

## Australian Association of University Professors

AAUP



[www.professoriate.org](http://www.professoriate.org)



[Australian Association of von Humboldt Fellows \(humboldtaustralia.org.au\)](http://humboldtaustralia.org.au)

Dear Mr McNally,

Thank you very much for your invitation to make a submission to the inquiry into the *Australian Research Council Amendment (Review Response) Bill 2023*. Thank you also for extending the invitation to include the Australian Association of von Humboldt Fellows (AAvHF).

The Council of the Australian Association of University Professors (AAUP) and the Australian Association of von Humboldt Fellows (AAvHF) welcome the Bill to amend the *Australian Research Council Act 2001*.

We have specific comments (**marked \***) on sections of the Bill as detailed below.

With kind regards,

AAUP Council and AAvHF Executive

### Comments

*Schedule 2 - Australian Research Council Board and CEO*

*Part 3 - The Australian Research Council Board*

*Division 2 - The Board*

*10 Minister may give directions to the Board*

*(2) However, the Minister must not give a direction in relation to the making of a decision by the Board about whether or not to give a particular funding approval.*

**\* AAUP and AAvHF endorse this amendment which will prevent political interference in funding decisions.**

*Schedule 2 - Australian Research Council Board and CEO*

*Part 3 - The Australian Research Council Board*

*Division 3 - Board Members*

*12 Appointment*

*(4) In appointing Board members, the Minister must:*

*(a) ensure that a majority of the Board members are persons whom the Minister is satisfied have substantial experience or expertise in one or more fields of research or in the management of research;*

\* AAUP and AAvHF also endorse this amendment which will ensure that funding decisions are made based on academic grounds. However, AAUP and AAvHF believe that it would be essential for Board members to have experience in different fields of research that, as far as possible, reflect the broad structure of current fields of research. Therefore, we suggest that at least one member of the Board should come from the Physical Sciences, at least one member should come from the Biological Sciences and at least one member should come from the Humanities and Social Sciences. Additionally, it is essential that the Board includes several members from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Maintaining a gender balance should also be a top priority. However, academic merit must be the guiding principle for all appointments. A slight enlargement of the board may be necessary to accommodate all these aspects.

*Schedule 2 - Australian Research Council Board and CEO*

*Part 3 - The Australian Research Council Board*

*Division 5 - Board Committees*

*29 Board committees*

*(3) A committee is to consist of such persons (whether Board members or not) as the Board determines.*

\* AAUP and AAvHF do not endorse this amendment: The Board is proposed to consist only of a maximum of seven members (please see previous comment). The Board will, therefore, not have the breadth of experience or expertise across all academic disciplines necessary to determine who would be appropriate members of the College of Experts. The membership of the College of Experts should be determined by elections organized by national academic societies and/or academies and the voting should be open to all academics. This would ensure that the committee members are trusted and respected members of their academic communities. Such a system has already been in operation, for instance, in Germany for decades. In addition, although it is not explicitly considered in the Bill, AAUP and AAvHF consider the number of discipline panels within the College of Experts to be too small. Currently, the College of Experts has 5 broad discipline panels. In comparison, the German Research Council has 49 panels. An increase in the number of panels would provide greater depth of expertise within each panel, promote discipline-specific reviewing, and improve the quality of funding decisions. Finally, it is crucial to establish a clear and straightforward procedure for researchers to declare any conflicts of interest concerning members of the College of Experts or potential assessors. This will ensure that the assessment of the researcher's application is conducted on a fair and equitable basis. Currently, the ARC's process in this regard is vague and inefficient, often resulting in either long delays or no response at all for researchers awaiting confirmation from the ARC.

*Schedule 3 - Funding of Research*

*Division 1 - Grants of financial assistance for research programs*

*47 Board approval of grants of financial assistance for research programs*

*(8) If the Minister considers that, for reasons relevant to the security, defence or international relations of Australia, the Board should not give an approval under subsection (1), the Minister must, by notice in writing given to the Board, inform the Board to this effect.*

\* AAUP and AAvHF accept that national security, defence or international relations could be grounds for denying approval of a grant and that the Board would not be qualified to make this decision. However, AAUP and AAvHF are doubtful as to whether it is appropriate for the Minister of Education to make a decision of this type. It would seem that such a decision should fall within the realm of the Departments of Defence and/or Foreign Affairs. Therefore, AAUP and AAvHF suggest that the Minister should seek the advice of these departments and only act to deny grant approval upon their specific request.