

# Scholarships to lure talent back home

**Sophie Morris**

The government is under pressure to use scholarships to lure Australia's best and brightest researchers back from overseas for short periods each year to help offset the brain drain.

Sydney University vice-chancellor Gavin Brown has told a Senate committee inquiry into Australia's expatriates that the scheme would be a cost-effective way of helping the nation benefit from the tens of thousands of leading Australian scientists, engineers and researchers who work overseas.

The scheme, devised by 1999 Young Australian of the Year Bryan Gaensler, has been considered by the federal Department of Education, Science and Training, which also raised the possibility of philanthropic funding.

Professor Gaensler has left Australia for Harvard, but his alma mater, the University of Sydney, piloted a return scholarship scheme based on his proposal last year.

Professor Brown said the two NSW Expatriate Return Awards offered to two scientists based in the US in 2003 had cost the university and state education department less than \$70,000 - much less than bringing the researchers home permanently.

"We encourage the federal government to develop schemes to mobilise this diverse group of . . . [high] achieving Australians . . . without forcing them to choose between the overseas and Australian experiences," he said.

The proposal reflects a new approach outlined by the Southern Cross Group which represents expatriates. It told the Senate that Australia should accept it cannot stop talented citizens pursuing opportunities overseas, but should find ways to harness their skills.

Concerns that Australia's top research talent was being forced overseas to universities offering them better prospects and more resources triggered the introduction of the Federation Fellowship program in 2002.

Education Minister Brendan Nelson will announce the recipients of 25 fellowships, worth \$235,000 each year for five years, today.

AFR 16.6.2004