

# Funding fight all academic

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The British scientist who is leading the government's review of how research quality is measured in Australia says any changes to the system would work only if they were backed by extra public funds.

The outcome of the review by Gareth Roberts, the president of Wolfson College, Oxford, will shape the missions of Australia's public research agencies and **universities**.

"Inevitably, there will be winners and losers," Sir Gareth told The Australian Financial Review.

His 12-person expert advisory group met for the first time last Thursday, in Canberra.

Sir Gareth was appointed by Education Minister Brendan Nelson after writing an influential review of the UK's competitive Research Assessment Exercise in 2002.

That three different groups of **universities**, as well as the Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee, are represented on his 12-person team indicates the divisions in the sector over what constitutes research excellence.

The Australian Technology Network, the Group of Eight and the Innovative Research **Universities** will all be pushing to have their particular strengths recognised. Public research agencies and the Business Council of Australia are also included.

Obviously, no university wants to lose any of its funding.

"I would be on a big crusade to say there should be additional funding," Sir Gareth said. "When you're introducing changes, you don't want to lower morale.

"You want to make sure the more research-intensive **universities** get more research monies that they can really use to good advantage to do leading-edge research.

"At the same time, you want to make sure there is additional funding for the less research-intensive **universities** to develop a new mission to help their communities."

Sir Gareth said Australia needed to "double or triple" the funds going to "third-stream funding". This would reward **universities** for establishing links with their communities, rather than on the basis of the quality of their research.

In the UK, these activities account for a sixth of all the funds distributed through the RAE.

A pool of "third-stream funding" could compensate those **universities** that would lose funds when more rigorous measures were introduced to assess research quality.

Sir Gareth said without extra investment in research and improved quality assessment, Australia's reputation would languish and its economic well-being would suffer.

"If you do invest in this sort of quality research framework, it will pay huge dividends," he said.

"Otherwise, with the rise of China and other nations, in 10 years, Australia will be struggling."

He called on Dr Nelson to reveal how much of the overall research funding pool would be allocated according to the new framework that his team will devise.

In the UK, all block funding is distributed through the competitive RAE process. Sir Gareth said that in Australia the new formula should determine at least half of all block grants for research.

His team grappled with questions including how to measure the social impact of research and whether different disciplines should be assessed in different ways.

The expert advisory group will deliver a discussion paper to Dr Nelson this week. The research community will have five weeks to consider the issues and a national seminar is planned for June.