



2% GDP FOR PUBLIC RESEARCH

INVEST IN TOMORROW'S

BREAKTHROUGHS NOW!

40 years of knowing it is needed.
40 years of potential wasted.

If there is not immediate and substantial investment in the public research sector by central government, this review process will be wasting everyone’s time and energy. Funding is the central underlying issue, full stop.

That being said, we might as well document some of the issues. Perhaps the best documented (and most important) issue facing the research sector is woefully and consistently inadequate funding from central government regardless of which government. Taking one example among many, this issue was addressed in the 1986 review process and published in the resulting report: [Key to Prosperity – Science & Technology](#) (AKA ‘The Beattie Report’) which I include here by reference and hyperlink. They wrote:

On the basis of these arguments and the discussion in earlier sections of our report, the Working Party recommends that New Zealand should aim to double its research and development expenditure per capita over the next seven years. This level would still be only comparable with that of Denmark, Finland, and Norway and well below that of the top performers. Doubling our research and development expenditure per capita would raise the total to about 2% of present GDP.

This issue has been noted *repeatedly* since that report, and each and every government has managed to ignore it. The following quote from E.G. Bollard reflects the views of some researchers regards the reforms of the late 1980s and early 1990s.

“When the history of science in this country comes to be written, the six years between 1986 and 1992 will appear barren and traumatic ones – ones principally of discouragement to scientists.” E.G. Bollard ([Royal Society Te Apārangi](#), 2012)

Given the budget announcement yesterday, it looks like this government is going to *one up* previous governments by **reducing** funding beyond the austerity programmes of the past into one of starvation.

Tempting as it is to just not bother, I feel compelled to make a submission primarily about how universities treat people generally, and the pastoral care of immigrant Masters scholars, PhD scholars, and Post Doctoral scholars specifically.

The brief titled “[Postgraduate Students and the Aotearoa New Zealand Research Workforce](#)” by Lucy C Steward and W. Troy Baisden¹ they note that the number of doctoral students in New Zealand doubled between 2008 and 2020. In addition, “It is obvious that the bulk of this growth has come from international students rather than domestic students.” They go on to explain (and I paraphrase here), that these people make up a larger number than the FTE PhD researchers across all sectors and ultimately they are in non-permanent employment. Are PhD Scholars the bulk of our research workforce? The evidence points to that being the case.

In a piece titled “[A Strong and Resilient Research System is Built by Valuing People](#)”² I attempt to describe the how people are (mis)treated by our research system, including universities and then look at a few ways we might improve things. It might be worth your time looking at this piece. It has the following quote from this group’s chair that seems as appropriate in 2024 as it was in 2001.

1 <https://zenodo.org/doi/10.5281/zenodo.6342485>

2 <https://doi.org/10.26686/nzsr.vi.8134>

“I would not see a scientific career as compatible with human existence, at the present time. Scientists lead a bloody miserable life” Sir Peter Gluckman (Gluckman, 2001)

I include by reference “[The Grim Realities of a Doctoral Student in Aotearoa](#)” by Sneh Patel, Grace Yee, and W. Troy Baisden.³ There is nothing that I could write which would improve upon the message that this work conveys, but I would like to highlight the stipends being less than minimum wage. Many of these researchers live in poverty. Some recent news stories such as “[Budget shifts universities’ financial burden onto students](#)” in Newsroom do not inspire hope for improvement in the short term.

Coming now to the issues facing the many immigrant scholars who come to our shores, our universities, and work bloody hard, sacrificing much to get their degrees – not to mention adding to our research outputs, and university metrics. They face same problems as domestic students as well as some that are specific to their situation. These researchers must navigate the immigration system to procure visa’s to study. This takes much more time, effort, and money than most people realise. I am an immigrant myself (now a citizen). My partner was an immigrant when we met overseas. There, both places she worked as a post doc had trained legal professionals on staff to assist *specifically* with engaging the immigration system by providing expert advice. As far as I understand, there are either no such counterparts at our universities and CRIs, or they are so rare that I have not yet heard of one.

What I have heard of is post-grad students and post docs who have been left to fend for themselves (at best) due to what I can only call a chasm in system of pastoral care. The horror stories that one hears when talking with people in this situation are downright awful. Some end up having to quickly exit the country and still carry a financial burden as a result. Others are stuck with advisors who take advantage of the additional power imbalance in a myriad of ways. It can be ugly. It must be remedied.

My recommendation is that every university and CRI have as many licensed immigration advisors as necessary to assist their scholars and employees navigate the visa processes from a place of knowledge. To find out more about the process of advising immigrants, see this page: <https://www.immigration.govt.nz/assist-migrants-and-students/advise-migrants> While this will not alleviate all of the issues these people face, it will help with a central one.

3 <https://zenodo.org/doi/10.5281/zenodo.6348120>



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