

Notice

Understanding the Criminology Research Council

The Criminology Research Council (CRC) was established by the *Criminology Research Act 1971* and is an integral part of a State, Territory and Commonwealth funded approach to research on criminological issues in Australia today. The *Act* specifies that the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) advise Council in relation to the need for, and programs of, criminological research, as well as provide secretarial and administrative services to the Council.

The function of the CRC is to control and administer the Criminology Research Fund and, for that purpose, to examine and determine the relative importance and urgency of proposed projects. The CRC supports research that is relevant to current and future public policy issues, fosters the undertaking of quality criminological research, and ensures that this research is disseminated effectively. The CRC is essential to the effort by Australian Governments to provide facilities for studying the causes and effects of criminal behaviour and the means for its correction and prevention.

Zimring (2001) has noted that because of their relatively small numbers and close working relationships, criminologists in Australia and New Zealand enjoy greater opportunities for generating theoretical perspectives and innovative programs with fewer restrictions than their American and European colleagues. The CRC is instrumental to this creativity. Israel (2000) has observed that, unlike the US, where criminologists are heavily dependent on commercial funding, criminologists in Australia have fortunately been supported largely by the government. He specifically mentioned the support provided by the CRC, though there is evidence that commercial sponsorship and consultancies are increasing, particularly with respect to government-based research.

The Council consists of nine members who represent the Commonwealth and each of the States and Territories. This composition of the CRC represents the diverse areas targeted for research funding and reflects both national and state priorities. The Commonwealth representative is appointed by the Federal Attorney-General. The State and Territory representatives are appointed by the Attorney-General on the nomination of the responsible State or Territory Minister. Although the composition of the CRC changes slightly in response to resignations and retirements, the membership remains relatively stable. In most instances the representatives are the heads of justice for their respective jurisdictions. When deputies are appointed, they typically are directors of research or policy within justice for their state or territory. The Chair is democratically nominated and elected for a term of one year.

The Council currently meets three times a year and dedicates the meetings to the following specific issues:

- March — to establish Council priorities for the forthcoming year;
- July — to target specific areas for grants;
- November — to allocate funding for the general grants round.

Since establishment the CRC has provided a forum for Attorney Generals around Australia, and their representatives, to assess needs in the field of criminology research and to allocate moneys from the Criminology Research Fund to specific research projects in universities, government institutions and elsewhere. The Fund is generated from annual allocations by the Commonwealth, State, and Territory Governments. Since its inception in 1973, the CRC has considered 929 proposals and has provided funding to 294 (32%) projects.

In conjunction with the AIC, the CRC encourages Australian research into criminological issues to remain relevant and focussed on the needs and concerns of the Australian community. The AIC coordinates research projects undertaken on a national basis at governmental level and advises the CRC in relation to needs for, and programmes of, criminological research. Such research is essential for providing information and policy insights to Australian Governments in the vitally important tasks of law making and law enforcement.

What projects are supported?

The Council is empowered by section 47(1) of the *Criminology Research Act* 1971 to make grants for:

... such purposes of, or related to, criminological research (including the dissemination of information and advice and the publication of reports, periodicals, books and papers in connection with criminological research and the results of criminological research) as are determined by the Council.

The term '*criminological research*' is defined to mean 'research in connection with the causes, correction and prevention of criminal behaviour, and any related matter.' It can include research in sociology, psychology, law, statistics, police, judiciary, corrections, mental health, social welfare, and education.

At its first meeting of the year, CRC members bring to the table those issues or topics which they consider to be of particular relevance to their own jurisdiction and nationally. These topics are discussed in order to determine:

- What issues are considered suitable for the CRC to develop into national consultancies;
- What is suitable for smaller scoping papers and roundtable discussions; and
- What should be included in a priority listing to guide applicants in the general funding round.

Each year the Council receives a diverse and eclectic range of applications for funding — some of more pressing national significance than others. In 1975, for example, when 10 of 28 proposals were funded, 'An Investigation into the Use of Mandalic Civilization for the Harmonization of Planetary Society and the Obviation of Criminality' was not listed as a high priority.

Applications for Grants

Applications for grants must state clearly the objectives and the benefits of the proposed research according to specified criteria. The research should add to the information base on crime and justice in Australia and assist Governments around the country in developing policies to prevent crime and to monitor criminal activity effectively. The relevance of the

research to public policy cannot be overemphasised. The research should be timely and its findings should be communicated in ways that will facilitate the policy development process in the world beyond the research environment. There is also a requirement that the research funded by the CRC must produce results that will have relevance at either a national level or across a number of states. Research that is likely to yield results that are pertinent only to one particular state is unlikely to be funded unless the findings have broader implications that could be implemented by other states. For example, research investigating child abuse in Queensland was recently funded because it was broadly applicable to other states in addition to meeting certain other criteria.

In effect, the CRC provides a mechanism for ensuring that research, which has policy relevance at a national level or across a number of participating jurisdictions, can be carried out. It is a way of ensuring that research with broad practical applicability is conducted and that an inter-jurisdictional perspective can be brought to bear in crucial areas.

General Grants Round

The CRC advertises for general grants nationally in April or May each year, at which time an Application Kit is made available. Applications for funding must be received by the CRC by the nominated closing date in August. Applications received after the closing date will not be considered until the next round of general grants in the following year. The CRC determines, by the end of each year, those projects that are to receive funding. Successful grantees are required to enter into a contract with the Council. Grant moneys (depending on the timelines of the project) are usually paid in instalments over the period of the project as follows:

- One third upon commencement of the Grant;
- One third upon delivery of a progress report; and
- One third upon delivery of 15 copies of the final report, an electronic version of the final report; an executive summary paper of approximately 4,000 words, which may be considered for publication in the Australian Institute of Criminology's Trends and Issues series; and a one paragraph summary of the main findings of the research.

The final payment is made once all contract commitments have been met and the final report has been received and accepted by Council at a subsequent meeting.

Final reports are distributed directly to CRC members, ensuring that relevant persons and department sections are made aware of the availability of the reports. The reports are also listed on Australia's national shared cataloguing system and the largest bibliographic network in the country, Kinetica, as well as on CINCH, the Australian criminology database which is publicly available online and on CD-ROM. The Council also aims to communicate the research it funds in other ways, including the holding of Roundtable Discussions with key stakeholders in the area under consideration, the development of completed research for further investigation, and the publication of completed projects in the AICs Trends and Issues series which attracts wide distribution and media attention throughout Australia and internationally.

Grant Criteria

The criteria taken into account by the Council when assessing applications for the general grants round include:

- a) the relevance of the research to public policy — Information that has not previously been available to policy makers or that will contradict existing information is particularly relevant;
- b) the extent to which the proposed research will have practical application and contribute to the understanding, prevention or correction of criminal behaviour;
- c) the likelihood of the proposed research making a substantial and original contribution to criminological knowledge — Information that will lead to the asking of new questions, to new ways of thinking or to new understandings of causes of crime or other aspects of criminology is especially valuable;
- d) the cost effectiveness of the research;
- e) the soundness of the design and methodology and the feasibility of the research;
- f) the competence of the applicant(s) or principal investigator(s) to undertake the proposed research;
- g) the approval of the research by an institutional Research Ethics Committee, where appropriate;
- h) the availability of data, where required; and
- i) the extent of funding or in-kind support obtained from relevant agencies or private sector organisations.

The meanings of relevance and of timeliness are subject to change. Since 1973 the CRC has striven to recognise and support meritorious, innovative, theoretical and methodological analyses of many persistent issues in criminology, such as the consequences of sentencing, the effectiveness of police training and the influences of mental impairment on crime. As the Appendix indicates, the CRC has also supported research concerning issues that have more recently emerged, such as environmental crime and women in prisons. Substantive concerns, including victimisation, Indigenous status, and child sexual abuse have become increasingly timely. The challenge is to decide which projects to approve out of a pool that includes many excellent proposals.

Funding is not normally given for research within the normal operational responsibilities of government departments, for research more appropriately funded by other research bodies, for doctoral research or for research to be conducted predominantly outside Australia.

Grant selection process

All applications undergo a preliminary examination by a panel comprising:

- the Criminology Research Council's Adviser (a Senior Research Analyst at the Australian Institute of Criminology); and
- two senior criminologists nominated by the President of the Australian and New Zealand Society of Criminology Inc., and appointed by the Council.

The Panel identifies those applications that, in accordance with the criteria listed above, are worthy to proceed for further assessment by an independent referee selected by the Panel. The Panel submits its recommendations to the CRC. While guided considerably by the Panel recommendations, the CRC retains responsibility for the final decisions about acceptance or otherwise of applications.

The process has become increasingly competitive. **See Figure 1.** The success rates were very high in the early days. Between 1973 and 1977, the first five years of the CRC, 41 (38%) of the 108 proposals submitted were funded. Between 1998 and 2002, 33 (20%) of the 168 proposals submitted were funded. The highest success rate 13/19 (81%) occurred in 1978. The year with the lowest rate 2/22 (10%) was 1999.

The size of awards has increased as the success rate has declined. **See Figure 2.** Awards ranged from \$532 to \$18,529 between 1974 and 1976, with the median award of \$6191.¹ Between 2000 and 2002 awards ranged between \$10,386 and \$73,096, with the median award of \$40,925. Since 1990 the maximum awards have remained similar with the exception of a very large project funded in 1993.²

Other initiatives of the CRC

Research Fellow

To advance the Council's objective of fostering quality criminological research, a two year Research Fellowship position, which reflects the Council's priorities, was established. To date, three scholars have been appointed to this position and have worked on a wide range of tasks allocated by the Council.

Academics' Meeting

The CRC relies heavily on the work of Australia's academic community and sees it as crucial that a strong and positive dialogue exists between the Council and the academic community. To foster this, the Council initiated, as part of its corporate plan, the holding of a meeting with academic leaders every two years. The objective of the meeting is to discuss how the legislation can best be implemented so as to give maximum benefit to government and the community and also to address issues raised by the academic community.

Discussion

In his Sir John Barry Memorial Lecture, Paul Wiles (2002) observed that criticisms of government action related to criminology are inevitable. Those criticisms are compounded for the CRC because of the tension between being simultaneously responsible for identifying meritorious research in criminology and for funding that research. There are potential foundations for the concern that governmental organizations may favour particular topics or may operate in self-interest. Some critics believe that agencies of social control, which the CRC is, are swayed by fads and 'moral panics' (Grattet, Jenness & Curry 1998). As sometimes happens in criminology, the CRC will occasionally be slow to recognise the importance of an issue (Pfohl 1977). Public criticisms that the CRC has been unfair and biased in the manner in which grants have been allocated have been expressed at the session during which an earlier version was presented to the 2003 conference of the Australian and New Zealand Society of Criminology. Similar criticisms were expressed at

1 All figures are in the dollar amounts for the year the proposals were submitted.

2 In 1993 an exceptional grant for \$300,000 was awarded to investigate reintegrative shaming.

the 2004 Academics meeting of the CRC. These criticisms articulated common themes. One long-standing resentment is that an especially large grant in 1993 severely diminished funding that would otherwise have been available to smaller deserving grants. Another belief is that the CRC is biased toward quantitative analysis. A third belief is that groundbreaking ideas are often passed over in favour of established topics and methodologies. Ironically, the large 1993 grant funded research on one of the monumental theoretical and policy-based contributions of Australian criminology and drew heavily upon qualitative analyses. A final criticism is that the CRC discriminates against critical theory. An examination of the proposals funded over the years indicates that the CRC has supported the investigation of newly emerging issues without what Goode and Ben Yehuda (1994) refer to as, 'jumping on the bandwagon'. See Appendix A.

Other critics (Beck & Rosenbaum 1994; Becker 1963) claim that bureaucracies, like the CRC, perpetuate the Criminal Justice System. We think that it is fair to say that nothing could please members of Council more than making the CRC redundant by eliminating crime and social injustice. Since crime in its old and new manifestations continues to exist, the need for criminology promises to persist for the foreseeable future. The CRC seeks to optimise funding for criminological research through fair and objective policies and procedures. The CRC has adopted an annual review process that involves a single group of some of the most recognized criminologists in Australia. Those reviewers utilise standardized instruments to rank order the grant applications. A research project assessing and evaluating the relative productivity of grants submitted to the CRC currently is underway. The CRC will continue to play an essential role in ensuring that the resources of Governments in Australia are provided for the study of the causes and effects of crime and of means for its prevention.

The evolution of criminology in Australia has been productive and eclectic in comparison to what Garland (1994) has described in England (Finnane 1998). Pratt and Priestley (1999) have described the contributions of Australian and New Zealand criminology in their history of the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, which is a close contemporary of the CRC.

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Further Information

Further information can be obtained from the CRC website: <<http://www.aic.gov.au/crc>>. The general grants round is advertised on the website from approximately April to the cut off date in August each year. Individuals can also register an interest in applying for a grant by emailing the CRC 's administrator at <crc@aic.gov.au>, or by phoning the CRC on 02 6260 9237.

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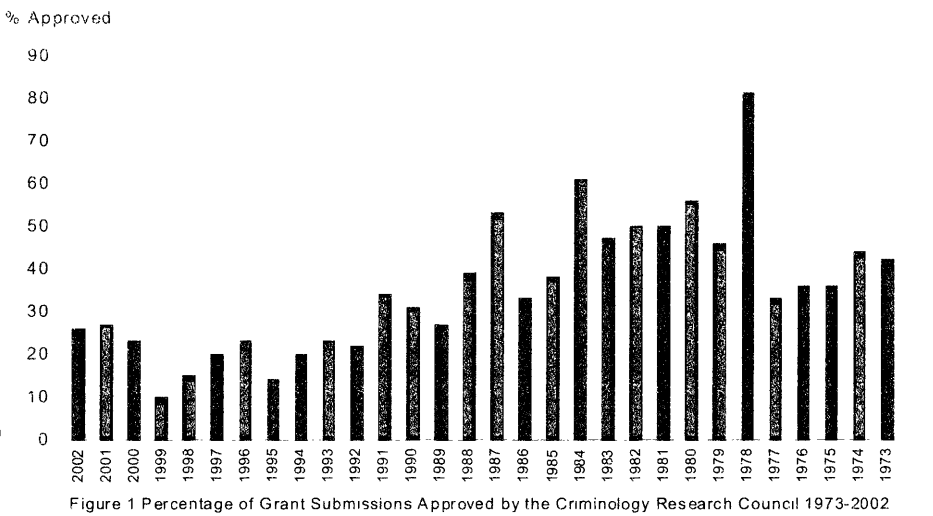
APPENDIX A

Recent Examples of CRC Funded Research

- A study of the development of aggression in children from infancy through to adolescence and the propensities of various causal pathways to lead to delinquency.
- A study of hearing loss and communication disability within the criminal justice system, to identify communication disability and disadvantage for Aboriginal defendants.
- The experiences of child complainants of sexual abuse within the criminal justice system.
- A quantitative and qualitative analysis of the relationship between community cohesiveness and rural crime.
- Identification of characteristics and patterns of male domestic partner abusers.
- Investigating the incidence of criminal and antisocial behaviour by young people on

the Strand in Townsville.

- Evaluation of an early intervention crime prevention program.
- An analysis of private investigators in Australia and the related issues of ethics and regulation.
- An empirical study of judicial practice in sentencing multiple offenders in Victoria.
- A quantitative study of the ACT's unique geography on residential burglary offenders.
- The development of a unique risk of violence tool for Australian indigenous offenders.
- A study of how Australian schools are responding to the problem of peer victimisation in schools.
- A review of the literature on agricultural crime.
- A study on the language processing and production skills of young offenders and implications for enhancing prevention and intervention strategies.
- A study of correctional offender treatment programs in Australia.
- An examination of the early risk factors of adolescent and young adult antisocial behaviour.
- The development and testing of a risk assessment model for different classes of victims of child sexual offenders.
- A study of the prevalence of victimisation and violent behaviour in the seriously mentally ill.
- A survey of attitudes toward employability of non-violent ex-offenders.



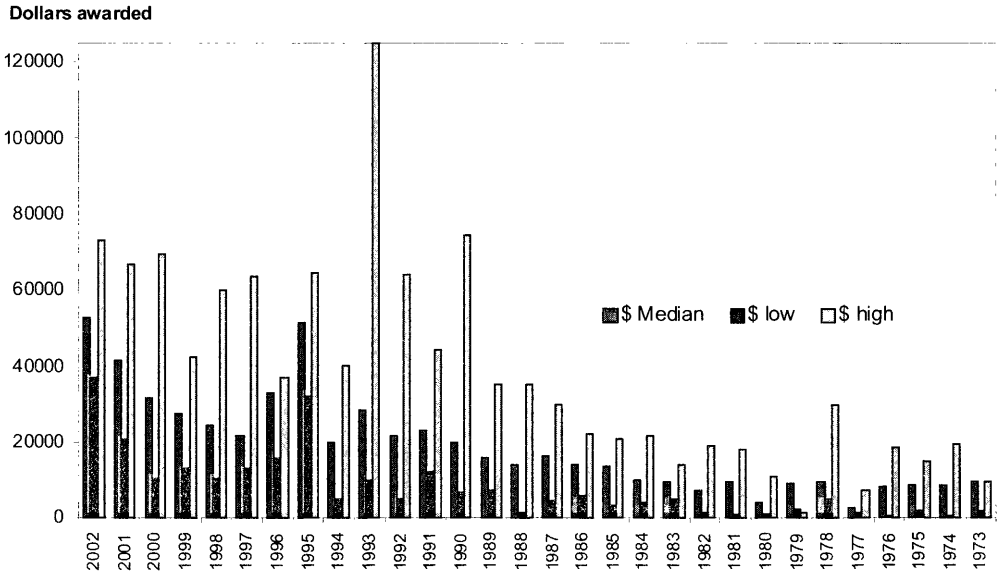


Figure 2 Median and range for dollar amounts of grants approved by the Criminology Research Council 1973-2002