



the quality of crops

med of five years ago — truly couldn't have dreamed — we're doing now," he says. "Five years ago if someone said 'How far off is rapid sequencing of plant genomes?', I would have said 100 years."

Quicker sequencing means farmers get higher-quality plants sooner so they can reap the economic benefits.

Baverstock says the centre is also engaging in research examining the possible use of eucalypt as a biofuel. The new director will lead such projects and ensure research becomes commercialised for the benefit of farmers.

Vision and leadership skills are crucial for the director's role and candidates must be talented communicators who have scientific clout. "I think there's a bit of art in

it, and it's one that I haven't got, [but] our previous director had this," Baverstock says.

"He'd come to me and say the next thing we're going to need is one of these machines, this thing is going to take the world by storm, this is where it's going, and he was always right. He had that ability to smell out where the centre needed to go to capture the full benefits."

Baverstock is keen to find a dynamic scientist to fill the niche role and says the university is willing to negotiate a healthy salary.

"We would pay virtually anything to get them, it's just so important to get the right person. It's quite a unique position in the Australian context, so we need someone who is going to really make things hum."

Combined strength of pharmacy schools

THERE'S a new loud voice in pharmacy education.

In an uncapped sector with 17 pharmacy schools producing too many graduates, the top four research-based schools have banded together as the National Alliance for Pharmacy Education. Included are the two oldest pharmacy schools, University of Sydney and Monash, along with the universities of Queensland and South Australia.

Their first task is to design postgraduate programs that will be offered across all four universities, probably from next year. The suggestion is that NAPE postgraduate degrees will become the gold standard.

But there are other implications. Peak industry body the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia raises income from providing the one-year intern training programs all pharmacy graduates must complete to gain registration. At the moment it provides intern training programs to 70 per cent of the annual 1500 graduates.

Monash and UniSA run their own intern training program. Under NAPE, Sydney and UQ will join them in a standard program. The PSA will lose at least 500 graduate customers.

Monash pharmacy dean Bill Charman stresses that the impetus for forming the national alliance was not about moving into the training program area.

"I don't see this as anything about losers," he says. "The ITP space is going to have many, many providers as of next year. I'm aware of a number of providers that are going to move into that space."

An attraction for any university to run intern training programs is that it keeps graduates within an institution, making them likelier to sign up for postgraduate courses. Some in the sector suggest the programs may be redesigned to court towards further degrees.

Extra funding was recently set

aside by the Council of Australian Governments for clinical training. For Charman, this highlights how pharmacy education "has just been there as a passive contributor".

"Because pharmacy hasn't been adequately organised, the money that's available in terms of clinical training doesn't fit any of these particular areas at the moment," he says.

This would include the continuing professional development courses Tasmania, South Australia and NSW have been running, organised by the PSA. Newly designed programs awaiting official approval will be mandatory for all pharmacists under the national registration system, which began this month.

NAPE's postgraduate offerings could play into this space but Charman is keen to draw a distinction between brief courses done for registration points and NAPE's award courses done to gain degrees.

Sydney University pharmacy faculty head Iqbal Ramzan says NAPE is "there to provide courses that pharmacists might need when they graduate, or throughout their life journey as pharmacists, to make sure that they're keeping in touch with what's current".

"And we see that we have a legitimate right to be in that space because we are an educational institution, we have all the staff who currently provide that service to professional bodies like the PSA, so it's only logical that we take a leadership role," Ramzan says.

"We want to add to the discussion on many things. So when submissions are being asked for in terms of health reform, clinical placements or workforce, we will be there to give, we hope, objective and sound things that people can discuss. That's going to be good for our nation, for health care and, incidentally, it might also be good for pharmacy."

ALISTAIR JONES

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR