



Australian Government

Australian Research Council

**Early Career
Researchers
Statement of Support**

Context

The Australian Research Council (ARC) aims to be an integral part of a responsive and supportive research sector, that is providing opportunities for all researchers to participate in the Australian research workforce and undertake research for the benefit of the Australian community.

The ARC is committed to ensuring that all eligible researchers have fair and equitable access to competitive funding through the National Competitive Grants Program (NCGP). The ARC promotes and encourages, within the NCGP, approaches to eligibility and assessment that take into account the career stages, and diverse career and life opportunities and experiences of researchers.

The NCGP provides a range of opportunities, for researchers at all career stages, to undertake basic and applied research across science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), and humanities, arts, and social sciences (HASS) disciplines, individually and in teams.

Purpose

The purpose of this statement is to articulate the ARC's commitment to supporting early-career researchers—researchers within five years of conferral of a PhD—and to enable their engagement in the Australian research workforce.

Encouraging broad participation in the NCGP, including through targeted funding schemes, is a priority for the ARC to ensure that outstanding researchers and research contribute to achieving Australia's research and innovation goals.

Principles

The ARC recognises that to ensure an Australian research workforce that is relevant and sustainable, support and opportunities need to be available for early-career researchers. This is particularly relevant as early-career researchers can face specific challenges relating to participation, and continuation of employment in the research sector owing to a variety of factors, including career interruptions.

The ARC aims to support early-career researchers through a range of policy and program initiatives to build a strong, viable and diverse Australian research workforce. To achieve this the ARC has committed to:

- Supporting the highest quality early-career researchers under a range of NCGP schemes, and specifically under the *Discovery Early Career Researcher Award* scheme.
- Facilitating access for early-career researchers to research leaders through, for example the *Industrial Transformation Research Program (ITRP)*, *ARC Centres of Excellence*, and *Australian Laureate Fellowships* schemes.
- Promoting outstanding researchers, research outcomes, and impact across all ARC funded disciplines to showcase excellence and improve the visibility of role models, mentors, and research leaders at all career stages.
- Maintaining a peer review process predicated on research excellence that has fairness, expertise, administrative transparency, impartiality, and integrity as core principles.

- Ensuring program design and implementation, and best practice policies support the participation of early-career researchers in the Australian research workforce and contribute to building a strong and resilient future research workforce.
- Monitoring NCGP data and analysis to identify trends and inform policy consultation and development, implementation, and effectiveness.
- Ensuring that all NCGP information complies with Australian Government accessibility requirements and guidelines, including non-discriminatory content.
- Engaging with stakeholders to identify the most effective support for early-career researchers in the Australian research workforce.

Implementation

The ARC supports early career researchers through Administering Organisations, primarily Australian universities, under the Discovery and Linkage Programs. These programs comprise a range of schemes to support researchers at different stages of their careers, build Australia's research capability, expand and enhance research networks and collaborations, and develop hubs and centres of research excellence.

In line with the principles outlined in the *ARC Research Workforce Statement*, the ARC provides a range of opportunities for researchers from diverse career backgrounds, at all career stages, across disciplines, and from Australia and overseas. Within this framework, the ARC has implemented a range of initiatives to support early-career researchers:

- Early-career researchers can be supported under most NCGP schemes, including under the Linkage Program, through the *ARC Centres of Excellence* scheme, the ITRP, and the *Linkage Projects* scheme. Under the Discovery Program, early-career researchers can be supported under the *Discovery Projects*, *Discovery Indigenous* and *Australian Laureate Fellowships* schemes and exclusively under the *Discovery Early Career Researcher Award* scheme. Early-career researchers can work independently, with peers, or research leaders on projects, awards and in centres and hubs.

Targeted Funding

Discovery Early Career Researcher Award (DECRA) scheme

- The *Discovery Early Career Researcher Award (DECRA)* scheme exclusively funds early-career researchers for projects in any discipline. Each year the DECRA scheme aims to support up to 200 three-year awards, including project funds of up to \$50,000 per annum.

Australian Laureate Fellowships scheme

- Each Australian Laureate Fellowship includes salary support for a minimum of two Postdoctoral Research Associates (PDRAs) for five years each. Additional PDRAs may be funded from project funds.
- The *Australian Laureate Fellowships* scheme supports the highest-quality researchers to undertake ground-breaking, internationally competitive research in Australia. Preference is given to researchers who will play a significant, sustained leadership and mentoring role in building Australia's internationally competitive research capacity. Australian

Laureate Fellows are expected to provide an excellent research training environment and exemplary mentorship to nurture early-career researchers.

Discovery Indigenous scheme

- The Discovery Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Award (DAATSIA) exclusively funds Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander researchers. Awarded in conjunction with a Discovery Indigenous project, DAATSIA are awarded at one of five salary levels, commensurate with academic levels A – E.
- The *Discovery Indigenous* scheme also exclusively supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research students and is the only NCGP scheme to support stipends for honours students.

Eligibility

- Under the DECRA scheme, eligible researchers must apply within a specified timeframe based on award of PhD date. The eligibility period can be extended for specified career interruptions, in recognition of the potentially significant impact of interruptions at the early-career stage.
- Specified, eligible career interruptions include parental and caring responsibilities, medical conditions, unemployment, and non-research employment. Further information is provided in the [Eligibility and Career Interruptions Statement](#).

Assessment

- The award of ARC funding is predicated on research excellence determined through a fair, rigorous, and competitive peer review process.
- The Research Opportunity and Performance Evidence (ROPE) assessment criterion is used in most ARC schemes to recognise research excellence in the context of diverse career and life opportunities and experiences.
- ROPE considers a researcher's capacity, productivity, and contribution, relative to opportunity and experience, recognising the impact of career interruptions for any reason.

Grant Conditions

The NCGP is administered in accordance with the [Commonwealth Grants Rules and Guidelines](#). Grants are awarded in accordance with ARC grant guidelines and policies.

- A DECRA may be undertaken part-time for a period of up to six years. Award recipients can access parental, recreation, and sick leave.
- A Chief Investigator, under any project scheme, must be an employee for at least 20 per cent of full time equivalent at an Eligible Organisation. This criterion ensures that researchers with part-time positions, who can often be early-career researchers, are eligible to apply for NCGP funding.

Monitoring

- The ARC monitors the outcomes of grant opportunities to identify any trends or issues that may be affecting early-career researchers.

Expectations of Administering Organisations

ARC funding is provided to Administering Organisations not to individual researchers. In this context, the ARC expects Administering Organisations will encourage broad participation in research and development activities and:

- provide opportunities for early-career researchers to extend their leadership and communication skills through targeted development opportunities
- enable early-career researchers to expand and develop their research leadership capabilities in leading research projects
- provide ongoing training and education that promotes and supports responsible research conduct
- support early-career researchers by providing flexible and supportive workplace environments.