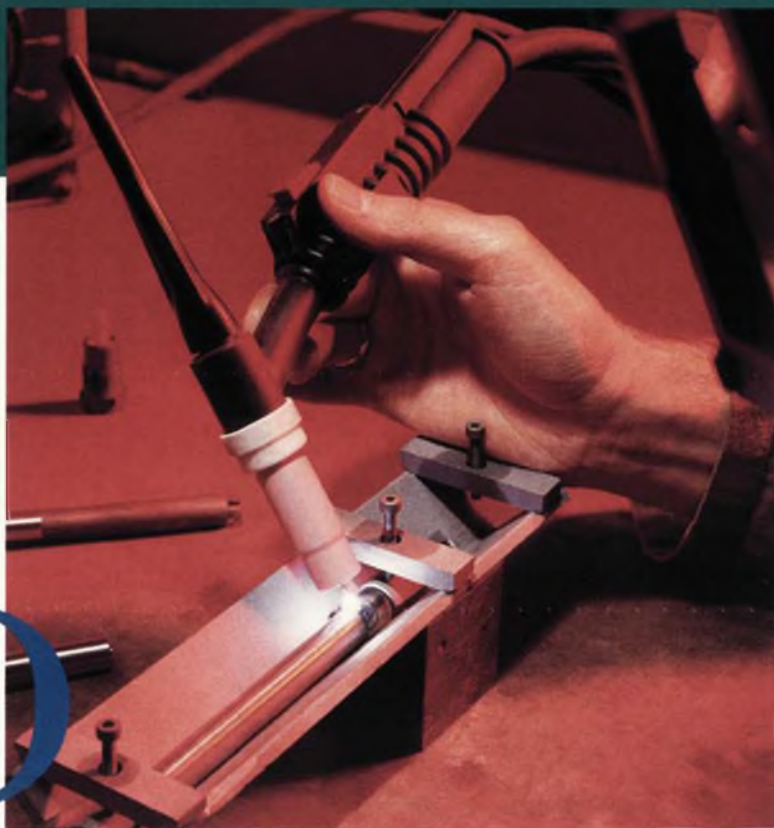


Support for review of university

R&D



The Federal Government has given 'in principle' support for a national audit of the research and development infrastructure that exists in Australia's universities. The proposal for a national audit was made by the House of Representatives Industry, Science and Resources Committee in its report on the effect of certain public policy changes on Australia's research and development.

The House Industry Committee said that funding of research infrastructure at universities was an urgent issue, but acknowledged that the best method of funding was difficult to determine. The Industry Committee proposed a national audit as a way of determining the state of university research infrastructure and the level of its usage.

'The Government has supported 17 R&D recommendations made by the House Industry Committee.'

Responding to the House Industry Committee's report, the Government indicated that it agreed with the Industry Committee's proposal for an audit, but would await the outcomes of a current South Australian audit before determining whether to proceed with a national audit.

"If the South Australian study is successful," said the Federal Government, "the Australian Research Council could undertake a national audit along the same lines."

The Government has supported 17 out of the 20 research and development recommendations made by the House Industry Committee. The recommendations were made because of concerns about the effects that policy changes, such as outsourcing and privatisation, were having on Australia's research and development.

In response to the Industry Committee's concerns about the impact of outsourcing on health research, the Federal Government indicated that it is working with the States, through the Australian Health Ministers Advisory Council, to develop suitable performance indicators for research and training in the public hospital system. According to the Government, the indicators will be a means of identifying changes over time to the levels of research support being provided.

The Government also emphasised its commitment to double research funding to the National Health and Medical Research Council throughout the next five years.

Other recommendations from the House Industry Committee were referred directly to the National Innovation Summit held in Melbourne in February this year. These included:

- the establishment of a system of research and development brokers for collaborative, pre-competitive research;
- the need for an appropriate response to recent declines in business spending on research and development; and
- the need to retain 'in house' research and development expertise when outsourcing.

An Innovation Summit Implementation Group, comprising representatives from the business, research, education and government sectors, will now consider the feasibility of proposals raised at the summit and will formulate an appropriate action plan by the end of 2000.

The House Industry Committee's report on research and development and the text of the Federal Government's response to that report are available from the Committee's web site at www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/isr or by contacting the Committee secretariat, call (02) 6277 4594 or email: isr.reps@aph.gov.au