictionary problems, such as realising fusion power, and encourages collaboration within Australia and abroad. Coordination of fellowships would also enable Australia to better leverage international research activities.

3. Future fellowships be tenable, through the administering organization, in international programs that are of strategic value to the nation. Up to 18 months of the 4 year candidature should be tenable in international institutions.

Rationale: The opportunities available to scientists in the international arena far exceed Australia’s modest R&D investment. In addition as a lure to attract very high quality applicants, posting fellows in international projects provides significant international leverage.

4. A further selection criteria be added to collaboration: “the extent to which the project engages international activities”.

5. Two additional tiers be introduced at the lower step of \$80,000 (plus 28% on-costs) and an intermediate step of \$115,000 (plus 28% on-costs).

Rationale: This would allow greater flexibility in matching the performance of applicants, and more accurately reflects the career progression of researchers working in Australia

6. The ARC re-examine the entire array of Fellowship schemes to better integrate them with the Future Fellowships. This should be done within the next 18 months to integrate fully by the 2010 round of applications. The main goal should be to provide a tapered structure without the current bottleneck at the ARF level for those who have just completed their postdoctoral training.

7. The ARC place increased focus on how the project builds the research

strengths of the nation, not just the host organisation(s). Specifically, the text “host organisation(s)” in the Strategic alignment selection criteria should be replaced with “host organisation(s) and the nation”. The associated statement of alignment should be modified to indicate how the administering organization will maximise the wider employment opportunities to the fellow in Australia, post-fellowship.

8. Applications from continuing staff should be assessed only on the added value gained above and beyond their usual research productivity in that organization.

Rationale: The proportion of continuing staff in universities and publicly funded research agencies is different. This aspect is rare when compared to the majority of fellowships the ARC currently manages, and which have to be held in an eligible university.

9. There is a need for host institutions to articulate that the research support exists (or will exist) for the Future Fellowship. As such, the level of research support provided by the host should be a component of strategic alignment assessment criteria.

Rationale: These researchers need to hit the ground running. An institution cannot simply provide a notional home, and then ask the successful candidate to go out and find their own research support with no guarantee of success in any particular funding round.