



Australian Government
Australian Res

STRATEGIC PLAN

A MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER



In May this year, I released *Powering Ideas: An Innovation Agenda for the 21st Century*, which outlines the Australian Government's plans to revitalise the national innovation system. The Australian Research Council is critical to those plans, and critical to the system itself. It is not only one of our most important public research funding bodies; it is also a force for change and renewal.

The period from 2009–10 to 2011–12 covered by this Strategic Plan will be significant for Australian research and innovation. Our best chance of recovering quickly from the global downturn and laying the foundations for future prosperity is to go on investing in new ideas, even when times are tough. That is the Government's strategy, and the Australian Research Council is helping us deliver it.

The Australian Research Council is responsible for a large share of Australia's investment in research and development, especially through the National Competitive Grants Program. The Government also relies on it to manage special projects such as the *Research in Bionic Vision Science and Technology Initiative* inspired by the Australia 2020 Summit.

The Australian Research Council is also driving reform in the university research sector by developing and implementing *Excellence in Research for Australia*. ERA will measure Australia's research performance against international benchmarks. It will lift the quality of Australian research and identify opportunities for further development.

I look forward to following the execution of this Strategic Plan and to seeing the real difference it will make to Australia's innovation system.

Senator Kim Carr

Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research

July 2009

FOREWORD



I am pleased to present the Australian Research Council (ARC) Strategic Plan for the triennium 2009–10 to 2011–12. The Plan has been prepared in consultation with the ARC Advisory Council and endorsed by the Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, Senator the Hon Kim Carr.

The *Australian Research Council Act 2001* requires the ARC to review its Strategic Plan every year. Following major changes to the Plan last year, we have focussed this year on ensuring that our direction remains consistent with the goals expressed in the Australian Government's new innovation agenda. In consultation with the ARC Advisory Council, we have reaffirmed our commitment to supporting excellent research and to building Australia's research capacity through skills development and strong collaboration between sectors.

As part of the 2009–10 Budget, the Australian Government announced that the ARC would have responsibility for implementing two new initiatives — *Super Science Fellowships* (to support early-career researchers) and *Research in Bionic Vision Science and Technology*. These developments are reflected in the new Priority Actions for 2009–10 that have been identified for each Objective in the Plan.

Implementation of the Priority Actions planned for 2009–10 will help ensure that the ARC is well placed to contribute into the future. Through this Strategic Plan, the ARC stands ready to assist the Australian Government in driving forward its innovation agenda, working closely with stakeholders and other agencies to achieve its goals.

Professor Margaret Sheil

Chief Executive Officer

July 2009

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ABOUT THE AUSTRALIAN RESEARCH COUNCIL

The Australian Research Council (ARC) is a statutory authority within the Australian Government's Innovation, Industry, Science and Research portfolio. It was established on 1 July 2001 by virtue of the *Australian Research Council Act 2001*.

Role

The ARC is responsible for administering the National Competitive Grants Program (NCGP) and providing advice to the Minister on research matters. It is also responsible for a new Australian research quality and evaluation system—the *Excellence in Research for Australia* (ERA) initiative.

The NCGP supports research across all disciplines. It offers a pathway of schemes to support Australian researchers and research training with funding awarded on the basis of excellence through a competitive peer review process.

Through the NCGP, the ARC has a strong focus on:

- funding research that leads to breakthrough discoveries and new knowledge;
- providing incentives for universities to partner with other organisations; and
- attracting, retaining and developing highly skilled research personnel.

Further information about the ARC and its funding schemes is available on page 10 and at www.arc.gov.au.

Stakeholders

The ARC's primary stakeholders are the Australian Government, institutions and researchers within the higher education sector, as well as various partner organisations¹. Other stakeholders include peak bodies with an interest in research, research funding agencies, publicly funded research agencies, business and industry groups, the media and the Australian community.

¹ Other organisations within the national innovation system that partner with higher education institutions in the conduct of ARC-funded research.

OUR MISSION

To deliver policy and programs that advance Australian research and innovation globally and benefit the community

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The ARC will be guided by a strong commitment to the following principles:

Excellence

Excellence in achieving our mission through program and organisational objectives

Engagement

Engagement with government, universities, research agencies, business and the wider community nationally and internationally

Benefit

Benefit to the community through demonstrated return on investment, informed decision-making and efficiency of operations

Accountability

Accountability through adherence to ethical standards, government policy and transparent, efficient and effective processes that make optimal use of resources.

The ARC is committed to the Australian Public Service (APS) Code of Conduct and the APS Values. ARC-funded research is subject to the principles outlined in the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research, 2007*; the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research, 2007*; and the *Australian Code of Practice for the Care and Use of Animals for Scientific Purposes, 2004*.

The ARC is shaping Australia's future, underpinning an innovative economy and society through management of research funding schemes, evaluation of research excellence and contribution to research policy.

OPERATING ENVIRONMENT

Australian Government support for science and innovation

In 2009–10 Australian Government support for science and innovation will be approximately \$8.6 billion (budget estimate, *Australian Government's 2009–10 Science and Innovation Budget Tables*). Of the total, more than \$2.3 billion will be provided for research in the higher education sector.

The Government's innovation agenda

On 12 May 2009, the Australian Government released its innovation policy agenda to 2020.

Titled *Powering Ideas: An Innovation Agenda for the 21st Century*, this agenda draws on investigations and policy work undertaken during 2008 including reviews of the national innovation system, the Cooperative Research Centres program and Australian higher education, as well as the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Innovation's *Inquiry into Research Training and Research Workforce Issues in Australian Universities*.

As part of the policy agenda the Australian Government has adopted seven National Innovation Priorities to focus the production, diffusion and application of new knowledge. The Innovation Priorities complement Australia's National Research Priorities.

New initiatives for the ARC

In the 2009–10 Budget the ARC received funding for the:

- (i) *Research in Bionic Vision Science and Technology Initiative*—a competitive grants scheme to support development of a bionic eye;
- (ii) *Super Science Fellowships* scheme for early-career researchers;
- (iii) ERA initiative; and
- (iv) National ICT Australia (from 2011–12 to 2014–15).

NATIONAL INNOVATION PRIORITIES

- Public research funding supports high-quality research that addresses national challenges and opens up new opportunities.
- Australia has a strong base of skilled researchers to support the national research effort in both the public and private sectors.
- The innovation system fosters industries of the future, securing value from the commercialisation of Australian research and development.
- More effective dissemination of new technologies, processes, and ideas increases innovation across the economy, with a particular focus on small and medium-sized enterprises.
- The innovation system encourages a culture of collaboration within the research sector and between researchers and industry.
- Australian researchers and businesses are involved in more international collaborations on research and development.
- The public and community sectors work with others in the innovation system to improve policy development and service delivery.

NATIONAL RESEARCH PRIORITIES

- An environmentally sustainable Australia
- Promoting and maintaining good health
- Frontier technologies and transforming Australian industries
- Safeguarding Australia

ARC KEY OBJECTIVES

The ARC has five key objectives and one cross-cutting management objective:

Key Objective 1: Research

To support excellence in research

Key Objective 2: Capacity

To build Australia's research capacity

Key Objective 3: Policy

To provide informed high quality policy advice to government

Key Objective 4: Evaluation

To enhance research outcomes through effective evaluation

Key Objective 5: Promotion

To raise the profile of Australia's research effort and be an effective advocate for its benefits

Management Objective: Effective and Efficient Organisation

To continue to improve organisational performance

KEY OBJECTIVE 1: RESEARCH

Objective

To support excellence in research

Key Strategies

We will achieve this objective by:

- 1.1 Supporting excellent research through competitive funding schemes
- 1.2 Encouraging Australian and international collaboration and exchange
- 1.3 Partnering with other organisations, both nationally and internationally, to support major research policy and program initiatives
- 1.4 Ensuring peer review processes are both effective and world's best practice
- 1.5 Monitoring and evaluating research funding schemes to maximise their effectiveness
- 1.6 Promoting the responsible conduct of research

Performance Indicators

- 1.1 Investments in research supported through ARC funding
- 1.2 Outputs and outcomes arising from ARC-supported research
- 1.3 Collaboration between ARC-funded researchers and those within other components of the national and international innovation systems
- 1.4 Quality of grant administration processes

Priority actions for 2009–10

- Establish a competitive grants program for development of a bionic eye
- Review the NCGP peer review and assessment processes
- Conduct a selection round for the *ARC Centres of Excellence* scheme, following consultations with stakeholders
- Establish an evaluation framework that gives government, industry, business and the wider community assurance of the excellence of research conducted in Australia's higher education institutions
- Review information provided by the ARC regarding responsibilities under the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research*

KEY OBJECTIVE 2: CAPACITY

Objective

To build Australia's research capacity

Key Strategies

We will achieve this objective by:

- 2.1 Supporting the career paths of excellent researchers
- 2.2 Attracting and retaining the world's best researchers
- 2.3 Expanding research training opportunities
- 2.4 Enhancing Indigenous research and the capacity of Indigenous researchers
- 2.5 Supporting the cooperative development of access to research infrastructure including access to international research facilities
- 2.6 Planning for long-term trends and opportunities
- 2.7 Retaining the ability to respond to strategic research opportunities
- 2.8 Encouraging researchers to make accessible data arising from ARC-funded research
- 2.9 Consulting with stakeholders on funding schemes

Performance Indicators

- 2.1 Quantity and quality of researchers supported through ARC-supported research
- 2.2 Investments in research training supported through ARC funding
- 2.3 Facilitation of access for Australian researchers to research infrastructure
- 2.4 Contribution of ARC-funded research to research activity and capability in areas of national need

Priority actions for 2009–10

- Implement the *Super Science Fellowships* scheme
- Create career opportunities for Australian researchers – early-career researchers (*Super Science Fellowships*), mid-career researchers (*Future Fellowships*) and senior researchers (*Australian Laureate Fellowships*)
- Implement the new Australian Research Fellowship–Indigenous

KEY OBJECTIVE 3: POLICY

Objective

To provide informed high quality policy advice to government

Key Strategies

We will achieve this objective by:

- 3.1 Ensuring policy advice is evidence-based, innovative, strategic and professional
- 3.2 Engaging with government, industry, research institutions, researchers and learned academies
- 3.3 Maintaining dialogue with other funding agencies, both national and international

Performance Indicators

- 3.1 Contribution to the development of research and innovation policy

Priority actions for 2009–10

- Develop policy advice, as appropriate, to support the long-term enhancement of innovation and research
- Support the reinvigorated Prime Minister's Science, Engineering and Innovation Council and other policy coordination bodies
- Ensure the ARC is well placed to advise on emerging research strengths, weaknesses and priorities
- Ensure ERA outcomes are available for the development of other Government policies

KEY OBJECTIVE 4: EVALUATION

Objective

To enhance research outcomes through effective evaluation

Key Strategies

Taking into account international developments and benchmarks, we will achieve this objective by:

- 4.1 Assessing the quality of research conducted within the university sector against international best practice
- 4.2 Capturing and quantifying research activity within disciplines in the higher education sector
- 4.3 Using findings of the ERA evaluation process to inform future development of policy and programs

Performance Indicators

- 4.1 Contribution to best practice evaluation of Australia's research investment in universities

Priority actions for 2009–10

- Conduct a trial evaluation of two discipline clusters, Physical, Chemical and Earth Sciences and Humanities and Creative Arts
- Continue to consult with stakeholders regarding discipline specific measures for ERA
- Refine the ERA model through stakeholder input following a trial ERA evaluation

KEY OBJECTIVE 5: PROMOTION

Objective

To raise the profile of Australia's research effort and be an effective advocate for its benefits

Key Strategies

We will achieve this objective by:

- 5.1 Communicating information about ARC-funded research and its outcomes
- 5.2 Encouraging researchers to communicate the outcomes of their research
- 5.3 Maintaining proactive stakeholder and community engagement
- 5.4 Contributing to public policy formation in national and international forums
- 5.5 Capturing and quantifying the outcomes of research and knowledge transfer and the contribution of research to the economic, social, cultural and environmental well-being of Australians

Performance Indicators

- 5.1 Stakeholder and community awareness of the outcomes of ARC-funded research and researchers

Priority actions for 2009–10

- Undertake proactive media liaison to improve the presentation of ARC messages and to ensure acknowledgement of the ARC in positive research stories
- Work with ARC Centres of Excellence to foster collaborative promotion efforts
- Hold an expo where researchers can showcase their research outcomes and new research projects

MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVE: EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT ORGANISATION

Objective

To continue to improve organisational performance

Key Strategies

We will achieve this objective through:

- 6.1 Effective corporate governance
- 6.2 Sustainable systems and resources
- 6.3 Attraction and retention of skilled, professional and flexible staff
- 6.4 Open communication at all levels
- 6.5 A supportive work environment
- 6.6 Appropriate knowledge management systems
- 6.7 A coordinated program of scheme evaluation

Performance Indicators

- 6.1 Continuous improvement of the ARC with respect to (i) governance; (ii) efficiency; and (iii) staff
- 6.2 Cost effectiveness of grant administration processes

Priority actions for 2009–10

- Identify and implement business process improvements
- Review staff development programs and processes
- Negotiate a new Collective Agreement

APPENDIX: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Budget

In 2009–10 total net resourcing for the ARC is \$684.1 million² which includes funding for ERA and the NCGP.

Excellence in Research for Australia

ERA will identify excellence in Australian higher education institutions by comparing Australia's research effort against international benchmarks. The evaluation of research will be conducted through bibliometrics and other indicators, by discipline cluster and institution. Trial evaluations of two clusters will occur in 2009 with evaluations of all clusters being undertaken during 2010.

National Competitive Grants Program

The NCGP comprises two elements—Discovery and Linkage. For 2009–10 the ARC Program Budget is \$652.8 million. Table 1 provides details of the budget by scheme.

Discovery

Discovery Projects

Discovery Projects provides both research grants and fellowships. Research grants are awarded for one to five years with grant sizes ranging from \$20 000 to \$500 000 per annum.

Australian Laureate Fellowships

Australian Laureate Fellowships are prestigious awards aimed at attracting and retaining outstanding researchers in Australia.

Future Fellowships

Future Fellowships are aimed at attracting and retaining outstanding mid-career researchers in Australia.

Super Science Fellowships

Super Science Fellowships aim to encourage postdoctoral researchers and build on Australia's strengths in space and astronomy; marine and climate; and future industries.

Discovery Indigenous Researchers Development

Discovery Indigenous Researchers Development is a relatively small scheme that supports the development of indigenous researchers' skills and expertise. It offers awards and fellowships.

Linkage

Linkage Projects

Linkage Projects supports collaborative research and research training between universities and partner organisations, with the partner organisation required to provide a cash or in-kind contribution to the research project. It provides support for research grants, postgraduate awards, postdoctoral fellowships and industry fellowships.

Research Centres

Research Centres supported by the ARC include co-funded Centres of Excellence and ARC Centres of Excellence. Research Centres are aimed at building critical mass in areas of research strength.

Linkage Infrastructure, Equipment and Facilities

Linkage Infrastructure, Equipment and Facilities encourages institutions to develop collaborative arrangements among themselves or with organisations outside the sector to develop research infrastructure. The minimum grant size under the scheme is \$100 000.

Linkage Learned Academies Special Projects

Linkage Learned Academies Special Projects funds the Learned Academies and the National Academies Forum to undertake research-related projects with a maximum funding duration of three years.

Special Research Initiatives

Under the *Special Research Initiatives* scheme, the ARC takes a proactive role in identifying specific initiatives to be undertaken. The funding aims to support (among other things) the cooperative development of innovative research areas and national and international linkages as well as activities aimed at building the scale and focus of research and research training.

² This figure includes departmental administered and operating expenses.

Table 1: Resources

Schemes (2009–10 dollars)	FY 2008–09 (\$m) Actual	FY 2009–10 (\$m) Budget	FY 2010–11 (\$m) Budget	FY 2011–12 (\$m) Budget
Discovery Projects (includes Fellowships)	289.064	304.098	301.928	325.718
Australian Laureate Fellowships	–	9.562	19.124	28.686
Federation Fellowships	30.907	25.008	19.458	13.820
Future Fellowships	–	39.419	80.297	122.613
Super Science Fellowships	–	2.320	6.960	9.280
Discovery Indigenous Researchers Development	0.951	1.004	1.029	1.067
Sub-total Discovery	320.922	381.411	428.796	501.184
Linkage Projects	125.368	141.562	136.941	137.200
Linkage Infrastructure, Equipment and Facilities	31.002	31.580	30.500	30.400
Linkage International	3.604	1.958	0.298	–
Research Centres	96.275	80.246	83.678	86.904
Linkage Learned Academies Special Projects	0.330	0.233	0.356	0.480
Special Research Initiatives	8.385	15.841	15.289	18.000
Sub-total Linkage	264.964	271.420	267.062	272.984
Total ARC Program Budget	585.886	652.831	695.858	774.168
Percentage splits				
Discovery	55%	58%	62%	65%
Linkage	45%	42%	38%	35%

ACRONYMS

Through the document the following acronyms are used:

ARC Australian Research Council

ERA Excellence in Research for Australia

NCGP National Competitive Grants Program

FEEDBACK

Comments on this Strategic Plan should be sent to:

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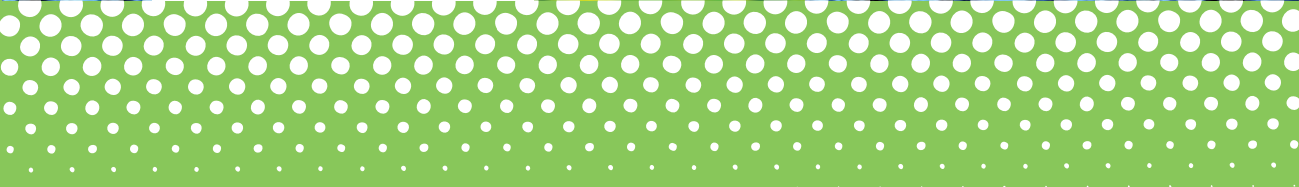
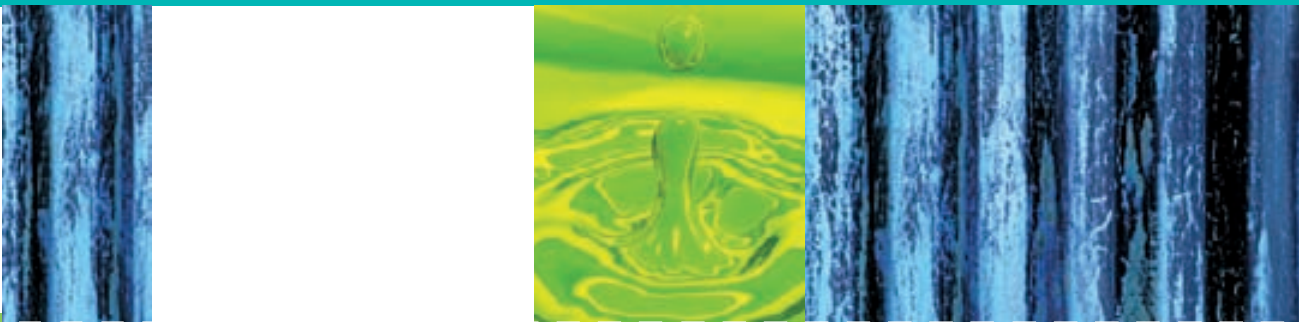
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