

# DIRECTOR'S REPORT



Professor Jonathan Stone, Director.

The year 2006 was one of particular achievement for the School. Each year, our scientific productivity for the previous year is assessed, as HERDC-listable publications. In 2005, our publications rose sharply on the year before, reaching 60% above 2002 levels. Preliminary figures for 2006 indicate a further rise of ~20%, giving a rise of 90% over the last 4 years. The School hosted nodes of 6 ARC Centres of Excellence in 2006; two commenced their work in 2006, and two of the longer-established Centres (for the Kangaroo Genome and Integrated Legume Research) have just been renewed to 2010. Success with applications to the Australian Research Council and the National Health and Medical Research Council lifted our income from these major funding bodies to 2-300% above 2002 levels. These several measures of our work reached all-time highs, and the quality of the School's work was attested by a remarkable range of awards to our scientists, from election to learned academies to the most prestigious awards in Australian biology (the Burnet Medal of the Australian Academy of Science) and science (the Prime Minister's Prize).

The School continues its contributions to the University through teaching in many undergraduate courses, the training of Honours students, the hosting and development of research facilities available to researchers across the campus, scientific collaborations with other University areas, both within the College of Science and with areas in other College, and our contributions to the work of the College of Science. RSBS scientists now sit on curriculum and discipline committees of the College, enabling us to contribute even more strongly to this area of the College's work.

Growth in the School's infrastructure continued during 2006, with the commencement of construction of a PC2 glasshouse facility, part of a two-part College of Science facility; the continued development of the School's Molecular Biology, Mass Spectrometry and Isotope Dating facilities, and the establishment of a Biomolecular Spectroscopy Facility; and continued planning for new construction to meet the School's biological compliance needs. The School's needs for biological compliance have been incorporated into the University's laboratory refurbishment planning process. At the time of writing, plans are being developed for a biological sciences building for the College of Science to accommodate these needs. The building will be shared with other significant biological science areas in the College, particularly the School of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology. Detailed planning will take place in 2007. Two areas of particular challenge have emerged this year. One relates to the School's postgraduate enrolments, which fell sharply from 2004 to 2005. This fall has been largely reversed, but we need to rebuild our postgraduate enrolments beyond 2004 levels to reach our targets, and the School has added a position to its administrative staff to facilitate this. The second challenge is budgetary. In 2005, the School successfully completed the transition to grant-based funding; from 2001 - 5, the proportion of activities funded by the recurrent budget fell from 80% to 50%, partly due to a steep rise in grant earnings. Shortfalls in the federal supplementation of the recurrent grant mean that the real value of the recurrent budget will continue to fall, slowly but cumulatively, and we have begun planning to meet this challenge. This planning will be strongly influenced by the outcome of a University-wide review of the biosciences, recently announced.

Each year brings individual honours, and this year, School staff were recognised with high honours. I mention in particular the award of the Prime Minister's Prize for Science to Mandyam Srinivasan, a remarkable moment in the School's life. Jennifer Graves was awarded the Burnet Medal of the Australian Academy of Science and was the

Asia-Pacific Laureate of the UNESCO L'Oreal Awards for Women in Science; and Graham Farquhar was elected Secretary (Biological Sciences) of the Australian Academy of Science, the most prestigious national position in the biological sciences.

Each year also brings its arrivals and departures. Shin Ho Chung's Biophysics Group joined the School in 2006, bringing a program of analysis of the function of membrane channels (named in 2006 as one of the NH&MRC's 'Ten Best'). The distinction of Professor Chung's program, and the fundamental role of membrane channels in all biology, makes his arrival most welcome. The School was also strengthened by two continuing appointments of Dr Ruth Arkell in the Molecular Genetics and Evolution Group, and of Dr Michael Roderick in Environmental Biology. The latter position is a joint appointment, made with other areas in the College of Science. Conversely, Professor Srinivasan's departure, after 20 years with the School, is particularly significant. His contribution to the School and University over this long period has been outstanding, and he goes with our respect and warm acknowledgement of a remarkable series of insights into the power and function of the tiny brains of insects, and with our best wishes for another 20 years of very creative work.

Finally, I must thank all staff, in the Director's Unit, in the School's Administrative Group and beyond, for their work and support during a year of real achievement. Challenges remain; they always will, and will require all our energy in the coming year. But much was achieved in 2006.



**Distinguished Prof. Graham Farquhar**

Secretary (Biological Sciences) of the Australian Academy of Science

Doctor Honoris Causa in recognition of 'expertise in Environmental Biology' Universiteit Antwerpen, Brussels.

Royal Society of Tasmania R.M. Johnston Memorial Medal. Awarded to "a scholar of great distinction in any field within the Society's purview".



**Prof. Jennifer Graves**

UNESCO-L'Oreal Women in Science 'Asia-Pacific Laureate'

Macfarlane Burnet Medal for Biology (Australian Academy of Science).



**Prof. Mandyam Srinivasan**

Prime Minister's Prize for Science

Election to the Academy of Sciences for the Developing World