

AIP submission to the Review of the Australian Research Council Act – Preliminary draft –

The submission is via a web form, with text boxes for each of the questions in the Consultation Paper. There is no place to include introductory comments or an executive summary.

1. Scope and purpose of the ARC

The AIP strongly advocates for a balance between fundamental and applied research, with both supported through well-managed ARC funding schemes.

It is important to recognise that many technological and scientific breakthroughs were enabled by fundamental research that, at the time when it was carried out, had no foreseeable commercial application. It is crucial for Australia's long-term prosperity to support and strengthen Australian fundamental research programs, through the Discovery Project scheme and beyond.

2. Governance and management

We recommend the creation of an ARC Board, which should consist of prominent members of the research community, appointed by the research community.

We recommend that the ARC Board appoint the ARC CEO, who must have high-level research and management expertise.

3. Academic expertise and peer-review

The AIP strongly advocates for the pre-eminence of peer review in grant assessment.

We recommend the creation of an advisory panel to support and advise the ARC CEO.

4. Grant approval

To our knowledge, no other advanced democratic country includes a ministerial veto over research funding. This system damages Australia's international reputation. We recommend that the minister has no veto power over research grants.

5. National Interest Test

We are of the view that the National Interest test (NIT) should be removed. The AIP believes that strengthening the social licence for public funding is of critical importance. However, in our view, the NIT does little to achieve this aim. Good value for money for our society needs to be achieved by a robust policy framework. In addition, we consider that the social licence of public funding would be strengthened by ensuring that the funding system is held in high regard by the science community and by the Australian public, is viewed as impartial and fair, and is free from the perception of political interference.

6. Administrative burden

We agree that some current administrative arrangements are onerous, particularly concerning:

- delays to, and uncertainty regarding, announcements;
- unexpected changes to grant rules and deadlines;
- onerous requirements made of partners who do not receive direct funding;
- the scope and currency of Australia's Science and Research Priorities.

7. Process improvements

We appreciate and support the improvements that have been made to deliver grant rounds on time, to a predetermined time frame.

8. ERA and EI

Our view is that the ERA initiative is a costly initiative (both for the universities and the ARC) and no longer of benefit to the research community and the ARC. It should be discontinued.

9. Evaluation capability

10. Other comments

The separation of policy and execution is an important principle in terms of independence and practicality.