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Superannuation Research Centre appoints two post-doctoral fellows

■ Focus on ageing, investment switching, savings

The CSIRO-Monash University Superannuation Research Cluster has appointed two post-doctoral fellows as an integral part of the ongoing research work of the \$9 million research program.

Professor Deborah Ralston, Cluster Leader and Executive Director of the Australian Centre for Financial Studies (ACFS), made the announcement at the Research Cluster's two-day workshop being held in Melbourne today and tomorrow.

Dr Sonja Kassenboehmer, currently employed as a post-doctoral fellow at the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research at the University of Melbourne, will join the research team to focus on the role of cognitive decline with ageing, financial literacy and financial decision-making.

Dr Jun Feng, who recently completed a PhD in Economics at UNSW, will look at superannuation fund member behaviour in areas such as investment switching, savings (contributions) levels and their consequences for retirement savings outcomes.

Prof Ralston said the Research Cluster was excited to attract candidates of the calibre of Drs Kassenboehmer and Feng to these positions.

"Both these candidates bring the right skill set and enthusiasm to two areas of superannuation where there is an obvious need for more research.

"These topics align well with the stated aims of the Research Cluster, especially in the 'transition and post retirement phase' theme.

"For example, better understanding financial decision making will help answer the proposed questions: 'How do we maximize decision making for superannuants in the transition from accumulation to post-retirement?' and 'What can be done to ensure a less volatile income stream and greater certainty for retirees?' " she said.

Dr Kassenboehmer completed her PhD at the Ruhr-University of Bochum in Germany in 2011, in which she used extensive statistical and micro-econometric analyses applied to large and complex data sets to ask important questions about the determinants of both subjective and objective human welfare measures.

"The skill that she has accumulated in her PhD studies (including earlier studies leading to a 1st class honours Bachelors of Mathematics with Applied Statistics), and in the (labour-market related) research she has been involved with at the Melbourne Institute over the past two years, ideally places her for the proposed research. The quality of her research is demonstrated by the number of first author publications in top economics journals," Professor Ralston said.

Dr Feng holds an MPhil in Actuarial Studies from UNSW and a Bachelor of Management in Information Management and Information System from Fudan University, Shanghai. His research focuses on ageing issues in general, both in terms of financial and physical risk of ageing.

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Prof Ralston said: “Feng has a rich knowledge and a comprehensive understanding of the current superannuation system, and past and future policy changes. This is fundamentally important to the nature of the research questions being examined given the legislative and policy context that has changed so much over the past decade.”

The Research Cluster’s two-day workshop, the first held since it was launched in late August, will give 11 researchers the opportunity to update and receive feedback from their peers and industry stakeholders on where they are at with their research projects.

Prof Ralston said: “From the outset we wanted the research, which will provide an independent evidence base to inform policy and promote innovation within the superannuation system, to be constantly reviewed by our peers. This way we can ensure its relevance to a policy area that is critical to Australia’s future.”

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