

Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities

Policy Review of the National Competitive Grants Program

Australian Research Council and the Department of Education

DASSH welcomes the opportunity to give feedback on the Policy Review of the National Competitive Grants Program.

The [Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities](#) represents more than 250 Deans, and Associate and Deputy Deans, from 44 universities across Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, leading schools and faculties that teach tens of thousands of students and several thousand scholars. DASSH supports those who have responsibility for governance and management of research, teaching and learning across those member institutions. DASSH members were consulted widely as part of this submission process.

1. What are the best guiding objectives for the NCGP to support excellent pure basic, strategic basic and applied research that will enable it to deliver economic, social, environmental, and cultural benefits for Australia?

In Australia's limited funding environment, the ARC continues to represent a valuable source of funding for both pure and applied research. The humanities, arts and social sciences have made significant contributions at both the pure and applied level. Research within our disciplines advances knowledge and leads to economic, social, environmental and cultural benefits for Australia.

As the key source of funding for pure basic research in Australia, it is particularly important that the ARC maintains a strong commitment to funding curiosity-driven research across the broad range of disciplines. This research is critical to the competitiveness and richness of the university sector.

The humanities, arts and social sciences rely on funding from the ARC to support pure basic research which underpins much of the work undertaken in our disciplines. Without a strong commitment from the ARC to support pure research, opportunities available for humanities, arts and social sciences scholars to fund their research will be further eroded. This will also have significant consequence for the more applied research which builds on the foundations established by that pure scholarship.

More funding is urgently needed to support Australia's research sector. This funding should be shared across different types of research, including pure and applied research, and between grants with shorter and longer timeframes.

In particular, the ARC must ensure that there is an adequate degree of separation between different types of research within its funding schemes. This includes a separation between pure and applied research as well as distinct funding for industry-focused projects.

Some overlap currently exists within individual funding schemes between different types of research, particularly between pure and applied research. Discovery Projects, for example, offer funding to support both basic and applied research.

Providing separate funding streams for different types of research will enable a more even distribution of funding and will ensure that a clear avenue for funding pure research is maintained.

2. How can the NCGP further support and encourage:

a. high-calibre research that drives the advancement of knowledge?

b. the utilisation, translation or commercialisation of research to deliver benefits to Australia's society, economy, and community?

DASSH strongly encourages expanding funding arrangements to better support research translation. Translating research findings into outcomes often takes longer than the typical length of grant programs. Demonstrating research impact can take a particularly long time in the humanities, arts and social sciences, where research is often focused on shifting social paradigms.

Establishing a funding scheme specifically dedicated to research translation would be a step in the right direction. Specific translation schemes such as this have been implemented in other locations. In the UK, the government provides funding for research translation through Impact Acceleration Accounts. The IAAs provide funding to research institutions with the aim of fostering knowledge exchange and helping translate research outputs into impacts.

A similar scheme could be established in Australia with support being made available to ARC-funded projects which have either been recently completed or are soon to be completed. This would provide valuable support to researchers as they work towards translating the findings of their research.

Industry-focused schemes also often privilege significant cash contributions from partners or host institutions. It is important that the ARC acknowledge the diversity of contributions which can be made by industry partners, including cash, in-kind, and access to networks and datasets. This is particularly important for those in the humanities, arts and social sciences who often rely entirely on in-kind contributions.

Current industrial transformation schemes are also linked to research priorities which are predominately STEM-based. Researchers in the humanities, arts and social sciences often partner with industries which have significant social and economic influence, including in the spheres of culture, education and health. The humanities, arts and social sciences also offer valuable insights across a wide range of industries, including those that are STEM-based. The ARC should thus expand the priorities for industrial transformation schemes to provide a greater recognition of the value that research within the humanities, arts and social sciences brings to industry.

3. How can the outcomes, impact and contribution of NCGP funded research be best identified and communicated?

Research can have impact in a wide range of areas, whether economic, social, cultural or environmental. However, there is currently a narrow focus on commercialisation within the NCGP. This obscures the broader potential research impacts, including around policy reform, public engagement and community enrichment, which are often the domain of research in the humanities, arts and social sciences.

A narrow focus on commercialisation also obscures the value that researchers bring in terms of novel contributions to knowledge. It is therefore vital that the ARC provides a greater recognition of the broad range of potential research impacts when allocating funding.

This can be achieved, in part, by allowing researchers to indicate discipline and stakeholder-relevant criteria for measuring potential benefit within grant applications. This will ensure that research impacts reflect discipline norms and are assessed accordingly.

The ARC is also well placed to provide support for researchers in helping demonstrate the impact of their research, including by providing examples of previous projects which have achieved impactful outcomes across the broad range of disciplines. The ARC could also provide examples of impactful interdisciplinary projects to help encourage greater interdisciplinarity throughout the NCGP.

- 4. What structure and design of the NCGP would:**
- a. best support the NCGP's objectives?**
 - b. reduce complexity and deliver grants more efficiently?**
 - c. rebalance risk settings to encourage frontier basic research with potentially transformative outcomes?**
 - d. set the right balance between different scheme types and duration?**
 - e. use peer review in the most effective way?**
 - f. leverage the opportunities and manage the risks of using artificial intelligence?**

While DASSH welcomes the move towards a two-step application process to help streamline the application process, there is some concern that the EOI process may have put more work on applicants and assessors.

Applicants are also currently receiving feedback on non-successful projects at the end of the grant round. It is important that non-successful applicants are provided with earlier and more substantial feedback on EOIs which will enable them to improve subsequent applications.

DASSH supports further refinement of the EOI process to ensure that the process is being used as effectively as possible and is able to reduce administrative burden.

- 5. How can the NCGP best support collaboration between disciplines (between and across HASS and STEM) among researchers (both national and international), across sectors and funding programs?**

Impactful research and novel contributions to knowledge are often driven by interdisciplinary research. Interdisciplinarity must therefore be a key priority of the NCGP.

Interdisciplinarity is not specifically mentioned within the six draft objectives which have been put forward to guide the directions of the NCGP. We encourage the ARC to include interdisciplinarity as a separate objective for the NCGP in order to drive greater interdisciplinarity across all of the NCGP funding schemes.

Scoring guidelines for assessors, and the approach to assessment across College panels, should also be amended to reflect the importance of interdisciplinary research. This can be achieved by emphasising a priority for interdisciplinary projects within assessment criteria.

6. How can the NCGP promote a strong and diverse research sector, including through supporting research training and opportunities for early career researchers, women researchers and other under-represented groups?

Greater support for ECRs is urgently needed within the NCGP. Under the current funding environment, early- and mid-career researchers are missing out on funding which is increasingly going towards more senior scholars.

Funding for the latest round of the Discovery Early Career Researcher Award shows that 22 per cent of approved projects went towards applicants who were right at the end of the eligibility timeframe and many of whom held mid-career level posts such as Senior Lecturer and Associate Professor. Likewise, in the latest round of Future Fellowships, 16 per cent of successful applicants were 15 years past the award of their PhD.

This stretching of the grant parameters is disadvantaging ECRs and MCRs. The ARC must ensure that the eligibility and assessment criteria for funding schemes properly aligns with the different stages of academic careers.

The weighting of funding applications should also be reconfigured away from a heavy reliance on past track record toward supporting innovative ideas and avenues for high impact. This will ensure that ECRs are given greater opportunities to not only be involved in grants, but to lead their own projects.

Male scholars also tend to experience higher rates of success within industrial transformation schemes. The latest round of the Industrial Transformation Research Hubs program saw a significantly higher success rate for male scholars at 80 per cent of those who applied versus 20 per cent for females. Male scholars also came out ahead in the latest Industrial Transformation Training Centres funding with 67 per cent of male applicants receiving funding compared to 32 per cent of female applicants.

We encourage the ARC to work towards greater parity within these schemes. This can be achieved, in part, by broadening the largely STEM-based research priorities, including towards a greater focus on the humanities, arts and social sciences where there are higher concentrations of female researchers.

- 7. Are there aspects of the NCGP that could be strengthened or redeveloped to advance support for:**
- a. Indigenous Australian research, incorporating Indigenous knowledge and knowledge systems (where appropriate)?**
 - b. Indigenous researchers, irrespective of their areas of research?**

DASSH supports a more systematic incorporation of Indigenous Knowledges within all aspects of the academic enterprise, including providing greater support for Indigenous scholars.

As part of the recent ARC Review, the ARC Review Panel recommended that the ARC provide greater support for Indigenous researchers through the introduction of two Indigenous Fellowships. DASSH supports this recommendation and encourages the ARC to establish a dedicated funding scheme for Indigenous researchers.

The application process for funding schemes could also be amended to better support Indigenous research. Researchers are currently required to fit their research into existing research priorities which do not always adequately reflect the nature of their research. Applications should thus provide a wider range of options for research priorities which are specifically related to Indigenous research.