

Faculty of Health Sciences  
RESEARCH AND RESEARCH EDUCATION PLAN: 2006-2008  
Executive Summary

### Introduction

This is the Faculty's second Research and Research Education Plan and documents the Faculty's strategic research directions over the next three years. This plan builds on past achievements and develops new strategies consistent with the University's strategic goals and trends in research.

### The Context For Research In The Faculty Of Health Sciences

The Faculty is based on several campuses and contains staff and titleholders from a wide range of disciplines. The chief investigators for many of the Faculty's major research programs consist of both university-employed staff and staff employed by teaching hospitals, research institutes, or health services that provide significant salary and infrastructure support for research. Many have substantial clinical and administrative responsibilities and are committed to teaching and research and it can be difficult for them to develop effective research programs in isolation. Accordingly, it is recognized and encouraged that the close collaboration between staff in the Faculty, research institutes and the health services increases their competitiveness when seeking national and international funding for research. Thus, the diversity and geographical spread of research in the Faculty is a strength which requires careful management to ensure our collaborative and collegial links are well maintained and developed even further wherever possible.

Despite successes in recent years in growing research income, student numbers and publications, the Faculty faces a number of challenges over the next few years, due to the changing external environment. In addition, the Faculty will be restructuring from a departmental to a school model at the beginning of 2006 and we must ensure that the new structure facilitates research at a strategic level across the Faculty and must not act as a barrier. Indeed, interdisciplinary research will be the cornerstone of this plan.

At a national level, the Faculty must prepare itself for the Commonwealth Government's Research Quality Framework which will impact on the way research output is evaluated by the Government and, as a consequence, affect the level of block grant funding (i.e. RTS, IGS & RIBG) coming into the University to support research. The Faculty must also continue to develop strategies to effectively address the Government's national research priorities. The Promoting good health and well being for all Australians and its specific Priority Goals of A healthy start to life, Ageing well, Ageing productively, Preventative healthcare and Strengthening Australia's social and economic fabric are particularly relevant, as are the NHMRCs National Research Priorities (Arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions; Asthma; Cancer; Cardiovascular health; Diabetes; Mental health; and Injury and injury prevention) and its strategic priority to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health. The Faculty's response to the University's 'Research Clusters' initiative has provided the basis for the further development of strategies in this area. The Faculty must now clearly identify its areas of research strength and opportunities for development, particularly relative to the national priorities outlined above and also identify new areas that will be important in the next decade.

The Faculty's research activities are funded from diverse sources and the income it generates makes a substantial contribution (around 1/3 over the last 7 years) to the total research income of the University. A major source of this income is from National Competitive Grant sources, particularly the NHMRC. Regrettably, during the recent period of NHMRC income growth (which has now ended) South Australia's share of NHMRC funds has not matched that achieved by the Eastern States or Western Australia. Faculty strategies must continue to underpin and grow our NHMRC funding, and seek to expand funding from other national and international competitive grants, industry, government, contract research and consultancies as well as generate income through the commercialisation of research and intellectual property.

The amount of financial support available within South Australia for research is limited in comparison with other States. Accordingly, it is essential that researchers compete more effectively for research funds available at a national and international level while continuing to lobby the SA Government to invest in research like their Eastern State counterparts. Important strategies to achieve this goal include the use of the medical research endowment funds primarily to increase the success of researchers in this competition and the provision of infrastructure support directly to researchers.

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The Faculty must continue to provide a dynamic and successful training program for higher degree research (HDR) students. Success in this area is a fundamental prerequisite for the development and maintenance of a flourishing research program. The Faculty has grown its domestic research student load by 31% since 2000 to around 254 EFTSL and its International HDR student load at a similar rate (although the number of students is relatively low). This growth provides a challenge for the University to ensure the additional infrastructure needed is available to these students.

Human resources strategies are critical for success. Our research active staff must have time to research and we should continue to increase the number of full-time researchers in the Faculty. We must also continue to recognise the important role research active titleholders play in the Faculty in terms of research outputs, mentoring of early career researchers and research student supervision. Specific training programs are needed to ensure that early career researchers (ECRs) acquire the skills necessary to achieve success with their research grant applications and to ensure their publications are submitted to high quality peer reviewed journals. Finally, we need to have effective strategies for succession planning.

Effort must be made to maximise the endowment and infrastructure support income which is used strategically to improve the capacity of staff in the Faculty to attract external research income. Liaising more closely with the Florey Foundation, SAFDER and Alumni Association has the potential to more effectively utilise resources available in the Faculty and the Medical Foundation and Dental Foundation for fund raising purposes.

Priorities for Action

Over the next three years the Faculty will:

- Continue to support the ongoing development of existing areas of research strength;
- Support the following as developing new areas of research strength:
  - 4 Indigenous health;
  - 4 Health Services;
  - 4 Ageing and Chronic and Degenerative Diseases;
  - 4 Military and Veteran's Health.
- Double the number of full fee paying international higher degree by research students;
- Attract 3 'new' NHMRC Program Grants;
- Double the number of NHMRC Research Fellows located in at least 8 disciplines;
- Support the establishment of the Florey Precinct;
- Double the extent of interdisciplinary research and linkages with external groups as well as be a significant contributor to all the University Research Clusters;
- Increase its international focus by the establishment of formal research links with other Universities and gain NIH and EU funding;
- Establish a consumer and community advisory committee to participate in health and medical research;
- Support its research active staff;
- Foster researcher career development with a particular emphasis on Early Career Researchers and Higher Degree by Research students;
- Develop a marketing plan;
- Establish a lobbying network to promote the value of health science research;
- Ensure the Dental and Medical Foundations are effectively linked with their respective Alumni Associations.

NOTE: The term 'research' covers a wide-range of activities being undertaken by the Faculty of Health Sciences' academic and clinical and affiliate title holders and research-only staff as well as by our postgraduate students. In this document the term 'research' covers, amongst other things:

- Investigator initiated and driven research (basic, clinical, population health, etc);
- Contract research;
- Some consultancy activity; and
- IP development.
- HDR student training and education
- ECR development and support