

Terms of Reference.

Question 1 – Point 6.

Change is important in a scientist field in their early career, but it seems to hinder their career prospects, let alone workplace benefits such as long-service leave or maternity leave. Long service and maternity leave loadings are currently part of the “on-costs” associated with salaries on the grants, however the relocation every 3-4 years for young researchers does not allow access to these funds. These funds have been withheld by the universities and currently they are not transferrable. A system, similar to that utilized by self-employed workers, should be set up to allow continuance of service when changing employment, therefore allowing funding to be used for the purpose it was allocated originally. Permanent work is virtually unheard of for most scientist in research.

Not all scientists are suitable to be the principle investigator of a laboratory. Some people are more suited to bench work and as such it is respectable to have an individual project or small group within the confines of a larger group lead by the head scientist. One current contradiction is that for several fellowships, you cannot have been listed as an associate investigator on a previous grant, however it is more advantageous in the long run if you are named as an associate investigator on a grant. Innovation is discouraged as only grants with 60-75% of the work already done are funded. This is unachievable for young scientists who are just starting out or wanting to move to another lab. New scientific discoveries won't be made by scientist writing grants all the time to gain money for work they don't have time for because they are writing grants.

Current funding structure provides the smallest possible amount for salaries that is often not even in line with university salary structures. A consequence of this is that a scientist with one grant cannot afford the higher priced mid career scientist so they hire the cheapest option which is a 1st year out post doc. This may not be the best option for progress however, as increased amounts of training will be required and the loss of “lab knowledge” by the loss of a long standing staff member is considerable. Thus for mid career scientist, this can be equated to a situation where a 21yr retail worker is not able to get a job because the company only wants to hire 15yr olds as they are cheaper, which is currently against anti-discrimination law.

Mrs Ellen Bryce
Proud mum