

## ACT Grants

This paper details the grants policy adopted by the Board of Delegates to operate from 2007.

The ACT's policies and procedures for grants should be related to practice in the university sector as far as is consistent with what appears to be good practice.

The ACT has offered grants and scholarships for some time. Over time the Board has made some revisions to the type and conditions that apply. Now that the ACT is taking up the opportunities offered to private providers—especially with respect to the pathways being opened up that lead to self-accreditation and modified university title in the National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes (July 2006)—and is one of the largest of the higher education private providers in Australia, there is merit in restructuring the nature of the grants and scholarships the College offers. The introduction of the DMin provides a further reason for the restructure because the methodology employed in DMin research may more often reflect the approaches of the social sciences than the humanities.

As long as finances permit, the ACT would continue to make available up to \$25,000 p.a. to fund the grant regime outlined below. The Delegates would be interested in knowing what dollar amounts might be allocated to each of the five categories of grants. More money could be made available in the future if there is a demonstrated potential for an increased level of research activity among academic staff employed by ACT affiliated colleges.

### Scope of grants

The ACT currently offers the following grants:

1. Research grants to support research of full time staff
2. Research student grants, and
3. Development grants

Typically the research grants are for travel overseas to work at another institution and gain access to their library and to support study leave. Research so far is based on the humanities model of library research. There is little done that corresponds to social science research that might be based on large data bases, surveys or field work. With an increased interest in ministry studies, social science type research may increase.

Following that principle of reflecting university practice, the classification of grants could be changed to:

1. Research (academic staff and research candidates)
2. Conference and seminar participation (academic staff and research candidates)
3. Professional development including study leave support (academic staff and affiliated colleges)
4. Visiting fellowships (academic staff and affiliated colleges)
5. Research networks (academic staff)

The first two classes could be available to both staff and students; the third and fourth would apply only to staff and colleges. The fifth is a relatively new category to universities and is designed to encourage the formation of multi-disciplinary research teams distributed across several or most institutions.

At present the ACT may be a major source of funds but with the capacity to raise funds under DGR status for either the ACT or affiliated colleges for research and the possibility that when the public sector universities are transitioned from the present higher education act to the one the private providers operate under, ARC (i.e. government funding) may be available. Both of these possibilities could mean that ACT grants might be seeding grants rather than the major grants.

## **Purpose of grants**

The intent of the ACT should be to foster research per se rather than be too concerned about where the benefits flow. If the affiliated colleges perform well more of the investment is likely to return in one way or another to benefit the colleges, e.g., through stronger recruitment potential.

Research grants should be available to both staff and research students engaged in theses. In the public system, student research has accounted for nearly half the published research in science.

ACT research grants should be designed to support the smaller colleges since their budgets may provide smaller surpluses to support the work that grants cover. But there is not an argument for positive discrimination, since a lot of theological and ministry research can be done without much supporting infrastructure.

All financial supported should be acquitted at the end of the project

Suggested purposes and conditions for awards follow:

## **General purposes**

The ACT, being one of the largest private providers of education, should have a strong and developing profile in research scholarship, not only for the direct benefit of ACT colleges and students but also to contribute to the international community of scholars and practitioners. The standards set by ACT should also be a benchmark for other providers of higher education.

### **1. Research grants**

Research grants should support, encourage and leverage research. Support means to enable existing efforts and intentions, encourage implies an increased effort and leverage points to directing the search for funds beyond the ACT. The latter may also involve expanded horizons for the contribution that the research might make.

Grants could be sub-classified according to these criteria or applicants simply be asked to indicate which of the purposes apply.

Currently applicants are asked to furnish a budget and publication plan rather than a conventional research application. Criteria should be brought into line with conventional research grant applications, such as those used by the Australian Research Council, and applications should give particular attention to outcomes and output, rather than why the research needs to be done in the first place. They should also indicate where they expect to obtain further funding of they classify their application as one designed to leverage the research effort.

Appended is a set of criteria for a research grant application that combines those requirements with experience gained in commercial research and consultancy is attached. It covers budget, research plan, capability statement (which can include the CV), and output and outcomes. The contribution to the individual's portfolio and scholarship can be inferred from the CV and the application.

The research grant would be given for a defined project and could be awarded instead of a study leave support grant.

Research students may apply for these grants.

The requirement for support from the college principal should be limited to ensuring that such support exists and could be covered by simply a signature on the application. More important is the nominating referees who could judge the proposal.

In time applications could be assessed by the Research Board and then recommended to the Board of Delegates.

Any grant provided should be subject to a final report and acquitting of funds.

## **2. Conference and seminar participation**

Participation in conferences and seminars is expected of academic staff and students. Colleges should provide support themselves, so this category should be limited to supplementary funding for more expensive meetings, eg international conferences or forums with high registration fees such as commercial conferences.

There are two approaches to supporting this activity. One is that staff and students may be given a budget and allowed to spend it at their discretion. The other is that funding is based on specific applications and may be limited to those who present papers or chair sessions and the equivalent. The former basis should be left to the colleges, and participatory criteria apply to ACT grants.

Grants should also be available to research students on a similar basis to staff.

Further criteria include standing of conference, track record, support from referees and college principal.

## **3. Staff development grants**

There are two classes of grants under this heading, namely study leave and programs that directly assist the professional development of staff such courses, seminars etc fostering academic development. Academic development includes teaching and research capability rather than the research itself.

### **Study leave support**

This grant could be designed for people with limited exposure to overseas contexts and whose circumstances might make it difficult to meet the expenses. It would favour staff in early stages of their careers, mostly for their first period of leave. If they are good a research grant could meet the cost of later leave periods.

Criteria for award would be based on the professional development benefits of the study leave, rather than necessarily a research project. Colleges could ask for this support to enable them to encourage key staff to take a period of study leave, but there is also merit in the individual learning how to make application.

The assumption that college staff salaries are inferior to the university sector is open to question, so that relative financial stringency is not likely to provide ready justification.

### **Professional development**

This award would be similar to the existing proposal and offered to colleges or individuals to improve their professional capabilities.

## **4. Visiting fellowships**

Visiting scholars are an important source of stimulation and often under-used. The incidence of visitors can be a measure of the vibrancy of scholarship in an organisation. Grants can be made colleges to encourage and support visitors. Such visitors should be people of standing and able to make an appropriate contribution to the academic development of the college.

The case could be strengthened where visitors contribute significantly to more than one college.

Colleges would need to demonstrate that the visitor was making direct and substantial contribution to the college by way of teaching, joint research, research supervision, professional development of staff. The grant would not be available to someone simply using the college as a base to conduct research in or visit Australia.

In the absence of a proposal, the Board of Delegates may choose to use the same funds to appoint a visiting fellow to contribute to the college

## **5. Research networks**

Multi-million dollar funding has been provided by the ARC to research areas of significance where it can be shown that benefit will flow from multi-disciplinary linkages across institutions. The money is used for getting people together, sharing research progress, developing research agendas and seed funding applications and research supporting applications for major grants. This category may be very ambitious for the ACT, but the principle might be employed at micro-scale by funding seminars that are used to bring researchers in defined areas of strength among ACT scholars together in order to advance their research and scholarship or by funding seminars that bring together developers of distance education modules. This category of grant could be differentiated from the professional development grants that are about improving capability rather than outcomes.

Such applications would need to identify the participants, demonstrate that collectively ACT college staff offered a concentration of expertise in the area of study, and that clear expansion of research outcomes or agendas would flow from the proposal.

The money would provide for design of the forum, travel and venue as well as visiting scholars.

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## **Research Proposal**

The research proposal is based on applications for competitive national grants funded by the Australian Research Council, and budgets used in commercial research contracts and consultancies. This results in a more comprehensive document, one that satisfies all competitive grant requirements, but includes full costs, a stronger emphasis on outputs and outcomes than competitive grants, and a requirement that you make explicit your ability as an individual to conduct this research. The fundamental questions that assessors might ask about this research are:

1. Is the project worthy of the degree to which applies?
2. Will it be executed with rigour and completed successfully within the timeframe set for the degree?
3. Is the final product worth the expenditure of those who fund it (GSE, self, sponsor and taxpayer)?

### **Topic**

Present your topic in a form that might be the title of your work and provide a one or two sentence elaboration.

### **Investigators**

In addition to yourself include your supervisor and other collaborators

### **Classification of Project** (DETYA research and socio-economic classification)

Find out how to classify your research and discover the difficulties with official classification systems used to record research activity, allocate assessors and place your work in the context of the stock of knowledge.

### **Ethics Clearance**

Find out if ethics clearance is required, and perhaps whether even though it is required whether that requirement is warranted. The rules governing ethics clearance are remarkable in their coverage.

### **Summary** (10 lines able to be understood by reader of the Sydney Morning Herald or equivalent)

Describe your aims and expected outcomes in language that is understandable to a lay audience.

### **Outline of project** (suggested number of words in brackets)

This is the core of the proposal and where you demonstrate that you know what you are trying to do, and have a sound method and the management techniques required to complete the task.

- problem/background (200)
- relationship to relevant bodies of literature (500)
- aims, purpose or hypotheses and their significance (200)
- method (500 to 1000)
- risk assessment (300)
- outcomes, i.e. what will the results be (200)
- output or deliverables, i.e. in what form will the results be presented and to whom (100)
- work program including a chart or timetable showing milestones that can be monitored
- reporting schedule (and to whom, eg supervisor) (200)

### **Budget including justification**

The budget is to be presented in two versions. The first version includes a full costing of the project including the value of your time and that of your supervisor as well as all consumables that you and others might provide. The following list will help.

- Principal investigator (i.e. you) at \$100 per hour; supervisor at \$200 per hour. This includes oncosts
- Infrastructure costs not normally included in oncosts
- Equipment to be obtained (field measurement, computing etc.)
- Data acquisition, will you need to buy some?
- Analysis (software, assistance from experts such as statisticians)

- Travel for data collection, fieldwork, visits for collaboration etc (full costs)
- Consumables (stationery etc.)
- Conference participation (registration, accommodation and travel costs)

The second is a reduced version that forms the basis of any application to funding sources including the GSE and Macquarie University. It is important that the GSE know the cost of your research and can estimate the cost of any obligations and commitments that it might face in allowing you to continue your candidature. Potential sources of funding should be included but no presumption made about GSE funds. Provide estimates for the following categories of expenditure for each year of candidature.

- Personnel
- Equipment
- Travel
- Maintenance
- Other

Justify all items of expenditure succinctly in relation to your research plan and provide sources of information for costs as appropriate.

### **Assessors**

Nominate at least three leading academics or professionals you believe have the knowledge to assess your project (find out about their areas of research interest). None of them is to be a staff member of Macquarie University

### **Capability statement**

This should include your academic performance, work experience, access to information, and any other relevant attributes. In other words are you better able to do this project than most other people? A CV may be included.

### **Bibliography**

This lists the references cited in the research proposal

Board of Delegates  
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