19 December 2018

The Hon Dan Tehan MP

Minister for Education

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Dear Minister

I write on behalf of the Australian Council of Graduate Research Inc which is the peak body for those with institutional responsibility for graduate research programs and support in each Australian university. Our Council is committed to improving the quality and accessibility of higher degree by research training in Australia and has worked tirelessly towards this agenda for over 20 years.

Most recently ACGR has collaborated with the Department of Education to develop the Research Training Implementation Plan to facilitate the recommendations (that were approved by your predecessor, Simon Birmingham) arising from the ACOLA Review of Research Training.

This Plan makes it clear that our nation must invest heavily in expanding the skills development and industry engagement elements of graduate research training as well as improving access and support for equity groupings including indigenous students. ACGR has met all of its deliverables assigned to it in the RTIP, developing statements about best practice in each of these areas. Our members share your commitment to high quality, broad based and industry relevant research training for our nation.

It therefore difficult to understand how your government can effectively decrease, rather than increase, the funding provided through the Research Training Program to support this shared agenda.

By freezing the total funding distributed through the Research Training Program whilst maintaining the indexation of RTP stipends, not only are universities hampered in their capacity to deliver an expanded program as described in your RTIP, but we will also need to cut the recruitment of new domestic students in order to fully fund those already in the pipeline.

This short-sighted approach of “robbing Peter to pay Paul” will take $66m out of the research training coffers in coming years and have a significant and lasting effect on the quality of our research training, readiness of our graduates to contribute to Australia’s economy and innovative strengths and our international competitiveness.

We urge you to reconsider this element of the Mid-Year Economic and Financial Outlook and find ways to maintain support for RTP as a critical investment in Australia’s future.

Best regards

Professor Sue Berners-Price

Convenor

Australian Council of Graduate Research Inc.