



SUBMISSION TO THE:  
AUSTRALIAN RESEARCH COUNCIL  
AMENDMENT (REVIEW RESPONSE)  
BILL 2023 [PROVISIONS]

19 January 2024

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## MEASURES IN THIS BILL

NTEU is generally supportive of the recommendations made in the ARC Review report and the subsequent measures introduced in this bill.

However, we recommend several areas for improvement, summarised here:

- **Include a requirement that the gender, discipline and geographical balance be considered in board appointments**
- **Protect Discovery funding by codifying a minimum 60 percent allocation in the Act**
- **Address systemic job insecurity among grant employed researchers via the Act** (specific measures below)

## ARC BOARD

As many in the sector are aware past Ministerial vetoes of ARC approved grants have seriously undermined the credibility of publicly funded research in Australia and unfairly targeted the work of a number of legitimate Australian researchers.

NTEU is particularly supportive of measures to ensure the independence of the ARC. Including the proposed establishment of a board. NTEU would like to stress that the board should comprise a diverse group of participants from the sector, including staff who are currently active researchers. To this end NTEU supports the measures in Division 3, Section 12 that require one Indigenous board member, and members representing rural and regional research. This section could be strengthened by including a requirement that the board have an equal gender balance, and that disciplinary and geographical diversity also be considered. These requirements should also apply to the advisory board.

## FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS

The bill includes sensible measure that will simplify funding and appropriations processes for the Minister. However, the bill also removes the requirement (under Division 50 of the current Act) that the Minister must split funding between different categories of research programs. Instead of removing this provision the current bill provides an opportunity to strengthen protections for basic research.

The greatest advancements in human knowledge come from basic blue skies research. The essential role of ARC in funding such research should be included in the Act via a minimum funding allocation for the Discovery programs. It should be noted that over the past decade the relative funding share allocated to Discovery has been *above* 60% for almost the entire decade, making it relatively non-controversial to enshrine a 60% floor for the Discovery programs into the Act.

## MEASURES ABSENT FROM THIS BILL

A notable absence in the final report of the ARC Review and this subsequent bill is acknowledgement of the widespread usage of insecure employment in the research sector. This crisis is already having detrimental impacts on research workforce development and retention, and makes building a career in Australian research difficult and unappealing for talented young Australians.

## WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

In NTEU's submission to the ARC Review we strongly emphasized the need for government to address this.

NTEU specifically noted that research is one of the most precarious industries for workers in Australia, given that:

- **only around 1 in 4 researchers are employed on a continuing basis, and only 1 in 5 amongst women**
- 4 out of 5 of these contracts are under 3 years in length
- A third of the workforce has been on rolling fixed term contracts for over 6 years

Whilst this crisis is the result of decisions made by individual employers, responsibility to fix the problem must inevitably fall to funding bodies and the government. This is because there is an incentive misalignment between each individual employer, who prefer minimising costs and financial obligations, and the broader public interest - strong retention and attraction of highly skilled researchers.

In order to address this NTEU proposed several specific measures ([detailed in our original submission](#)) that can be applied at the funding body level, including that:

1. **The ARC establish a Researcher Transition Fund by diverting a fixed percentage of funding each year to a dedicated pool**
2. **The ARC work with institutions to develop (and publish) best practices for research workforce planning**
3. **As a funding condition of all grants, employers be required at a minimum to employ researchers for the entire duration of the grant period**
4. **The government undertake an audit of the use of fixed term contracts in the higher education and research sectors including non-ARC funded research**
5. **The Act to specify that in its annual report the ARC must report on the job security of all persons employed under ARC grants and progress towards reducing fixed term contingent employment**
6. **The Department provide data on the employment type of research staff in their annual staffing data release**