

15 January 2024

Committee Secretary
Senate Education and Employment Committees
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

University of Tasmania's submission to the *Australian Research Council Amendment (Review Response) Bill 2023* inquiry.

The University of Tasmania welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee's inquiry into the *Australian Research Council Amendment (Review Response) Bill 2023*.

Overall, we strongly support the amendments being made to the Australian Research Council Act 2001 (ARC Act). We support the 10 recommendations identified in the ARC Review final report, *Trusting Australia's Ability: Review of the Australian Research Council Act 2001*, and it is pleasing to see six of these recommendations progressed via this amendment.

There are additional areas that warrant consideration to further strengthen the ARC Act, which we have outlined in this submission.

Object of Act

We support the amendments made to expand the Object of Act (Section 3), including clarifying the purpose of the ARC to give a legislative basis for funding via National Competitive Grants Program, and clarity on the role of the ARC in underpinning and shaping the national research landscape. To further clarify the role of the ARC, we seek consideration of the following matters:

- The Object of Act (Section 3) should emphasise the importance of the ARC supporting discovery research. This is critical, the ARC provides only approximately seven per cent of the Government's annual investment into research and development and there are a broad range of alternative fundings sources that are geared for impact-driven research. If there is no space for fundamental, basic research to prosper and thrive, and for the people in that system to prosper and thrive, there will not be a pipeline of new knowledge being generated entering the research system to provide innovative, long-term solutions for those challenges ahead. This is a sovereign capability issue. By back-solving from impact, you always eventually map back to some form of basic, fundamental research that was generated recently or in the past. Australia risks becoming a net importer of new knowledge if talented researchers are not supported locally and forced to pursue careers overseas. This means that Australia will be starting from behind on impactful research and consequentially will not gain that most value that comes from a knowledge generating system.
- We recommend the ARC Act explicitly outline the importance of, and support to, discovery research. We support the addition of Subsection 3(a), which notes the ARC's mission to support Australian universities in conducting excellent research for the nation's economic, social, environmental, and cultural benefit. This could be expanded to include the role the ARC needs to play in fostering the translation of research to achieve prosperity, inclusiveness and sustainability.

- Subsection 3(b) notes the ARC's role in supporting academic career pathways. This should include supporting universities to retain excellent researchers, which is a critical way to ensure Australia remains a substantial contributor to global knowledge. Further, we recommend the ARC Act note the ARC's role in identifying gaps or weaknesses in the Australian research landscape and capability.
- We are pleased with the inclusion of Subsection 3(c), and the specified need for the ARC to support research integrity and promote ethical research. We believe an independent national research integrity body would be beneficial to further enhance the quality and excellence of research within Australia. This is not because we think there is a large volume of research integrity issues, but a small number of poorly handled research integrity issues can risk compromising trust in Australian research; this is especially critical in a time where trust in science is at risk.

The ARC Board

We welcome the creation of an ARC Board. We suggest that the ARC Board represent a broader cross-section of expertise by expanding membership beyond 5-7 people. This would allow the Board to have a more balanced representation of gender, indigenous heritage, cultural heritage, sexual orientation, stage of academic career, and disciplinary expertise, including inter- and trans-disciplinary studies. The Board may also benefit from representatives of the end users of research, such as Local Government Associations, small-to-medium-sized enterprises, and those with experience in overseas funding agencies, to ensure the ARC is operating at world's best practice.

ARC Advisory Committee

We acknowledge the importance of the current ARC Advisory Committee, which was established on 31 March 2022 as a Designated Committee under the ARC Act, to support the CEO in setting the ARC's strategic agenda and delivering its objectives. We note that the Bill formally mandates the ARC Advisory Committee to the ARC Act, with an intent to assist the Board to determine priorities, strategies and policies for the ARC (Subsection 30(1)).

With the addition of the ARC Board, we recommend making the purpose of the ARC Advisory Committee clearer, by providing more guidance on its membership, functions, appointments, remuneration, and how it operates in conjunction and collaboration with the ARC Board, the CEO, and the Minister.

Final comments

We thank the Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee for the opportunity to make a submission into this Bill. Australia is a key contributor to global knowledge and innovation, to which the ARC plays an essential role. The changes in the ARC Act are a crucial step in ensuring the ARC, and the legislation that underpins it, are modern, fit-for-purpose, and world-leading, which will in-turn promote, support and safe-guard Australia's future research.

Please contact me if I can provide any further input into this matter.

Yours sincerely,

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Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research)