

# **RACS SECTION OF ACADEMIC SURGEONS WORKSHOP**

**Survey of Academic Surgeons in Australia  
and New Zealand**

**September/October 2006**

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# Survey of Academic Surgeons in Australia and New Zealand September/October 2006

The May 2006 AGM of the Section of Academic Surgery recommended a workshop to discuss the future of academic surgery in Australia and New Zealand. Moreover a survey was recommended to determine the problems and provide some solutions.

The survey was developed with the support of the Division of Research and Audit and I acknowledge the involvement of Nicola Robinson, Margarita Flabouris and Wendy Babidge. Members of the Section Executive, Andre Van Rij, David Gotley, John Windsor, John Fletcher and Thomas Kossman provided feedback.

## Participation

The Section of Academic Surgery Survey 2006 was mailed out to 75 academic surgeons in Australia and New Zealand. Forty-four surgeons (59%) completed and returned their survey.

### Q 3: Type of institution

Type	Number	%
University	18	41%
Hospital	8	18%
Both	18	41%
<b>Total</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>100%</b>

### Q 4: Specialty

Specialty	Number	%
General Surgery	27	61%
Neurosurgery	3	7%
Orthopaedic	3	7%
Vascular	2	5%
Paediatric	2	5%
Plastic & Reconstructive	2	5%
Surgical Oncology	2	5%
Otolaryngology, Head & Neck surgery	1	2%
Cardiothoracic	1	2%
Ophthalmology	1	2%
Urology	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Q 5: Faculty rank

Faculty rank	Number	%
Emeritus Professor	2	5%
Professor	25	57%
Associate Professor	14	32%
Senior Lecturer	2	5%
Lecturer	0	0%
Fellow	0	0%
Senior Registrar	1	2%
Junior Registrar	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Q 6: Clinical Appointment

Forty-two (95%), academic surgeons responded that they had a clinical appointment. The average full time equivalent was 0.6 FTE (Full Time Equivalent), minimum 0.1FTE maximum 1.0 FTE.

## Question 7: Sources of funding

Participants were asked to select as many as options as appropriate.

<b>Funding sources</b>	<b>Number</b>
Both, Public / Private	25
NHMRC	23
Government / Public	10
Private	5
Other	7

**Q 8: What are the issues that negatively impact on your position?**  
Participants were asked to select as many options as appropriate.

<b>Negative issues</b>	<b>Number</b>
Pay differences between hospital and university	33
High clinical workloads of academic staff	27
Lack of a clear academic surgery career path	18
Lack of academic surgeon continuing professional development course	11
Lack of opportunity to develop new technologies within the research department	8
Other	9

**Q 9: What are the issues that impact on your position in a productive and positive manner? (Positive)**

There were few positive issues raised in answering this question with most answers listing the negative aspects of academic surgery.

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Number</b>
Better ability to do research, academic freedom.	6
Academic Surgery as a career provides fulfilling combination of teaching, research and clinical work – variety of roles.	5
Collaboration with others	7
Working with a good group of people.	3
Other comments	3

## Q 9: (Negative)

Theme	Number
Difficulty in meeting all the objectives of clinical service, teaching, research and service to profession and professional societies.	16
Inappropriate and insufficient departmental organisational structures and administrative supports that have increased bureaucracy and administration.	13
Inadequate remuneration	7
Lack of research funding and support in funding applications	7
RACS demands are disproportionate for academic surgeons. Lack of support from RACS.	3
Conflict between university and hospital.	3
Poor perception of academic surgeons by other surgeons.	2
Other comments	5

## Q 10: What are the current issues facing surgeons contemplating a career in academic surgery?

Theme	Number
Inadequate remuneration, employment conditions, income comparability, medical indemnity insurance.	45
Devaluation of academic position, lack of identity, lack of career path	18
Bureaucracy, endless administration, lack of administrative, research staff support	7
Lack of understanding of workload by university, conflict between clinical responsibilities and university	7
*Generation “Y”	4
Easily awarded titles/positions – political rather than merit	3
Inadequate examples of success ie: “happy professors”	3
Downgrading, lack of recognition in new graduate medical programs	3
Excessive clinical load	2
Lack of recognition by peers	2
Too much emphasis on research and not enough on teaching	2
Other comments	10

## Q 11: What would you do to make a career in academic surgery more appealing to young surgeons?

Theme	Number
Improve pay	30
Improve funding/structure/facilities/supports for research	19
Improve career path/identity/position description/status	17
Strong mentors/peer groups	6
Reward/recognition ie: NHS mint awards	5
“Research Centres of Excellence”	5
Protected time	3
Teaching and teaching development should equal to research work	3
Encourage post graduate research degrees	3
Change structure to integrate into hospital based units/private practice	2
Other comments	7

## Q 12: What would you do to retain current academic surgeons?

Theme	Number
Improve work conditions, pay, hours – medical indemnity insurance	27
Improve research facilities and provide adequate resources	13
Improvement in career structure/pathways/flexibility	11
Protection of academic time	7
Increase funding for research	4
Recognition, reward achievements	3
Peer support/strong mentors/unified voice	3
Promotion of academic surgery as a career	3
Other comments	15

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## Summary

### 1. Profile of the current ANZ Academic Surgeon

- A Professor or Associate Professor in General Surgery employed at 0.6 EFT in a public hospital with hospital and university funding and the right of private practice
- Workload is excessive and the remuneration is inadequate
- Department receives some funding for research which is inadequate
- He/She feels the clinical, administrative and private practice responsibilities impact significantly on their ability to undertake adequate research

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## Summary

### 2. Profile of the new generation ANZ Academic Surgeon

- Graduate from the ANZ University of Surgeons with a combined FRACS and Master of Surgery
- Will work in an University Hospital co-located with private and public patients and be geographically full time
- Infrastructure support will be provided by the Hospital
- Department of four full time staff specialists with academic salaries and academic titles
- Research will be funded by a Foundation established by fundraising with corporate sector support
- Time protected for teaching of undergraduates, surgical trainees and research
- Responsibility for hospital and university administration across all members of the department