Working Party Recommendations for the University of Western Australia Research Grants Scheme

Working Party Members
Professor Robyn Owens (Graduate Research School) (Convenor)
Professor John Cordery (Faculty of Economics and Commerce)
A/Prof Andrew Lynch (Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences)
Dr Gailinta Parish (Faculty of Engineering, Computing and Mathematics)
Dr Thea Shavakadze (Faculty of Life and Physical Sciences)
Mrs. Christine Casey (Research Services)
Mrs. Vicky Vroiljk (Research Services)

At a meeting of the Research Committee held on 15 Feb 2007, several recommendations were made for changes to the Rules and Guidelines for Applications to this scheme for funding in 2008. These recommendations highlighted the need for a broader discussion of the intent of the Scheme and the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and Research Training) agreed to convene a Working Party to look into this.

Current Scheme Objectives

The current objectives of the UWA Research Grants Scheme (UWARGS) are:

- To develop competitiveness of UWA staff in external grant schemes by funding high quality research projects of modest cost.

- Fund early-career researchers (ECRs) with "promise" and staff who have had career interruptions.

- Provide the opportunity for academic staff to devote their time substantially to a particular research activity.

These objectives are in line with the University's mission and Operational Priorities Plan for 2006-2008 which are to focus the University's resources towards its vision of "Achieving International Excellence".

A window of data showing how these objectives have been met by way of ARC Discovery grant applications, for example, is provided in the table in Attachment 1. This table lists the ECRS who applied for UWARGS in the years 2001-2006, subsequent external grant applications and the amounts awarded if the external grant was successful.

Review by the Working Party

Researchers

The Working Party identified three groups of researchers and the competencies appropriate to meet the scheme's objectives:

- Early Career Researcher (ECR) – requires writing and research development skills; teaching relief for time to produce output.

- Mid Career Researcher (MCR) – requires review of writing and research skills to increase chances of success when applying to external funding schemes; feedback on applications for external funding that were not successful and the opportunity to try out their improved writing skills; teaching relief for time to produce output.

- Established Researcher (ER) – requires review of grant writing and research skills to put together more complex applications to external funding agencies, including international funding bodies; feedback on applications for external funding that were not successful and the opportunity to try out their improved skills; and teaching relief for time to produce output.
Potential Benefits of the Research Grants Scheme to UWA

The potential benefits of the Research Grants Scheme to the University include:

- The enhancement of an individual’s track record through the demonstration of research competitiveness via peer-review;
- Scheme-awarded projects provide preliminary data and ‘proof of concept’ material that lead to an increase in the number of applications to and awards from external funding sources;
- An enhancement of the perception of a rich research culture at UWA signalling the University’s support for research and researchers;
- The development of research competencies associated with success in establishing sustainable research programs, including grant writing, proposal development, collaboration and peer review;
- An increase in the production of measurable outputs and outcomes; and
- The provision of a formal mechanism by which Faculties and Schools can mentor their researchers.

Difficulties with the Current Scheme

The Assessment Panels in the current UWARG scheme have noted the following difficulties:

- Increases in the number of MCRs and ERs claiming special circumstances;
- Applications for funding where the project is already receiving funding;
- Poorly justified budgets;
- Researchers applying to the UWARGS, in consecutive years, and not seeking external funding
- Submissions for pilot projects by ERs as there are no alternative sources of funding appear to be available to them;
- Requests for teaching relief to complete projects that had already been funded;
- No formal mechanism to provide mentoring or to meet the developmental objectives; and
- The application review process is overly time consuming for the assessment panels.

After substantial discussion, the Review Panel recommends the following changes:

Recommendations

1. The existing UWARG scheme should be abolished and two new schemes created: the UWA Research Development Award scheme for early-career researchers, and the UWA Research Grant Seeding Award scheme for mid-career and established researchers.

2. The current funds available through the UWARG scheme and the 75th Anniversary Award should be treated as a single pool and allocated (roughly and according to availability) as follows:
   - $1,275,000 should be made available to the UWA Research Development Award scheme. In addition, a minimum of $100,000 to be made available for Teaching Relief from the 75th Anniversary Fund. Additional funds may become available from the Anniversary Fund and would be used to top-up the Teaching Relief.
   - $300,000 should be made available to the UWA Research Grant Seeding Award.
UWA Research Development Award Scheme Principles

1. Only Early Career Researchers, defined as 0 – 5 years postdoctoral, or within 5 years of their first academic appointment, are eligible to apply to the UWA Research Development Award scheme.

2. To be eligible, applicants must not have received, as a Chief Investigator, $30,000 or more in external grant income in the previous year.

3. The UWA Research Development Award scheme is designed to provide an opportunity to develop grant application and research skills that can be built on for future research projects and to build track records for external grant / award competitiveness.

4. Applications to the UWA Research Development Award scheme should comply with the existing guidelines of the UWARG scheme: projects can be funded for 1 year, up to $30,000 in value, and applicants can apply for teaching relief, equipment, research assistance, travel etc.

5. Assessment of UWA Research Development Award applications will be carried out by using the same panel system that was established for the UWARG scheme.

6. Winners of a UWA Research Development Award will be required to apply for external funding within two years of receiving this award.

7. Winners of a UWA Research Development Award may apply for a further such award if and only if they continue to be eligible and have made at least one external grant / award application since receiving their first UWA Research Development Award.

8. All UWA Research Development Award winners must be partnered with an established research mentor at the time of application.

The UWA Research Grant Seeding Award Scheme Principles

1. This scheme is intended for Mid Career Researchers and Established Researchers;

2. To be eligible for a UWA Research Grant Seeding Award, MCRs and ERs must have applied for an externally funded research grant / award in the past three years, except on their first ever application for a UWA Research Grant Seeding Award, or if special circumstances can be justified.

3. To be eligible, applicants must not have received, as a Chief Investigator, $30,000 or more in external grant income in the previous year.

4. Receipt of an award from the existing UWARG scheme within the past three years would make an applicant ineligible to be considered as a first-ever applicant to the UWA Research Grant Seeding Award scheme.

5. MCRs and ERs can apply to the UWA Research Grant Seeding Award scheme in successive years, but can only receive an award once every three years.

6. The UWA Research Grant Seeding Award scheme is designed to provide funding for research or administrative assistants, equipment, teaching relief and other assistance to prepare an application for funding to an external agency.

7. Applications to the UWA Research Grant Seeding Award scheme will be in the form of an Expression of Interest to apply for an external, competitive grant / award. The Expression of Interest should list the chief investigators, the funding agency, the application deadline of the funding agency, a 1-page description of the project, a list of grants / awards applied for in the past 4 years and include the applicant’s track record for the past 5 years.

8. The Assessment Panel for the UWA Research Seeding Award scheme would take into account credible evidence that a previous external grant / award application has come close to being funded, and could be improved to a fundable level by receiving a Research Grant Seeding Award.

9. Awards will be made up to the value of $15,000, with payment to the applicant’s School upon receipt of the nominated external grant / award application by the due deadline. If a grant / award application is not submitted through Research Services, the Seeding Award, in its entirety, is forfeited.

Matching funds for small grants / seed projects

In proposing the outlined changes to the existing scheme, the Review Panel noted that Faculties could be encouraged to use these schemes to leverage Faculty funding and other external funding, providing the conditions of the schemes were met.
ECRS who applied for UWARGS in the years 2001-2006, subsequent ARC Discovery grant applications and the amounts awarded if the external grant was successful.

**Early Career Researchers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total UWARGS Awarded to ECRs</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Year</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Number</strong></td>
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**ECR Researchers who had initial success with UWARG grants and later successfully applied for ARC Discovery grants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grant (Year Funded)</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
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<tr>
<td>UWARG</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DISCOVERY</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
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</table>

Success rate for UWARGS in ARC applications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
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<tr>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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<tr>
<th>Grant (Year Funded)</th>
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<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UWARG</td>
<td>$40,834</td>
<td>$77,037</td>
<td>$58,216</td>
<td>$107,733</td>
<td>$249,062</td>
<td>$149,772</td>
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<tr>
<td>DISCOVERY</td>
<td>$1,397,467</td>
<td>$176,000</td>
<td>$3,115,000</td>
<td>$1,655,000</td>
<td>$3,460,316</td>
<td>$2,068,589</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>$40,834</td>
<td>$77,037</td>
<td>$1,455,683</td>
<td>$283,733</td>
<td>$3,364,062</td>
<td>$1,804,772</td>
<td>$3,460,316</td>
<td>$2,068,589</td>
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