

Submission

**To Senator the Hon Matt Canavan,
Chair Senate Standing Committees on Education and Employment**

Australasian Council of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities

*Australian Research Council Amendment (Ensuring Research Independence) Bill 2018 No. , 2018
(Senator Faruqi)*

24 February 2022

The Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (DASSH) supports this Bill amendment and is calling for the Ministerial right to veto individual ARC Discovery Grants to be removed.

DASSH holds serious concerns about the veto exercised by the Acting Minister for Education and Youth, Stuart Robert, over six Australian Research Council Discovery Grants on Christmas Eve in 2021.

Given all six affected projects were from the humanities, arts and social sciences disciplines, DASSH believes it signals the continued disregard for important areas of Australia's intellectual culture and life, at the same time as it reinforces the importance of the continued independence of the Australian Research Council (ARC).

The last time Ministerial veto was exercised was in 2018, all 11 projects rejected were also in the arts, social sciences and humanities.

DASSH does not see this as a partisan issue. Current legislation allowing Ministerial veto of projects allows political players of all political persuasions to exercise this type of control. We believe no Minister should be given that opportunity.

The ARC engages a College of Experts of international standing who play a pivotal role in the rigorous, multi-round assessment of Discovery Grant applications every year.

As the ARC College of Experts itself noted in an open letter to the Acting Minister calling for the reversal of the vetoes, the Minister's decision fundamentally undermines a robust expert process, and also erodes the good will of senior researchers and peer reviewers.

While the Minister has questioned the projects' value for money and their benefit to Australia, both criteria are directly addressed in all Discovery Project proposals. It has been demonstrated that all projects have clearly met and exceeded expectations when it comes to both.

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Another statement signed by more than 1,900 academics from Australia and around the world noted the veto as an attack on literary studies and literary culture in Australia, given two thirds of the grants were from this field.

Our almost 300 members, the Deans, Deputy and Associate Deans from more than 40 universities in Australia and New Zealand work inside universities with increasingly constrained research funding opportunities.

Historically, the lack of significant competitive funding for arts, humanities and social science research means that our Members and their cohorts are continually disadvantaged. The fact that all six grants vetoed by the Acting Minister come from these disciplines compounds this experience.

DASSH Members continually seek opportunities to partner with industry and attract philanthropic funding for our important research. Yet our universities also prize Category 1 funding from the premier funding body in the country, the ARC, in our disciplines.

Career progression and the international standing of our academic researchers at all levels is damaged by the relative lack of funding for our disciplines. Curiosity-driven 'blue-sky' inquiry in the arts, social sciences and humanities deepens our cultural and social understanding. More than that, it strengthens and enriches the fabric of our society.

That curiosity is also critical to the delivery of the more than 400 science, technology, engineering and maths projects funded in this grant round.

About DASSH:

DASSH represents more than 250 deans, and associate and deputy deans, from 43 universities across Australia and New Zealand, leading schools and faculties that teach tens of thousands of students and several thousand scholars in the HASS disciplines. Led and governed by an executive committee, DASSH supports those who have responsibility for governance and management of research, teaching and learning across those member institutions.



Contact details:

President Professor Catharine Coleborne
Australasian Council of Arts, Social Sciences and Technology
26 Balmain Cres, Acton, 2600

02 02 6103 9937