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Committee Secretary
Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Gerry McInally,

Australian Research Council Amendment (Review Response) Bill 2023

Thank you for the invitation to La Trobe University to make a submission to its inquiry into the above Bill.

La Trobe broadly endorses the draft Bill. As currently drafted, it reflects the intent and delivers on the recommendations of the *Trusting Australia's Ability: Review of the Australian Research Council Act 2001* report. As the Committee would be aware, I had the opportunity to be part of the Panel entrusted by the Education Minister, the Hon. Jason Clare, to conduct this review.

In order to further improve the Bill, La Trobe recommends the following:

- **An adequately-funded ARC**
  The ARC is a critical component of the Australian research system with its unique role as the main funder of pure and basic discovery research, a funder across the breadth of disciplines and a significant level of engagement with Australia's university research community. In order to deliver its enhanced mission and to maximise Australia's research capability, a core institution like the ARC needs to be properly funded.

  We therefore support the recommendations of Universities Australia (UA) to include the certainty of a legislated indexation factor. This would be in line with the Government's response to Recommendation 9 of the Review, which stated that the amendments to the ARC Act would include "an agreed formula for indexation".

  La Trobe recognises the importance of the establishment of a Board with significant research experience to strengthen the governance of the ARC and the expansion of the ARC's role and purpose and supports UA's call for adequate funding for the running of the ARC in the departmental budget . This would allow the ARC to deliver on the intent of the Bill . The savings banked as a result of the discontinuation of the Excellence in Research Australia (ERA) and Engagement and Impact (E&I) exercises should therefore be repurposed to strengthen the ARC. Given the proposed skills base of the ARC Board, there is scope for further savings if the Bill were amended to remove reference to the ARC Advisory Committee as a designated committee of the ARC. This would have the further benefit of removing the potential for overlap between the responsibilities of the Board and the Advisory Committee and would allow the Board to make recommendations to the Minister concerning designated committees. Savings made from this change could also be transferred to the ARC's operational budget.

- **Enabling the ARC to achieve its expanded mission**
  The Review of the ARC Act and this Bill envisage an expanded purpose for the ARC, which includes supporting the research community through increased academic pathways, building First Nations research capability and supporting research integrity. La Trobe fully supports these aims. However, it will be difficult for the ARC to pursue and deliver the intended outcomes without specific funding to support these goals.

- **Definition of Designated Research Programs**
  La Trobe shares UA's concern that the last clause of the definition of a "designated research program" could undermine the intent of the independent authority of the Board for approval of research grants based on peer reviewed evaluation. While the Explanatory Memorandum provides greater clarity about the intent, the Bill, in its current form, does not make the distinction between research programs that support research capability and individual research grants. Including that distinction in the definition of "designated research programs" would strengthen confidence in the independence of the ARC.

La Trobe endorses the response of UA to this inquiry. The inclusion of the above considerations would further strengthen a very robust Bill. La Trobe looks forward to the Committee's report, and to the passage of the Bill.

Yours sincerely

Professor Susan Dodds
Iterim Vice-Chancellor