

19 April 2011

RESEARCH WORKFORCE STRATEGY CRITICAL TO ECONOMIC MOMENTUM - ATN

The **Australian Technology Network of Universities (ATN)** has welcomed the release of the Federal Government's Research Workforce Strategy as a critical step in meeting Australia's future innovation needs.

ATN Chair, Professor Jeanette Hacket said the strategy recognises the need for action to address the future supply of the nation's research workforce.

"It has been clearly demonstrated by modelling undertaken for government that the research workforce is a chronic skills shortage area," Professor Hacket said.

"Quality researchers are not produced overnight and any excessive delay in addressing our research workforce requirements has the potential to arrest Australia's forward economic momentum and international competitiveness.

"While universities are a major employer of research graduates, shortages also affect business, industry and the community – not only directly with a lack of research – qualified individuals to work in these settings but indirectly via their role in training and educating the rest of our skilled workers.

The ATN particularly welcomes the 5 priority areas. "These priority areas recognise the critical role industry, universities and government must play in meeting demand for research skills. The review of the Research Workforce Strategy, measured to increase opportunities for indigenous and female researchers and increasing the number of international training awards for research students will ensure our research workforce has the depth of skills to support innovation.

The ATN, through the establishment of the Industry Doctoral Training Centre in Mathematics is directly addressing Australia's need for researchers who are both engaged with industry and who possess the associated skills to be effective and productive beyond conducting research itself.

"This Centre is a national first and will provide longer postgraduate courses and a form of higher education that currently does not exist in Australia," Professor Hacket said.

"We particularly welcome the Federal Government's commitment to seed fund this centre. In providing \$1m to the centre, the Government has recognised that collaboration between universities, businesses and students is vital and that such a centre is one way to meet the growing demand for skills while facilitating secure career paths for researchers in industry.

"This Centre recognises that there is a need to more formally incorporate industry leadership skills into research degrees. The need for graduates to possess advanced skills and the ability to innovate has been an ongoing theme for business and industry for years, with the prevailing opinion being that these skills are not only vitally important, but that they are an area of concern when recruiting researchers," Professor Hacket said.

The ATN also announced today that it will establish a high-level industry advisory board to assist in the development of the Centre. Membership of the Board will be announced shortly.

Background Information

The ATN Centre for Doctoral Training in Mathematics will formally embed industry related skills during a 4-year PhD program and will see candidates undertaking study in disciplines which complement their primary focus, producing more well-rounded graduates for careers in industry

Similar centres have been established in the UK for some time and industry is enthusiastic partners in such centres and keenly recruit the graduates

The Centre will act as a pilot for similar centres in other discipline areas. Mathematics was chosen both due to the rise in demand for doctorates in the field, projected to rise 37% between 2011 and 2020, and its application in a wide range of fields.

Mathematicians are in demand in many areas, including cryptography, network analysis, optimisation, finance, operations research, physics and astronomy, computer science and various areas of the biological sciences. It is used, for example, to understand the spread of infectious diseases.

Further information: Vicki Thomson – 0417 808 472