

# The Australian

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## Firms sought for industry PhDs

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### **THE hunt is on for companies keen to partner with Research Minister Kim Carr's new industrial PhD candidates.**

But the Australian Technology Network of universities, which has carriage of the project, knows creating this new class of postgraduate won't be easy.

The \$1 million allocation to the industry doctoral training centre in mathematics announced last week was a sign of Senator Carr's commitment when there are fears the cupboard is bare for further higher education funding. The long-awaited research workforce strategy, for example, launched on the same day, came with no new money attached.

Within 24 hours of the announcement, ATN representatives were dispatched to identify 100 industry partners each. They will be offered a mid-year briefing on the centre, which will accommodate 20 to 25 doctoral students each year, starting next year, for a four-year program.

"The challenge for the success of the program will be the industry involvement," ATN executive director Vicki Thomson said.

The plan to graft candidates to companies from the start their PhDs is an attempt to ensure that as well as acquiring the necessary expertise in mathematics, they acquire practical skills they will need in the workforce, such as communication and teamwork.

Mathematics PhDs were chosen for the ATN pilot because demand is projected to rise 37 per cent between now and 2020 and because of the subject's wide application in industry.

ATN chairwoman and Curtin University vice-chancellor Jeanette Hacket said: "The need for graduates to possess advanced skills and the ability to innovate has been an ongoing theme for business and industry for years.

"The prevailing opinion [is] that these skills are not only vitally important but that they are an area of concern when recruiting researchers."

The problem of turning out marketable PhDs is an international one and there are similar programs to the ATN pilot operating overseas.

Last week's edition of Nature examined the surge of science PhDs being turned out and their difficulty in landing jobs in some countries. In Japan, for example, the government decided in 2009 to offer companies about Y=4 million (\$46,000) to take them on. But hooking up these PhDs to industry is tough: "It's just hard to find a match," Japan Science and Technology Agency head Koichi Kitazawa told the journal

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