



Australian Government
Australian Research Council

CONSULTATION PAPER

Consultation

RESEARCH in the national interest ~ enabling the future

ARC Linkage Projects scheme

January 2010

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Chief Executive Officer's Foreword



On behalf of the Australian Research Council (ARC), I release the ARC *Linkage Projects* scheme Consultation Paper.

The *Linkage Projects* scheme is an important part of the ARC National Competitive Grants Program (NCGP). It provides funding to support collaborative research and development projects between higher education organisations and other organisations, including within industry.

The scheme contributes to the Australian Government's commitment to advance Australian research and innovation nationally and internationally for the benefit of the Australian community. The scheme is directly relevant to the Australian Government's National Innovation Priority 5—The innovation system encourages a culture of collaboration within the research sector and between researchers and industry.

I invite researchers, research organisations, potential partner organisations as well as other interested parties to be involved in this consultation by submitting their feedback in response to the proposed changes outlined in this Consultation Paper.

I look forward to receiving your contribution to this consultation process.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Margaret Sheil', written in a cursive style.

Professor Margaret Sheil
Chief Executive Officer
Australian Research Council

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1. This consultation

1.1 Purpose

The ARC has identified a number of changes to the *Linkage Projects* scheme that aim to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of its administration and provide more flexibility for institutions and their partners. This Consultation Paper seeks your comments on these proposed changes to the scheme.

This consultation focuses on the operational issues associated with administering the *Linkage Projects* scheme and is intended to complement an evaluation of the benefits from the scheme that accrue to higher education institutions, their researchers and partner organisations which will be undertaken in 2010. Further details of the evaluation will be made available on the ARC website: www.arc.gov.au.

1.2 Submitting comments

To assist the ARC in compiling and analysing the views of individuals and groups, respondents are requested to submit their comments using the template provided on the ARC website.

The consultation will run for four weeks. Comments should be submitted by mail or email to the address shown on the template by 8 February 2010.

Any queries concerning the consultation process or issues raised in this paper should be directed to:

Kathie Dent
Policy Officer
Policy Coordination and Governance Section
Australian Research Council
Email: LPconsultation@arc.gov.au
Ph: (02) 6287 6629

1.3 Implementation timeline

Subject to feedback through this consultation, the ARC expects to commence implementing the proposed changes to the *Linkage Projects* scheme in 2010 (for funding commencing in 2011).

2. Background

2.1 The Australian Research Council

The ARC is a statutory authority within the Australian Government’s Innovation, Industry, Science and Research portfolio. The ARC advises the Government on research matters and manages the National Competitive Grants Program (NCGP), a significant component of Australia’s investment in research and development. It is also responsible for the *Excellence in Research for Australia* (ERA) initiative—Australian research quality and evaluation system.

Through the NCGP, the ARC supports the highest quality fundamental and applied research and research training through national competition across all disciplines. The NCGP comprises two elements—Discovery, which supports individual researchers and projects, and Linkage, which supports partnerships between academic researchers and industry, government and community organisations as well as the international community.

Through ERA the ARC will assess research quality in universities using a combination of metrics and expert review by committees comprising experienced, internationally-recognised experts. The ERA framework aims to: identify excellence across the full spectrum of research activity; compare Australia’s university research effort against international benchmarks; create incentives to improve the quality of research; and identify emerging research areas and opportunities for further development.

The ARC Chief Executive Officer, Professor Margaret Sheil, is guided by the ARC Advisory Council on strategic issues, policy matters and matters relating to the evaluation of the quality and outcomes of research and research training.

2.2 *Linkage Projects* scheme—overview

Overview

The *Linkage Projects* scheme supports collaborative research and development projects between higher education researchers and other parts of the national innovation system, which are undertaken to acquire new knowledge, and involve risk or innovation.

The objectives of the *Linkage Projects* scheme are to:

- a. encourage and develop long-term strategic research alliances between higher education organisations and other organisations, including within industry and end-users, in order to apply advanced knowledge to problems and/or to provide opportunities to obtain national economic, social or cultural benefits;
- b. support collaborative research on issues of benefit to rural and regional communities;
- c. enhance the scale and focus of research in National Research Priorities;
- d. foster opportunities for postdoctoral researchers to pursue internationally competitive research in collaboration with organisations outside the higher education sector, targeting those who have demonstrated a clear commitment to high-quality research;
- e. provide outcome-oriented research training to prepare high-calibre postgraduate research students; and
- f. produce a national pool of world-class researchers to meet the needs of the broader Australian innovation system.

Timeline

The ARC currently runs two rounds of the *Linkage Projects* scheme per year with support available in each for all of the components listed below. Round one generally closes in May and outcomes are announced in time for funding to commence the following January. Round two generally closes in November and outcomes are announced in time for funding to commence the following July.

Funding components

Under current arrangements proposals under the *Linkage Projects* scheme may seek funding support for:

- Personnel (salaries and on-costs), including:
 - Australian Postgraduate Awards (Industry) (APAI) for postgraduate research students;
 - Australian Postdoctoral (Industry) (APDI) Fellowships for researchers with fewer than three years' postdoctoral experience at the closing date for applications;
 - Linkage Industry Fellowships (LIF) which enable the temporary transfer of a researcher to a Partner Organisation or another higher education organisation participating on a project, or vice versa; and
 - research associates, technicians and laboratory attendants.
- Relief from teaching or other duties for Chief Investigators (CIs).
- Equipment.
- Maintenance.
- Access to workshop services linked to and justified against the project.
- Domestic and international travel costs for CIs, PIs, APDI Fellows and research support personnel.

Australian Postgraduate Awards (Industry)

Currently, Administering Organisations may request funding for APAIs within *Linkage Projects* proposals. APAI requests can be requested as part of larger *Linkage Projects* proposals or may be requested within 'APAI-only' proposals.

APAIs may be awarded for postgraduate research students studying towards a Masters or PhD award. APAIs are awarded for a period of up to three-years with provision under certain conditions for an additional six months' support from the ARC for PhD students. APAIs funded for less than the three-year maximum, including for a Master's degree, are not eligible to receive an additional six months' stipend.

Each APAI request must be supported by Partner Organisation cash and in-kind contributions. The combined minimum Partner Organisation cash contribution must be at least 20 per cent, and the combined minimum Partner Organisation in-kind contribution must be at least 20 per cent, of the total amount sought from the Commonwealth. The Partner Organisation contribution must be provided in support of each APAI for each year the APAI is requested.

APAI requests do not require the names of potential candidates to be provided to the ARC. Normally, Administering Organisations recruit APAI candidates once funding has been awarded.

Relevant statistics

The number of proposals and APAI requests received and funded under the *Linkage Projects* scheme are summarised in the table below. Further statistics are at **Attachment A**.

Submit Year	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
LP proposals						
Submitted	1047	1048	1106	957	911	963
Funded	532	488	400	425	410	457
Success rate	50.8%	46.6%	36.2%	44.4%	45.0%	47.5%
APAI requests						
Submitted	775	878	886	796	794	908
Funded	426	389	304	295	312	362
Success rate	55.0%	44.3%	34.3%	37.1%	39.3%	39.9%

Further information

Further information about the *Linkage Projects* scheme is available on the ARC website:
www.arc.gov.au.

3. Proposed changes

3.1 Background

When the ARC initiated two rounds of the *Linkage Projects* scheme in 2001 it was envisaged that this would provide a shorter decision time for industry; however, given that the length of each round is unchanged that original objective was only realised in part. Conducting two rounds of the *Linkage Projects* scheme per year under the current structure places a significant administrative burden on the ARC that has been exacerbated by the introduction of other new schemes in recent years. It also increases the workload of research office staff and researchers involved in preparing and submitting proposals.

The current application and grant administration processes for APAIs, which may be requested within 'APAI-only' or larger *Linkage Projects* proposals, has the same impact on the workload of researchers, the ARC and Administering Organisations as the administration of much larger funding awards.

Finally, the assessment period of the first round of *Linkage Projects* significantly overlaps with the assessment period of *Discovery Projects* proposals and the new *Future Fellowships* scheme creating a large demand on assessors to complete assessments for both schemes during a short period of time.

3.2 Overview of proposed changes

To address these issues, the ARC proposes to adjust the type of proposals invited in each round of the *Linkage Projects* scheme to:

- Round 1: APAI-only requests.
- Round 2: *Linkage Projects* proposals (excluding APAI requests).

By holding one full round of *Linkage Projects* per year, the ARC will be able to introduce a separate (and more efficient) process for the award of APAIs. This change also allows the ARC to better schedule the timing of application and selection processes so that the full round of *Linkage Projects* is offset from the *Discovery Projects* round.

Round 1: APAI-only requests

The ARC proposes to hold a separate selection round for the award of APAIs to eligible Administering Organisations.

The ARC expects that moving to this new process would significantly reduce the administrative burden associated with applying for and assessing APAI requests. There is also a considerable workload for both parties associated with the administration of students after the project commences which contrasts with other government funded postgraduate awards where administration is managed at the institutional level. The process would also give greater flexibility to Administering Organisations to distribute the APAIs within their organisation. It may also assist Administering Organisations to attract new partnerships with industry, government or community organisations through APAI projects, which could lead to more significant partnerships and support for larger *Linkage Projects* proposals.

Round 2: *Linkage Projects* proposals (excluding APAI requests)

From 2010 onwards (that is, for funding commencing in 2011) the ARC proposes to hold one full round of *Linkage Projects* each year. The full round of the *Linkage Projects* scheme would not include APAI requests.

The ARC expects that a change to one full round per year would increase the number of proposals received in that round. However, the reduced administrative burden associated with holding one full round would substantially improve the efficiency of ARC operations and relieve workload pressures on Administering Organisations and assessment of both *Linkage Projects* and *Discovery Projects* proposals.

Question: Do you support the ARC's proposal to change the type of proposals invited to be submitted in each round of the *Linkage Projects* scheme?

3.3 Process for APAI requests

Award of APAIs

Eligible Administering Organisations would be required to submit a single proposal for the number of APAIs they wish to request. Administering Organisations may or may not receive the number of APAIs requested. However, the ARC will initially aim to achieve an APAI success rate that is slightly higher than APAI success rates in recent *Linkage Projects* rounds.

In their APAI proposal eligible Administering Organisations would be asked to address selection criteria based upon the following:

- the proposed allocation of APAIs within the Administering Organisation (that is, areas of likely research) and alignment with the strategic direction of the Administering Organisation;
- capacity for mentoring and developing high quality researchers;
- strategy for engagement with end-users, including current and potential Partner Organisation linkages; and
- recent track record in winning *Linkage Projects* funding, including APAIs.

Over time additional information would be sought on:

- APAI candidate recruitment success rates;
- APAI completion rates; and
- outcomes of APAI projects.

The ARC would establish a Selection Advisory Committee comprising academics and possibly end-users (such as representatives from government and industry). The role of the Selection Advisory Committee would be to rank proposals based upon the quality of the research proposals in addressing the selection criteria.

Question: Do you have any comments on the proposed process for APAI requests?

Partner Organisation support for APAIs.

Partner Organisation contributions would still be required to support APAIs. However, the ARC is considering introducing two levels of required cash support for APAIs by Partner Organisations. That is, for each APAI the combined minimum Partner Organisation cash contribution must be either \$5000 (low cost discipline) or \$10 000 (high cost discipline) per year, depending on the nature of the APAI project. The combined minimum Partner Organisation in-kind contribution would remain as at least 20 per cent of the total amount of the APAI stipend.

While Partner Organisation support would not be required prior to submission of the institution's APAI proposal, Administering Organisations would be required to certify that for all successful APAI requests suitable Partner Organisations would be found to provide the required cash and in-kind support.

Question: Do you support the introduction of two levels of required support for APAIs by Partner Organisations?

Selection of APAI candidates

Administering Organisations would be required to certify that they agree to follow a competitive application process to recruit suitable candidates for each APAI awarded.

3.4 Timing

The ARC is aware that any changes to the timing of the *Linkage Projects* scheme will affect negotiations between eligible Administering Organisations, researchers and potential Partner Organisations, as well as the recruitment of fellowship and APAI candidates.

The aim of the proposed timing is to ensure that the full round of *Linkage Projects* is offset from the *Discovery Projects* round, while announcing funding outcomes in time for projects to commence at the start of the financial year 2011–12.

The proposed timing of the APAI-only and full *Linkage Projects* rounds is outlined in the table below.

Month	Australian Postgraduate Awards Industry (APAI) requests	<i>Linkage Projects</i> (full round)
2010		
May	Application process opens (mid May)	
June		
July	Application process closes (mid July)	
August		
September		Application process opens (mid September)
October	Outcomes announced (late October)	
November		Application process closes (mid November)
December		Proposals assessed
2011		
January	Funding for APAIs commences	Proposals assessed
February		
March		
April		
May		
June		Outcomes announced
July		Funding for projects commences

Questions: Do you support the timeline being considered for APAI requests?
Do you support the timeline being considered for the full round of the *Linkage Projects* scheme?

Linkage Projects scheme statistics

Success rate of *Linkage Projects* proposals

Submit Year	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Round 1						
Submitted	466	463	529	485	424	441
Funded	231	237	194	208	202	218
Success rate	49.6%	51.2%	36.7%	42.9%	47.6%	49.4%
Round 2						
Submitted	581	585	577	472	487	522
Funded	301	251	206	217	208	239
Success rate	51.8%	42.9%	35.7%	46.0%	42.7%	45.8%
Overall						
Submitted	1047	1048	1106	957	911	963
Funded	532	488	400	425	410	457
Success rate	50.8%	46.6%	36.2%	44.4%	45.0%	47.5%

Success rate of *Linkage Projects* APAI requests

Submit Year	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Round 1						
Requested	306	392	427	421	361	400
Funded	174	193	161	139	145	154
Success rate	56.9%	49.2%	37.7%	33.0%	40.2%	38.5%
Round 2						
Requested	469	486	459	375	433	508
Funded	252	196	143	156	167	208
Success rate	53.7%	40.3%	31.2%	41.6%	38.6%	40.9%
Overall						
Requested	775	878	886	796	794	908
Funded	426	389	304	295	312	362
Success rate	55.0%	44.3%	34.3%	37.1%	39.3%	39.9%