

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY AUSTRALIA

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Strategic Examination of R&D

Issues paper 2 – Scaling the system: a proactive approach to scaling the RD&I system

Science & Technology Australia (STA) thanks the Strategic Examination of R&D (SERD) Panel for the opportunity to respond to the SERD targeted issues papers.

STA is the peak body for the nation's science and technology sectors, representing nearly 150 member organisations and more than 235,000 scientists and technologists. We connect science and technology with governments, business and the community to advance science's role in solving some of humanity's greatest challenges.

What aspects of the framework would work well?

STA supports this paper's overall sentiment and intent. However, most of the proposed actions overlap with the other issues papers focused on Investment and Capital and RD&I incentives.

The focus for this paper should be on commercialising local RD&I. This is included – but not discussed in depth – on p5.

The proposals to provide access to entrepreneurial and commercialisation training for researchers is sensible – but this already exists across the sector. The SERD's final paper must elucidate what is currently missing from current training offerings and explain how such training could/should be delivered. STA is currently developing a program to fill an identified gap in the current system with respect to training for STEM researchers to broaden their skills in both business leadership and translation. The ultimate program goal is to better connect STEM research with the broader economy. This program would both deliver training and professional development to STEM researchers and also build mobility pathways across the sector.

STA supports in principle the proposals to support commercialisation of research by developing startup creation and growth pathways – but the paper lacks detail on the mechanisms and initiatives that would enable this.

Including proof of concept grants as part of the five national focus areas is sensible.

What could be improved and how?

The paper lacks description of any tangible implementation and it's unclear how they would work in practice.

For example, what sort of incentives would be 'embedded' (and embedded where) for universities to identify and disseminate IP? The Foundational research paper mentions an 'IP Library' but without clarity on how the SERD would be designed and developed, and who would maintain it. Would this

library perform the role to ‘disseminate IP’? The current services offered by IP Australia are not mentioned – the Panel should clarify how their suggestions would complement/extend on these.

Another key question is whether all the proposed initiatives suggested in this paper would sit within the focus area structure outlined in the National Coordination paper, or if they would comprise a separate ‘framework’. To achieve maximum impact and benefit, this paper’s proposals must be incorporated in that nationally coordinated structure – or it risks ending up being administered in a piecemeal, ad hoc manner.

The paper fails to acknowledge the several research commercialisation programs already working to better connect university research with industry partners – i.e. Cooperative Research Centres, Australia’s Economic Accelerator, the National Industry PhD Program, CSIRO Industry PhD program, Trailblazer Universities Program, the ARC Linkage Program and ARC Industry Fellowships. Understanding how these programs work towards their policy intent – how successful they have been and what challenges have been faced – would enable a more robust discussion on how best to further support ‘scaling the system’ from foundational discovery research through to applied and translational projects.

The Panel should assess the current programs working to improve research commercialisation, and make recommendations that build on what is currently working well and deliver options to fill any gaps in the current system.

The Panel’s final recommendations must demonstrate a clearly articulated series of supports that shepherd RD&I through the innovation pipeline – from foundational discovery research through to translation, commercialisation and deployment – rather than a piecemeal conglomeration of vague and duplicative statements.

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