

Increased funding for HDR scholarships

The Australian Postgraduate Award (APA) is the main Commonwealth scholarship for higher degree by research (HDR) students.

Available APAs have not kept pace with increases in HDR enrolments, to the extent that at many universities, students with excellent honours results are missing out on scholarships.

A mere 12% of domestic research students receive an APA scholarship and this only provides them with an income of \$19,616 pa. This means that even the lucky few who have such a scholarship are working for a pittance, and often have to supplement their income through other means.

Research students should also be allowed greater flexibility in how they can use their stipends to support their candidature. Scholarship holders should be allowed flexibility in going part time, and part time stipends should not be counted as assessable income.

APAs for PhDs are only available for 3 years, with a possible 6-month extension. However, each student place is funded through the Research Training Scheme for 4 years. This means that many HDR students find themselves without an income in the important final stages of their research, causing hardship and attrition. APAs must be available for the full 4 years of the PhD program. The current situation wastes both talent and funding.

While it is difficult to get an exact figure that allows for variation by discipline:

Most universities estimate that between 65 and 70% of their research is carried out by postgraduate research students. Second, around 25-30% of publications arising from university research has a postgraduate research student as one of the authors. Third, research students are pivotal in helping to establish international collaborative links. [Siddle, D. 1997 Submission to the Committee conducting the Review of Higher Education Financing and Policy from the Deans and Directors of Graduate Education, April 23.]

If Australia is serious about being internationally competitive in research and development, it needs to lift its game in supporting the next generation of researchers and address the abysmal funding levels of HDR students. The APA stipend rate must be increased by at least 30%, and the number available increased by at least 20%. Such a change should be seen as a precursor to further increases.

Key Targets

- Increase the duration of the APA to at least 4 years
- Increase the number of APAs offered by at least 20%
- Increase the stipend rate of all APAs by at least 30%