

DASSH response to the Call for Comment on the proposed changes to the ARC *Discovery Program* funding rules

The Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (DASSH) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the proposed changes to the ARC *Discovery Program* funding rules and the opportunity to express concern at some of the proposals.

(1) Discovery Program schemes:

b. Cross-scheme limits

While in principle DASSH supports the aim of this proposed change – enabling ARC funding to be spread more widely – we are concerned about the affect it could potentially have on the ability to maximise the impact of Centres of Excellence (CoE) or Strategic Research Initiatives (SRI) research in areas where there is concentrated of research capacity in a strategically significant research area.

For example, the SRI National Indigenous Researchers and Knowledges Network (NIRAKN) aims to build research capability amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers, those researchers are likely also to be applicants for Discovery Indigenous grants. It may well be the case that there are not a sufficient number of competitive indigenous researchers outside the SRI to pursue those grants, even though there may exist untapped research capacity within the SRI. It is likely the same could occur for a CoE in a strategic research priority area, leading to less research being done on strategically important areas by those with the expertise and capacity to achieve significant outcomes.

The articulation of the ARC’s expectation of CI participation in grants is ambiguous in relation to *Laureate Fellowships*. DASSH suggests that the interpretation of this statement is possibly unclear – Is it the intent of the new restriction to restrict Laureate Fellows to being a CI on a CoE or a CI on a *Discovery Project*, but not hold a Laureate Fellowship, *Discovery Project* and CoE at the same time? The final paragraph of (2) b. on Laureate Fellows seems to be less prescriptive than the description of the new restrictions in italics.

(2) Future Fellowships scheme

a. Scheme Objectives

DASSH notes the under the proposed clarification of one of the Scheme Objectives – “*To ensure that outstanding mid-career researchers are recruited and retained, by Eligible Organisations in continuing academic positions*” – that the ARC would therefore “require Eligible Organisations to commit to retaining successful Future Fellows in continuing positions, subject to appropriate performance during the fellowship”. We feel that in addition to this performance assessment, the new requirement would need to include some means for institutions to reassess the continuing position requirement in light of operational requirements of the institution, in order to align with the enterprise agreements at most Universities.

b. Eligibility

From a humanities and social sciences perspective, the proposed change to the eligibility rules for the Future Fellowships scheme is troubling. Restricting the Award to “*Only researchers employed on a non-continuing basis, or those who have held continuing positions at Eligible Organisations for a total of less than three years*” is problematic. The model proposed here assumes a norm of researcher employment that is more familiar to science (PhD to (overseas) post doc(s) to continuing employment) and is not shared evenly across the disciplines. It particularly affects arts, social sciences and humanities (ASSH) disciplines, where post-doctoral opportunities are scarce, and researchers with family commitments who are less mobile and seek continuing employment in Research and Teaching roles in order to ensure continuity of income. This proposal would, for that reason, likely to disproportionately affect applications from women as well as make it difficult for post doctoral researchers to develop the type of track record that would make them a viable *Future Fellowship* candidate as they are almost always in permanent positions by the time they would be competitive under these changes.

DASSH is particularly concerned about this proposal because since the demise of the Australian Postdoctoral Fellowships (APDs), the Future Fellowship scheme has been one of the few opportunities provided to ASSH academics for an intensive opportunity to significantly build research momentum of the sort that internal study leave schemes are incapable of supporting.

It is also likely that the proposed change will lead to preserve behaviour, such as poaching between Australian institutions and an increase in offering short term contracts to new appointments so as to ensure that they are eligible to apply for a *Future Fellowship*.

In regard to these above concerns, the proposed change raises a number of questions that need to be addressed:

1. Would applicants who had held a permanent appointment at one institution be eligible to apply for a *Future Fellowship* at a new institution?
2. Would an applicant who had held a permanent position previously at the Administering Organisation but had subsequently relocated be eligible?
3. Would applicants be eligible if they had held a series of short term contracts at the Administering Institution?

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