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New minister vot

Brendan O'Keefe

THE federal Government would review research and development tax concessions to encourage more collaboration between industry and universities, new Innovation, Industry, Science and Research Minister Kim Carr has told the *HES*.

Senator Carr said Australia's international standing in research and innovation had been allowed to slip.

It was too early to provide details of what changes might be made to the R & D concessions, the minister said.

"We want to allow opportunities to improve collaboration," Senator Carr said. "We're looking at ways to use the concession to encourage that."

The minister said his four-pronged portfolio would spread emphasis evenly and would be "interrelated and integrated".

"Our overwhelming objective is aimed at rebuilding the national innovation system," he said.

"Innovation occurs from the shopfloor to the boardroom.

"The prime function of the new program is aimed at achieving cultural change, of improving the relationship and understanding between the public and private sectors. It would be wrong to see the program as discrete and isolated."

Senator Carr said he would set up a review of the innovation system as soon as possible: "That will provide an opportunity to examine gaps in the system and how to improve our inter-



Cultural change in the wind: Kim Carr

nationally competitive position."

Also, Labor would promote basic research, scrap the research quality framework, preserve the independence of the Australian Research Council and review the co-operative research centre pro-

gram to return public benefit as a fundamental tenet.

The higher education endowment fund would stand.

Senator Carr and Education Minister Julia Gillard were "talking about the way in which the

es for innovation

allocation mechanism should work".

Senator Carr said he would strike a balance in emphasis on basic research and more directed, industry-related research.

Universities had criticised the Howard government over interference in research and some projects were banned from receiving funding from bodies such as the ARC.

"We will emphasise the importance of discovery in terms of basic research programs and restore university autonomy and academic freedom," he said.

Federation of Australian Scientific and Technological Societies executive director Bradley Smith said: "The sector will be delighted if the Government takes a strong view on the independence of the

ARC and all other competitive, peer-reviewed grant schemes.

"That is paramount for Australia's international reputation."

Mr Smith said the value of basic research went beyond individual results.

"It enables Australia to better deal with risks and be well prepared to face pressures such as environmental hazards and geopolitical pressures," he said.

"Just seeing research in narrow terms doesn't capture the range of outcomes."

Senator Carr reiterated Labor's plan to scrap the RQF.

"We will use the next year as period to bridge-build consensus around metrics in the humanities and performing arts," he said.

"I have called for a brief from the department. We are not going

to act precipitously ... readers should be under no misapprehension that we will implement policy in full. We want to replace the RQF with a rigorous, obviously transparent arrangement that is internationally recognised to be of the highest quality."

Senator Carr said he would soon make an announcement on "preserving the independence of the ARC".

"The new CEO (Margaret Sheil) is a live wire and I look forward to a close working relationship with the ARC."

The minister said he would bring forward a review of the CRC system, to examine its governance, quantum, scope and effectiveness.

Former education minister Julie Bishop changed the culture of

the CRC system to one that leaned towards research that boosted industry.

"We will restore public benefit as a fundamental objective," Senator Carr said.

A spokesman for Senator Carr's Opposition counterpart Eric Abetz said the CRC program had been a success. A centre that Senator Abetz had helped create, the seafood CRC, should be allowed to continue.

"We are of the view that one size does not necessarily fit all," the spokesman said.

"A review is not necessarily a bad thing but we will be making sure that Labor doesn't throw the baby out with the bathwater.

"They are a clear example of research with an industry focus with good outcomes."