

## **SUMMARY OF THE R&D WORKER MOBILITY PROJECT**

NACI in April 2002 commissioned Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) to undertake a study on the underlying dynamics of R&D Worker Mobility.

This mobility issue is of concern to science systems around the world, and manifests itself in a number of ways. Mobility is both a beneficial and a dysfunctional aspect of the increasingly globalised market for scarce R&D skills.

The free circulation of R&D workers is part of the knowledge generation and technology transfer process and is thus essential to progress. On the other hand, what is commonly termed 'brain drain' represents the largely permanent loss of expensive skilled staff to other beneficiary organisations or countries. One party's drain is another's gain.

NACI seeks to understand these dynamics for South Africa in the context of the new position of the country both regionally and internationally. Specifically the study is to:

- Quantify as reliably as possible the scale and nature of R&D personnel turnover and flows at a cross-section of HEIs, SETIs and industry players;
- Identify the causes (employers and employees) behind these flows;
- Provide estimates of the R&D worker shortages in the key areas of technology expansion;
- Assess the extent to which the R&D flows are productive or dysfunctional;
- Provide seminal illustrative case studies over a five year period of such mobility;
- Formulate a range of appropriate policy options including appropriate implementation strategies;
- Provide guidelines for measuring the impact of such strategic interventions; and
- Demarcate areas for further research.

The project is using a combination of quantitative and qualitative data gathering techniques that span both local and international sources, with primary research being conducted through an employer survey and the development of case histories. It is intended to draw significant mobility data through linkage with the national R&D Survey (the 'Frascati' survey) that is currently in the field. A set of items on mobility has been included in the R&D survey thereby reducing the duplication of effort that an independent survey would have imposed on the science community.

It is intended that the project will be completed by the end of February 2003. Project staff are drawn from HSRC, CSIR and UWC.

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