

Professor Sue Thomas
Australian Research Council
11 Lancaster Place, Canberra Airport, ACT, 2906

27 March 2020

Dear Professor Thomas

I am writing on behalf of the Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (DASSH), which represents Deans and Associate Deans at 43 universities across Australia and New Zealand.

Our members have expressed concerns in relation to the deadline for the Special Research Initiative (SRI) for Australian Society, History and Culture, currently due on 22 April 2020. On behalf of the DASSH membership, I would like to request that the ARC reconsider its decision not to extend the deadline for the SRI, as outlined in the 'ARChway' newsletter earlier this month and suggest that a two-week extension for all applications would be appropriate.

Our Associate Deans (Research) are overseeing the vast majority of applications likely to be submitted in this SRI and are therefore at the frontlines of this issue. A large proportion of these Associate Deans have indicated that while their faculties and colleges have applications in preparation, they have felt the pressure of the short initial timeline for applications, and this pressure has been much compounded by the rolling effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many scholars preparing applications are now attempting to work concurrently on new and time-critical tasks (e.g. shifting curricula online at short notice), alongside additional pressures presented by family or household members now working and studying from home.

We are concerned that the effect of retaining the current deadline, or of requiring individual researchers to make requests for individual extensions, will lead to fewer applications and reduced quality in those applications that are submitted, and may compromise applicants' ability to adequately adapt curricula for their students. We also believe the current combination of circumstances poses a substantial risk to applicants' mental health and wellbeing and ask that the ARC take these factors into consideration when determining timeframes.

In this instance, we believe providing an additional two-weeks would not introduce an excessive delay in the process of assessing applications and would relieve the immediate pressure applicants are facing. It would provide a note of clarity in a complex and evolving situation. A two-week extension is also likely to ease the concurrent pressures faced by those who have indicated their willingness to serve as detailed assessors or sit on the Special Advisory Committee. Furthermore, we understand that many scholars are considering submitting individual requests extensions based on their specific circumstances. If a general extension is granted, this will ease the administrative burden faced by ARC staff in handling many requests.

The SRI initiative provides an excellent, unique opportunity for scholars in the humanities and social sciences to make a major contribution to our 'understanding about modern Australia, including its origins and the events that have shaped it' [*Special Research Initiative for Australian Society, History and Culture Grant Guidelines*, p. 9]. We believe that allowing scholars a little more time to prepare applications will result in improved projects awarded on a more equitable basis and will lead to better long-term outcomes for Australia.

Thank you for considering our concerns.

Kind regards



Meghan Bergamin

Executive Officer
Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities