Australian Government
Australian Research Council

ARC

Corporate Plan 2022–23

Contents

Chief Executive Officer's introduction

To help shape the Australian research system for the benefit of the nation by enabling world-leading research, fostering research quality, translation and impact, and safeguarding research integrity.

I am pleased to present the Australian Research Council (ARC) 2022–23 Corporate Plan.

The past year has been variable for the ARC and we are entering a period of reform as we respond to challenges in our strategic positioning. Our 2022–23 Corporate Plan builds on our new 2022–25 Strategy and outlines our plan to refresh the organisation, reset our relationships, and to build a stronger future together. The Plan also addresses activities in the Statement of Expectations from the Hon Jason Clare MP, Minister for Education, on 26 August 2022.

The ARC will continue to drive world-class research and innovation for the advancement of Australian society.

Between 2022–2025, we will deliver a refreshed approach to helping shape the Australian research system that delivers better outcomes for the research community and government. The activities set out in this plan align with our Strategy and build on our ambition to:

- develop world-class advice and engagement
- support Australia's research system excellence
- empower our people to deliver for the research community.

This plan, together with our portfolio budget statements and annual report, forms the ARC's planning and performance framework. We will evaluate and report on the delivery of this plan in the 2022–23 Annual Report.

We recognise the importance of working with experts across the higher education and research sector, industry, and other research users to achieve the best outcomes. The newly designated ARC Advisory Committee comprises leaders from across universities, industry, and government and is providing us with high quality advice and insight on our strategic agenda and functions, under the guidance of the independent Chair, Professor Chris Moran. I look forward to continuing to work with the Committee to improve governance, drive reform, and maximise the benefits of ARC-funded research for all Australians.

The expertise and knowledge of our College of Experts and the thousands of expert assessors that support the peer review processes and assessment of applications is critical to the effective operations of the ARC. I thank them all for their input and enduring support that enables us to fund over 1,100 projects every year.

We are a small agency with a proud history. Together we will work with our customers and stakeholders to deliver our ambitious program to better leverage Australia's world-class research to support Australia's economy and society.

Our commitment to diversity, inclusion and reconciliation, together with strong accountability, transparency and governance, will help ensure that our programs and activities meet our legislative and administrative responsibilities and maximise benefit for all Australians.

I look forward to working with our Minister and his staff, our portfolio colleagues, and our customers and stakeholders to ensure we are a responsive, customer-centric, and high-achieving organisation that puts supporting world-class research and innovation for the advancement of Australian society at the forefront of our strategic thinking and actions.

Statement of preparation

I, as the accountable authority of the Australian Research Council, present the *Australian Research Council 2022–23 Corporate Plan*, which covers the period 2022–23 to 2025–26, as required under paragraph 35(1)(b) of the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013*, and subsection 16E(2) of the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Rule 2014*.

Judi Zielke PSM
Chief Executive Officer

ARC Snapshot

Vision: World-class research and innovation for the advancement of Australian society

7,000+ assessors taking part in peer review processes, providing over 20,000 assessments

Administer over **5,700** new and ongoing grants under the NCGP

Fund over **1,100** new research projects each year

Support over **12,500** researchers

Over **2,000** partner organisations (companies, not-for-profits and government agencies) participate in research projects

11,610 journals reviewed and 3,155 new journals assessed in preparing for ERA 2023

Assess over **5,500** applications each year

Provide grant opportunities through **14** schemes, including the new industry fellowships program

Investing over **$850m** in research in 2022–23

213 members on the ARC College of Experts

140 ARC staff

18 ARC Centres of Excellence currently being funded

72 Industrial Transformation Research Hubs and Industrial Transformation Training Centres currently being funded

Assist in the administration of **$265m** in research funding for grants funded by 3 Policy Partners in 2022–23

Our Purpose and Strategy

The ARC is a non-corporate Commonwealth entity established under the *Australian Research Council Act 2001*, located within the Australian Government's Education portfolio, and reporting to the Minister for Education. We are responsible for delivering 3 programs through the National Competitive Grants Program (NCGP), Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) and Engagement and Impact (EI), as described in the ARC Portfolio Budget Statements 2022–23 (PBS). We have 5 key activities that align with the ARC's purpose and assist us in meeting the objectives of our programs.

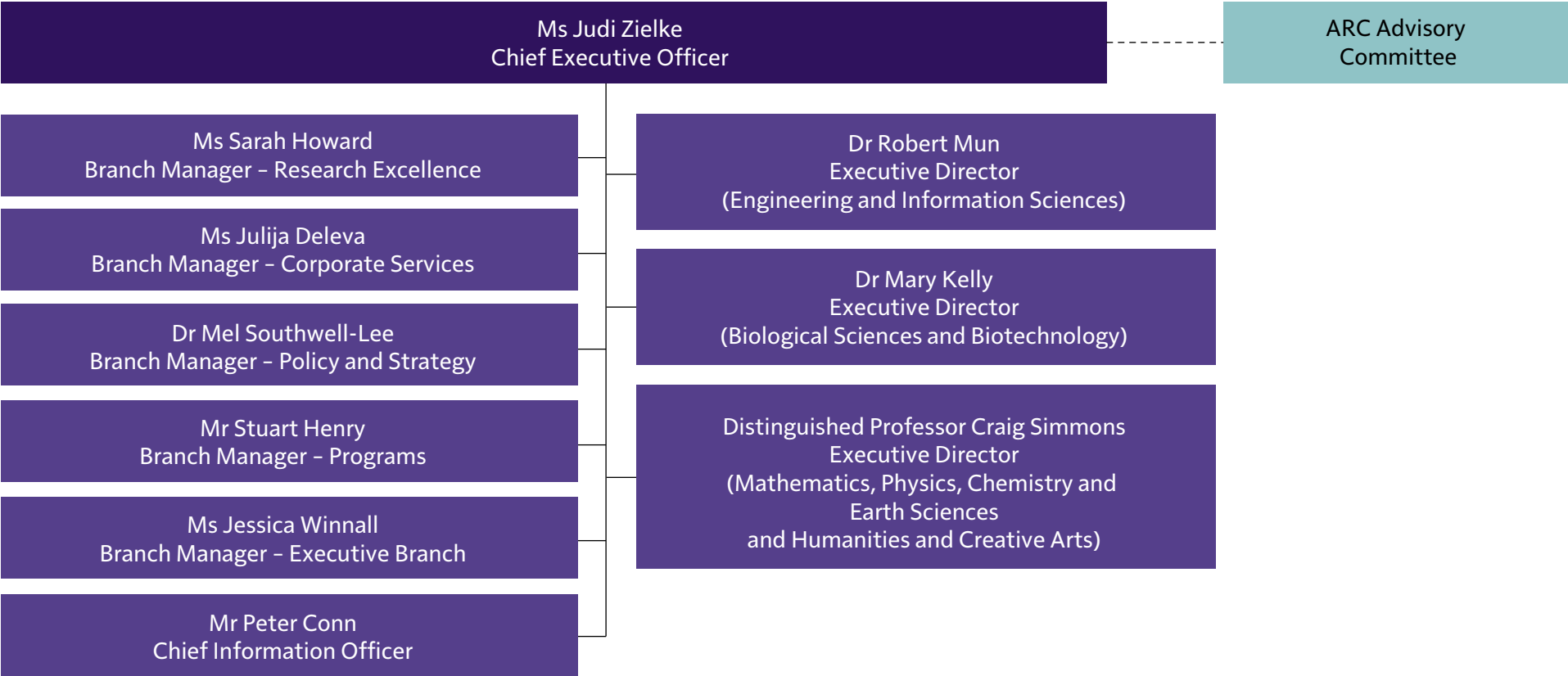| **Our Vision**	World-class research and innovation for the advancement of Australian society				
Our Purpose	To help shape the Australian research system for the benefit of the nation by enabling world-leading research, fostering research quality, translation and impact, and safeguarding research integrity				
Our Programs (as per the PBS)	**NCGP – Discovery Program** Building Australia's research capacity by supporting excellent, internationally competitive research projects, fellowships and awards.	**NCGP – Linkage Program** Building Australia's research and innovation capacity by supporting excellent, internationally competitive research projects, infrastructure, and centres of excellence that involve collaboration among researchers within and beyond the research sector.		**Excellence in Research for Australia** Improving Australia's research capacity by evaluating research at eligible Australian higher education institutions against international benchmarks and identifying excellence across the full spectrum of research activities.	
Our Key Activities	**Fund high quality and impactful research** We fund excellent fundamental and applied research through the National Competitive Grants Program.	**Assess research quality, engagement, and impact** We assess the quality, engagement and impact of Australia's university research.	**Safeguard research integrity** We safeguard the ethics, integrity, and credibility of Australian research through national codes and frameworks and quality assurance.	**Provide grant services to government entities** We collaborate with others to provide advice on program design, and deliver research grants and administration.	**Provide research policy advice** We advise government and other stakeholders on the Australian research system.
Our Strategic Priorities	**World-class advice & engagement** Our expertise and knowledge of the research system is shared, recognised, and sought out nationally and internationally, enabled by trusted, mutually beneficial relationships with a wide and influential network.	**Research system excellence** Our streamlined grants programs and processes, world-class data assets and national assessments enable the research system to continuously improve, and ensure Australia remains a leader in research quality, excellence and impact.		**Empowered people** Our expert workforce has the skills and capabilities essential for the future and operates within a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement with a strong focus on excellent service delivery.	

Governance

The ARC has a robust governance framework in place to support the CEO in delivering the ARC's purpose. This framework enables effective performance, risk oversight, and compliance with our responsibilities under the ARC Act, PGPA Act, and other relevant legislation.

The newly designated ARC Advisory Committee comprises leaders from across universities, industry, and government and provides us with high quality advice and insight on our strategic agenda and functions, under the guidance of the independent Chair, Professor Chris Moran. The ARC Audit Committee provides the CEO with assurance on the ARC system of risk oversight and management, and financial and performance reporting.

Figure 1 outlines the organisational structure of the ARC. We are organised into 6 branches and have a cohort of Executive Directors that support the CEO through policy advice, research discipline expertise, and performing regular outreach with the research sector.

Figure 1: Organisational structure as at 30 June 2022

Ms Judi Zielke
Chief Executive Officer

ARC Advisory Committee

Ms Sarah Howard
Branch Manager – Research Excellence

Ms Julija Deleva
Branch Manager – Corporate Services

Dr Mel Southwell-Lee
Branch Manager – Policy and Strategy

Mr Stuart Henry
Branch Manager – Programs

Ms Jessica Winnall
Branch Manager – Executive Branch

Mr Peter Conn
Chief Information Officer

Dr Robert Mun
Executive Director
(Engineering and Information Sciences)

Dr Mary Kelly
Executive Director
(Biological Sciences and Biotechnology)

Distinguished Professor Craig Simmons
Executive Director
(Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry and Earth Sciences
and Humanities and Creative Arts)

Our programs and activities

National Competitive Grants Program (NCGP)

Through the NCGP, the ARC supports excellent research and research training across the sciences and humanities.

The Discovery Program (about $540m p.a.) recognises the importance of fundamental research. It supports research capacity through promoting competitive research projects, fellowships, and awards.

The Linkage Program (about $310m p.a.) promotes Australia's research innovation capacity, supporting research projects, infrastructure, hubs, and collaboration between researchers and research users.

Research codes of practice and integrity

Relevant policies, processes and reviews include the:

- ARC Research Integrity Policy that applies to all research funded by the ARC.
- Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research 2018 (Code) and associated guidance, included within ARC grant conditions.
- Australian Research Integrity Committee (ARIC) that reviews institutional processes to proper process in investigating potential breaches of the Code, in partnership with the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC).

Advice on Australia's research

The ARC has intelligence on research and research training, research partnerships and the quality, engagement and impact of research. Our data and analysis is utilised across Government to inform decisions on research and innovation, industry sector investment, workforce issues, gender and equity.

Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) and Engagement and Impact (EI) Assessment Programs

The ARC administers ERA, a national research assessment framework which evaluates the quality of research against international benchmarks.

The EI assessment examines the translation of university research into appreciable outcomes beyond academia, determining what economic, environmental, and sociocultural benefits arise from Australian research.

Research Grant Services (RGS)

The ARC supports other Australian Government entities in the research sector by providing grants administration services. These services are standardised research grants processes through our Research Management System (RMS).

RGS helps make it easier to fund the best research and the best researchers in line with policy objectives, to make it easier to provide evidence about the value of research, and to make it easier to apply for, assess, and manage research grants in Australia.

Research Highlight: It's all in the coating – creating longer lasting steel products

Named researcher(s): Associate Professor Buyung Kosasih, Mr Wayne Renshaw
Institution: University of Wollongong
Scheme: *Industrial Transformation Research Hubs*
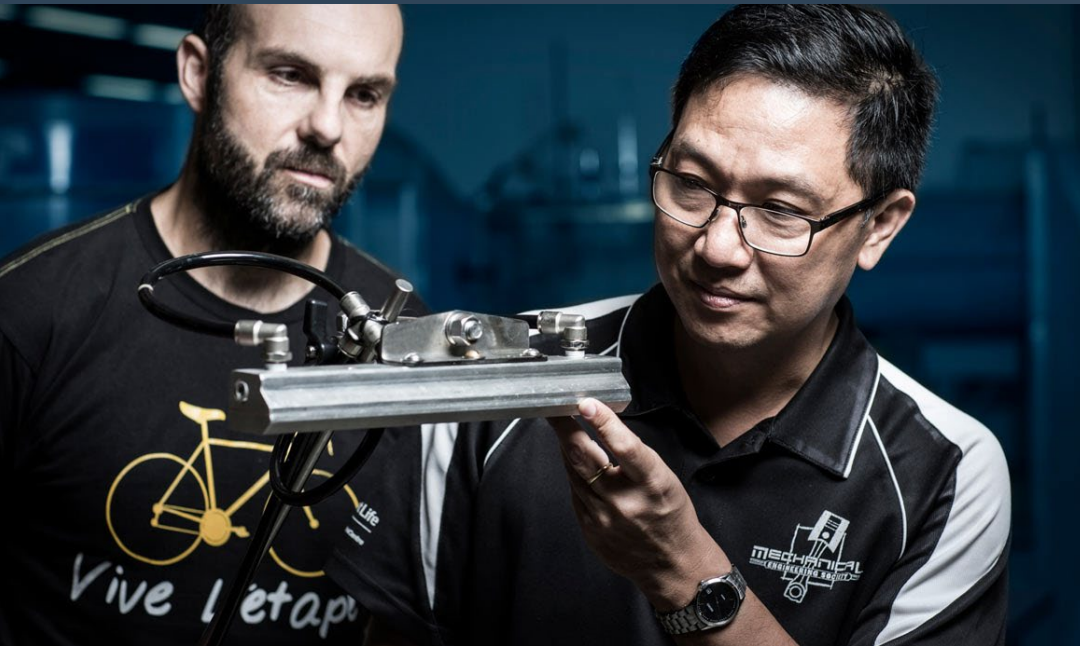
BlueScope, a provider of innovative steel materials, products, building systems and one of the world's leading manufacturers of painted and coated steel products, is drawing on expertise at the ARC Research Hub for Australian Steel Manufacturing (Steel Research Hub), administered by the University of Wollongong (UOW) to investigate complex manufacturing challenges for creating more durable building products.

One of the critical challenges being addressed by a joint UOW-BlueScope-University of Queensland research team at the Hub is how to produce smooth, uniform, thin metallic alloy coatings on high-quality coated steel products.

Coated steel products – such as corrosion-resistant metallic alloy coated steels – are important for Australian steel manufacturers, particularly in building applications that must withstand the demands of the harsh Australian climate for extended periods.

Associate Professor Buyung Kosasih, a Chief Investigator with the Steel Research Hub, says that the research team has developed mathematical and numerical models that help to predict the coating process under different operating conditions.

Metallic alloy coatings are applied to a strip of steel by first passing the strip through a molten alloy bath, such as in hot-dip galvanising; then, as the strip passes out of the bath, an air jet knife is used to blow or 'wipe' away the excess coating material to achieve the desired coating thickness and uniformity. A uniform coating is a more durable finish, less likely to corrode.

Associate Professor Buyung Kosasih says that their mathematical model is the first that links instability of the air jet knife to potential non-uniformities in the coating surface. This has highlighted a critical operating threshold that produces either a smooth or a rough coating finish of the metallic alloy coating. The team has now employed laboratory-scale experiments carried out at BlueScope facilities to assist in the selection of air jet knife operational and design settings in industry.

The Steel Research Hub originally launched in 2015, with a second successful Hub awarded $5 million from the ARC in 2020, securing a further $23.4 million cash and in-kind from collaborating industry and other university partners.

Image: Andrew Johnston and Buyung Kosasih, assessing the performance of the Mark I slotted air jet laboratory equipment.

Credit: Paul Jones.

Strategic Priorities

Our Strategic Priorities enable our vision and provide us with a refreshed approach to helping shape the Australian research system that delivers better outcomes for the research community and government. For each priority we have identified several key actions that we will implement and build upon over the course of this plan.

1. World-class advice and engagement

Our ability to engage with and inform the research agenda depends on our reputation in core areas of responsibility. By using expertise and know-how to build our reputation and networks, we will strengthen our position as a trusted source of intelligence, advice and connection.

Key Actions	Years			
	22–23	23–24	24–25	25–26
Increase strategic engagement with key government agencies.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Establish and maintain strategic engagement with like-minded agencies internationally to share experiences, trends and best practice approaches.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Increase regular strategic engagement with the research sector, including universities, researchers, industry and other research users.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Establish a data strategy and service unit to identify, analyse and share the value from ARC and other data sets across government and with the research community.	✓	✓	✓	
Leverage the new data service unit to identify, analyse and share the value from ARC and other data sets for universities, researchers, industry and research users.			✓	✓
Collaborate with the research sector to better communicate the national interest in all projects and assist with the translation of research.	✓	✓		
Support the independent legislative review of the ARC.	✓	✓		
Continue to work with universities and other stakeholders to safeguard the integrity and credibility of Australian research.	✓	✓	✓	✓

2. Research system excellence

We have a responsibility to foster excellence within the research system. Our leading metrics and research grants administration expertise are the foundation through which to strengthen Australia's research sector. We will support the ongoing quality and impact of Australian research and innovation, using insights to empower the research system to continuously improve.

Key Actions	Years			
	22–23	23–24	24–25	25–26
Promote the ARC's research grants administration expertise and services, including through the provision of Research Grant Services.	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘
Complete the NCGP process review, and work with the research sector to design and implement enhanced processes and procedures.	⊘	⊘		
Deliver the new Industry Fellowships Program consistent with the scheme objectives.	⊘			
Implement outcomes of the review of ERA and EI by transitioning the assessments to a more modern, data driven approach informed by expert review.	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘
Ensure ARC grant activities support the participation by all researchers, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers, women researchers and early and mid-career researchers.	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘
Ensure ARC research assessments and data deliver information to support a more diverse research sector, especially for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers, women researchers and early and mid-career researchers.	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘
Evaluate and measure the impact of ARC activities and funded research.	⊘	⊘		
Increase avenues for strategic engagement with the research community to strengthen criteria to measure impact and excellence.	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘
Leverage our strategic engagements to ensure our research grants administration and assessments are responsive to the needs of the research system and support a more diverse research workforce.	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘

3. Empowered people

Our people's diversity, deep expertise, and commitment is one of the ARC's unique strengths. As we look to the future, we must strengthen our workforce to better support our network of expert committees and assessors, as well as the wider research community. We will develop a world-leading culture of collaboration and service, and attract, develop, and retain the people we need to deliver our purpose.

Key Actions	Years			
	22–23	23–24	24–25	25–26
Develop a workforce strategy including current and emerging capability requirements, to ensure we are ready to meet future capability needs.	✓	✓		
Develop an organisational plan that shapes and actively embeds a collaborative and service-oriented culture to be flexible and responsive to the needs of our stakeholders.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Refresh the service charter and implement annual stakeholder satisfaction surveys.	✓			
Promote opportunities for ARC staff to learn from and gain experience with the research community.	✓	✓	✓	✓

Research Highlight: Cell gatekeepers could be the key to better crops

Named researcher(s): Dr Annamaria De Rosa, Dr John Evans, Dr Michael Groszmann
Institution: The Australian National University
Scheme: *ARC Centre of Excellence for Translational Photosynthesis*

Research at The Australian National University has shed new light on the network of gatekeepers controlling the 'traffic' of molecules in and out of plant cells, a discovery that could hold the key to developing food crops with increased yields.

A sieve of microscopic pores made of special proteins called aquaporins are gatekeepers that control the flow of molecules across cell membranes needed for plant growth. Aquaporins are found in all kingdoms of life, from bacteria to humans. In plants, they are vital for numerous processes including water transport, growth and development, stress responses, root nutrient uptake, and photosynthesis.

Led by former PhD student, Dr Annamaria De Rosa and Dr Michael Groszmann from Professor John Evans' research group in the ARC Centre of Excellence for Translational Photosynthesis (CoETP), the researchers say that the discovery could also open the door to crops with an improved ability to cope with extreme environments.

'We know that if we are able to manipulate aquaporins, it will enable numerous useful applications for agriculture, including improving crop productivity – but first we need to know more about their diversity, evolutionary history and the many functional roles they have inside the plant,' Dr De Rosa says.

The research has identified all the different types of aquaporins found in tobacco (*Nicotiana tabacum*), a model plant species closely related to major economic crops such as tomato, potato, eggplant and capsicum. Potential applications for crop improvement include increased photosynthesis, more efficient water and fertiliser use, improved drought tolerance and more effective response to disease infection.

Image: Michael Groszmann, John Evans and Annamaria De Rosa in the glasshouse with tobacco plants.

Credit: Natalia Bateman Vargas.

Operating Context

Environment

As Australia continues to navigate through the COVID-19 pandemic and confronts a range of global economic and environmental challenges, the importance of funding research that can translate into long term national benefits and solutions, such as job creation, boosting industry and the economy, and improving the wellbeing of all Australians has grown significantly. The Government's investment in research through the ARC plays a significant role in achieving this by funding both fundamental and applied research across the full spectrum of research (excluding pre-clinical or clinical medical or health research).

We work closely with a broad range of stakeholders across government, the research and higher education sector, industry, not-for-profit, and Australian and international communities. Our customers and stakeholders have high expectations when it comes to efficient, timely and robust service delivery. We understand that trust and confidence are promoted through meaningful engagement, demonstrating accountability, transparency, and a willingness to learn and grow.

Under the ARC Strategy 2022–25, we are prioritising improving relationships to facilitate better outcomes. We are enhancing our engagement through increased communication and consultation, with a focus on transparency and co-design. To inform our activities, we are gaining a better understanding of our customers' and stakeholders' needs and expectations through engagement mapping and satisfaction surveys. The new ARC Advisory Committee, made up of members with broad expertise across academia, research, industry, and governance, also supports the CEO with advice on strategy, governance, effectiveness, and maximising the benefits of ARC-funded research for all Australians.

We are working with our stakeholders to better identify and demonstrate the value of our investment in research, and its contribution to improved economic and social outcomes. As part of this, we are introducing the new Industry Fellowships Program, which will provide a strong pipeline of researchers who understand industry engagement and can work effectively with industry and other research users to deliver practical real-world solutions.

We acknowledge the key role that international collaboration plays in developing new knowledge and technological innovation. We maintain a strong presence within the international research community and provide funding opportunities that bring together Australian and international researchers and organisations. Australian research can also be an attractive target for foreign interference. We work closely with our counterparts across government, universities and industry to ensure strategies are in place to manage foreign interference risks to ARC funded research.

This is an age of increasing reliance on digital technology and innovation. Technological advancements are changing the expectations of what is achievable in relation to customer and stakeholder engagement and grant administration processes, but also provide threats to the security of information and the operations of the agency. We are keeping up with technological advancements to achieve our deliverables by continuing to invest in systems that improve the experiences of our stakeholders, and the efficiency of the agency. We are enhancing our Research Management System (RMS) to streamline processes and improve end user experiences. Additionally, we are continuing to strengthen our capabilities in artificial intelligence, cyber security, and emerging technologies to deliver smart and secure digital solutions.

Cooperation

In addition to serving the Minister for Education, we cooperate and collaborate with a broad range of national and international stakeholders. The organisations and stakeholders that play a significant role towards helping us achieve our purpose include:

Stakeholder	Contribution towards the ARC achieving its purpose
Australian universities	Universities are our key stakeholders, as NCGP funding is awarded to Australian universities, and we evaluate the quality and impact of research for this same group. We work closely with university leaders, such as Deputy Vice Chancellors, and with university research offices to ensure there is broad consensus, awareness and understanding of our policies, grants processes and compliance with the funding requirements and full participation in our national research assessments.
Researchers	Researchers play an important role in the running of the NCGP and our national research assessments, by delivering excellent research and research outcomes, through to thousands of researchers' peer reviewing applications for the NCGP and participating in our national research assessments. Australian researchers of international repute form the ARC College of Experts and play a central role in identifying and recommending research excellence for funding.
Research peak bodies and disciplinary groups	We collaborate and consult closely with research peak bodies and disciplinary groups to ensure our policies and programs are fit for purpose and meet the needs of the Australian research sector given the broad range of research we fund and evaluate.
Industry, not-for-profit organisations, and other research end-users	Industry, not-for-profit organisations, and other research end-users help to maximise the research benefit of ARC funded research by collaborating and participating in ARC funded research. These partnerships can include cash or in-kind contributions and lead to better outcomes for research and research translation across sectors.
Department of Education	We sit within the Education portfolio and regularly engage with our portfolio agency the Department of Education to ensure our policy and priority outcomes are aligned with Government activities.
Other government departments and agencies	We work with government departments to ensure our activities align with strategic Government priorities and that we comply with cross-government legislative requirements. We collaborate closely with the NHMRC to reduce duplication in applications, improve information sharing, and to deliver the Research Administrators' Seminar and the Australian Research Integrity Committee. Similarly, we collaborate with the Department of Industry, Science and Resources and the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) to deliver research commercialisation and translation opportunities. We also provide grants administration services to other government entities that fund research grant programs such as the Department of Education, Office of National Intelligence, and the Department of Defence.
International collaborators	We are committed to creating and boosting international research collaboration opportunities. Encouraging global research linkages through our schemes is key to ensuring Australian researchers are able connect and partner with outstanding international researchers to produce world leading research outcomes.

Research Highlight: Healing land and people with biodiversity research

Named researcher(s): Mr Darryl Kickett, Professor Anna Haebich, Dr Carol Dowling, Professor Stephen Hopper, Dr Tiffany Shellam
Institution: Curtin University
Scheme: *Discovery Indigenous*

A Discovery Indigenous research project led by Mr Darryl Kickett from Curtin University's School of Media, Creative Arts and Social Inquiry is advancing reconciliation in Australia by bringing together scientific expertise, history and Indigenous cultural knowledge to conserve the country's precious biodiversity.

The project titled Healing Land, Healing People: Novel Nyungar Perspectives includes fellow Curtin researchers Professor Anna Haebich and Dr Carol Dowling, as well as Professor Stephen Hopper from The University of Western Australia and Dr Tiffany Shellam from Deakin University.

The unique research project combines expertise in cultural healing, cross-cultural knowledge of biodiversity on old and young landscapes, archival collections-based historical studies, and oral histories explored on country with Nyungar people and along songlines in southwest Australia.

Darryl Kickett has been instigating opportunities for Aboriginal leaders, communities, and governments to work together for many years while based at Curtin University's Centre for Aboriginal Studies. In this project Nyungar Elders and family groups are contributing historical knowledge about how the study area, the Dryandra Woodlands, south of Perth, has been used for thousands of years. By combining this knowledge with scientific assessments, the research team is working to heal the land, by slowing the decline in biodiversity in the woodlands and the surrounding area.

The collaboration also provides a model opportunity to embrace Indigenous Elders as a solution to protecting biodiversity, and to advance the progress of reconciliation between Nyungar people, non-Indigenous community members and land.

Image: Research leader Darryl Kickett.
Credit: Supplied by Darryl Kickett.

Capabilities

The achievement of our purpose, strategic priorities, and key activities is dependent on having a strong and effective organisational capability. Over the next 4 years we will continue to invest in our people, processes, infrastructure and data capabilities and build on existing capabilities that underpin our objective and purpose.

Relationships and communication

Our ability to build relationships and communicate effectively with our customers and stakeholders is critical to achieving our purpose. Our engagement is driven through timely, effective and meaningful communication to inform, collaborate, consult, and promote the value of research to Australia and the wider research community. We utilise a range of communication channels to engage with stakeholders, including through the ARC website, network messaging, research highlights, panels, roundtables, sponsorships, outreach activities, media activities, and our social media presence. Our priorities for 2022–23 and the forward years include:

- Refreshing the ARC Communications Strategy to provide guidance and deliver communications that are clear, consistent, timely, and outcomes focused.
- Developing specific communications plans in alignment with strategic guidance.
- Identifying the needs and sentiment of stakeholders and stakeholder mapping.

People and culture

To achieve our outcome, it is important for us to have a highly skilled, engaged and customer-centric workforce which understands and drives our purpose. This requires a united and strong leadership focus to steer the agency towards a high performing culture. We empower our entire workforce to demonstrate leadership qualities and prepare us for the future. Our priorities for 2022–23 and the forward years include:

- Reviewing workforce roles and responsibilities.
- Identifying workforce strategies, including current and emerging capability requirements, to ensure we are ready to meet future capability needs.

Grants management expertise

We are recognised as experts in the delivery of research grant programs and supporting excellent fundamental and applied research and research training, consistent with the whole of Australian Government grants administration initiatives. Our College of Experts, made up of experts from the Australian research community, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members and research end-users across the private, public and not-for-profit sectors, play a key role in identifying research excellence. In addition, the RMS provides a standardised research grants process and offers a flexible, robust, stable and innovative platform for administering research grants. We also provide specialist research-based grants administration services to other Australian Government agencies that is standardised, streamlined and supports Australian Government standards and requirements. Our priorities for 2022–23 and the forward years include:

- Implementing actions from the NCGP process review.
- Enhancing the policies and processes relating to the management of information captured in RMS on behalf of other Commonwealth Government agencies.

Data and analytics

We collect comprehensive data sets as part of the NCGP grants process, ERA and EI national research assessments and RGS arrangements, and share this information with our stakeholders across government, the research sector, and the community. We seek to promote and leverage the benefits of this powerful data asset to inform research policy advice to the Government and to inform the community on trends in the research sector. Our priorities for 2022–23 and the forward years include:

- Consolidating data on the ARC website to increase the usability of the data, improve end user experience and maximise the benefits of shared information.
- Updating the ARC's Data Release Policy.
- Refreshing the ARC's data visualisation functionality.

Technology

Our technology strategy aligns with the broader Digital Government Strategy, providing services to our client base through digital platforms in a people/business centric manner. We have implemented a cost-effective contemporary operational platform to ensure alignment within the Whole-of-Government architecture and promote re-use of digital investment by both providing and consuming shared digital capabilities with other government agencies. Our priorities for 2022–23 and the forward years include:

- Investing in cyber security uplift to ensure our systems are highly available, trusted and reliable.
- Implementing our ICT risk reduction strategy to ensure our functions are highly resilient.
- Refreshing the RMS and SEER technology stacks to ensure they remain fit for purpose.

Organisational governance and financial management

We maintain high-quality governance structures that include strategies and frameworks for decision-making, performance measurement and reporting, audit, evaluation, and risk management. These frameworks are supported by internal policies, plans, an online governance and risk management system and staff training. We share outcomes and findings from internal audit, evaluation, and external reviews across the agency to improve internal controls and drive continual business improvement. We have an efficient and effective system of financial controls and procedures in place that meets the needs of our staff and stakeholders while maintaining our financial sustainability and complying with the Commonwealth Resource Management Framework. Our finance section is a source of financial expertise and provides high quality strategic financial advice across the agency. Our priorities for 2022–23 and the forward years include:

- Reviewing and updating the ARC's risk management framework to ensure it meets the needs of the ARC going forward.
- Evolving our financial controls and procedures to improve process efficiency and ensure that the integrity of the controls still meets our compliance requirements.
- Ensuring that our financial controls and procedures are understood by our staff.

Case study – Research Grant Services

Managing an end-to-end grants administration service for the Office of National Intelligence and Department of Defence

ARC RGS
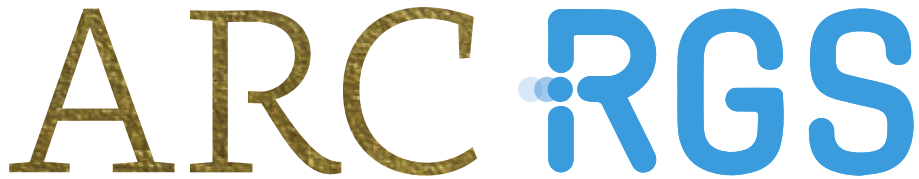
'The Research Grant Service was a novel and key service solution for ONI's policy and program requirements, in response to the 2017 Independent Intelligence Review.' (Office of National Intelligence 2022)

'This initiative provides the NSSTC and its National Security stakeholders with early engagement with researchers to influence and shape foundational Science and Technology R&D for future operational impact.' (Department of Defence National Security Science and Technology Centre 2022)

The ARC's Research Grants Services (RGS) administered almost $6 million in 2021–22 for the first round of research grants under the National Intelligence and Security Discovery Research Grants (NISDRG) program, funded by the Office of National Intelligence (ONI) and the Department of Defence National Security Science and Technology Centre (NSSTC). ONI and NSSTC have partnered with RGS to deliver an end-to-end grants administration service which includes design, implementation and ongoing program management, while ONI and NSSTC maintain policy and funding responsibilities for the program.

RGS is built on the ARC's 20 years of grants administration expertise and outstanding reputation, as recognised by the Australian National Audit Office. It supports our policy partners – ONI and NSSTC, to fund the best research for NISDRG in line with their policy expectations. Two versions, or instances, of the ARC's Research Management System

(RMS) have been set up to administer the NISDRG and enable receipt and assessment of applications and the reporting, payment and management of grants. RMS users only need one profile and login for both instances, as the RMS platform can support grants administration activities of multiple funding entities including simultaneous grant opportunities.

As part of our managed service, RGS facilitates the assessment of applications by targeting expert assessors in relevant fields of research to create a shortlist of meritorious applications for the ONI and NSSTC. The experts are drawn from the ARC's database of over 7,000 assessors and comprise experts from a broad spectrum of research disciplines and industry end-users.

Research grants data collected through the program also contributes to the ARC's grants data portal https://dataportal.arc.gov.au > Home > RGS > Web > Grants > RGS Grants Search - Grants Data Portal that is accessible and publicly available for policy makers and the community as it includes data relating to research grants from ONI, NSSTC, ARC and the Department of Education. RGS offers a range of services to support research funding administration, and undertakes an agile approach to service delivery, working closely with policy partners and embedding assurance in our activities, to deliver consistent and efficient grants administration services in support of whole of government initiatives.

Risk oversight and management

Our risk culture promotes active engagement with risk and ensures staff understand their responsibility to identify and manage risk. Risk management is embedded in all elements of our activities including decision making, strategic planning and daily operations. The ARC Leadership Group (ALG) monitors strategic and emerging risks that could impact on us achieving our purpose. Business areas routinely review their risks and controls through an online risk management system, and risk information is regularly shared and reported to senior management and the CEO. The ARC Audit Committee provides independent assurance to the CEO on our risk oversight, management and system of internal controls.

The ARC Risk Management Framework (the Framework) supports our staff in meeting their responsibility to manage risk effectively. The Framework is underpinned by the *ARC Risk Management Policy* and *ARC Risk Management Plan and Toolkit* which aligns with the *Commonwealth Risk Management Policy* and articulates our appetite, tolerance and approach to engaging with risk.

Risk appetite and tolerance

The risks to the ARC can be significant, and a failure to properly manage these risks may impact on our ability to deliver on our purpose and, as a result, damage the ARC's reputation and stakeholder confidence.

We accept there is a certain level of inherent risk in our activities and acknowledge that accepting a moderate level of risk, where appropriate, can assist in a process of continual improvement. However, it is important to note that we have a low tolerance for risks that specifically relate to our reputation and to the safety of our staff and stakeholders.

Our overall approach to risk management is considered and reflects an approach that recognises our ability to deliver our objectives could be jeopardised if poorly managed risks were to result in adverse events and reputational damage.

Within this context we are committed to managing risks at the most practicable, acceptable and cost-effective level possible.

Table 1 outlines our 3 key strategic risks, which the ALG manages closely.

Table 1: ARC Strategic Risks

Strategic Risk	Mitigation
ARC funded research is not creating new knowledge or achieving impact	We have a range of policies and processes, including rigorous grants administration and peer review systems, to support the funding of research that will lead to new knowledge. We are further strengthening the controls for this risk through implementing our strategic priorities, streamlining our grants administration processes, greater engagement with key stakeholders, and delivering new schemes that align with government priorities.
The ARC is not engaging effectively with its stakeholders	We have communication and outreach policies in place, work closely with our colleagues across government, and undertake regular outreach with the research sector. We are strengthening our management of this risk through the launch of the new ARC website, greater consultation, and developing a stakeholder map to enable us to better understand and meet the needs of our stakeholders.
The ARC fails to comply with its legislative requirements	We have well-established governance and financial processes for ensuring compliance with legislative requirements. In addition, we undertake regular staff training, participate in cross-government groups and have a dedicated Legal Counsel.

Subsidiaries

The ARC does not have any subsidiaries.

Research Highlight: Restoring underwater leafy habitats

Named researcher(s): Associate Professor Adriana Vergés
Institution: The University of New South Wales
Scheme: *Linkage Projects*

Associate Professor Adriana Vergés is a marine ecologist and multiple ARC grant recipient, based at The University of New South Wales and the Sydney Institute of Marine Science, whose research seeks to reverse the disappearance of the world's seaweed forests, under pressure from human activity and climate change.

The winner of the UNSW Emerging Thought Leader Prize in 2019, Professor Vergés is one of the masterminds behind Operation Crayweed, which has restored thriving crayweed forests to the shallow waters off Sydney. This successful restoration project has had a significant impact on the wider community, both in terms of its environmental effect, but also through the innovative science communication that took place around it at public events, to engage and inspire the local community in the protection of seaweeds.

A newer project Operation Posidonia seeks to achieve similar aims, with public engagement and funding to restore the endangered Posidonia australis seagrass to estuaries where it once thrived and phase out the use of the block-and-chain boat moorings which destroy it.

Kelp and seagrasses are important for carbon capture and storage. In some regions of Australia, seagrasses can store 20 or 30 times more carbon than rainforests. Kelp and seagrasses also underpin the ecosystems which commercially valuable fisheries, and local tourism industries depend upon.

Associate Professor Vergés says that her ultimate goal is to not only restore lost underwater forests and seagrass meadows but to also climate-proof these habitats as much as possible. 'In the marine environment, we are already seeing the impacts of climate change in a major way. Fishers are now catching species that used to be found in warmer waters, and we also have species and entire habitats that are disappearing,' says Associate Professor Vergés. 'For example, 95% of Tasmania's giant kelp forests have disappeared – and that is because of climate change.'

Image: A kelp forest.
Credit: Camille Pagniello, California Sea Grant, Scripps Institution of Oceanography UC San Diego.

Performance

Our performance measures are an integral component of the ARC performance cycle and are designed to demonstrate the effectiveness and efficiency of our work in achieving our purpose. We recognise the importance of reliable and relevant performance information to illustrate how we are achieving our purpose.

Performance measures and targets

	Performance Measure	Description	Key Activity	Target	Year			
					22–23	23–24	24–25	25–26
1	The percentage of ARC schemes completed in time to meet ARC published timeframes.	**Outcome:** NCGP application assessment processes are conducted in an efficient and timely manner. **Methodology:** The number of ARC schemes where outcomes were announced within the published timeframes on the ARC website against all ARC schemes where outcomes were announced, for the reporting period. **Type:** Quantitative	Fund high quality and impactful research	100%	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	The percentage of submitted progress, End of Year and final reports reviewed on time.	**Outcome:** The ARC reviews completed final grant reports and submitted End of Year Reports, Progress / Annual Reports in a timely manner (within 90 days of submission) to ensure researchers are not impeded in applying for additional grants. **Methodology:** Percentage of reports processed within the reporting period i.e. finalised (approved/waived) or desubmitted back to the Research Office for action. 90 days calculated from the last date of submission. **Type:** Quantitative	Fund high quality and impactful research	>90%	✓	✓	✓	✓

Performance Measure	Description	Key Activity	Target	Year 22–23	23–24	24–25	25–26
3 The percentage of appeals upheld against NCGP application assessment processes for all applications submitted	**Outcome:** ARC manages NCGP application and assessment processes fairly and in accordance with Grant Guidelines. **Methodology:** Number of appeals upheld in the specified reporting period against all applications where the appeals decision was made in the reporting period. **Type:** Quantitative	Fund high quality and impactful research	< 1%	✓	✓	✓	✓
4 The percentage of ARC funded research projects involving international collaboration for all ARC funded research projects.	**Outcome:** The ARC funds a high proportion of projects involving international collaboration. **Methodology:** The number of research projects indicating actual international collaboration divided by the total number of research projects displayed as a percentage. Data based on collaboration with nominated country/countries as per final reports approved within the reporting period. **Type:** Quantitative	Fund high quality and impactful research	>70%	✓	✓	✓	✓

	Performance Measure	Description	Key Activity	Target	Year			
					22–23	23–24	24–25	25–26
5	The total contribution from partner organisations for all research projects funded under the Linkage Projects scheme.	**Outcome:** The ARC fosters an environment for collaboration between researchers and partner organisations. Total contribution from partner organisations for every ARC dollar is equal to or higher than the previous year. **Methodology:** Total partner organisation contribution (cash and in-kind funding) divided by total ARC funding for the same scheme round. Includes all funded Linkage Projects where outcomes were finalised within the reporting period. **Type:** Quantitative	Fund high quality and impactful research	**≥ average dollar contribution than the previous year**	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘
6	Use of ERA program data to inform and support the needs of Australian universities and the Australian Government.	**Outcome:** ERA program reports and activities assist in the development of Australian Government policies and the strategic planning of Australian universities. **Methodology:** Desktop review and analysis of Australian university planning and reporting documents, requests for information from Government, and relevant feedback captured from outreach activities. **Type:** Qualitative	Assess research quality, engagement, and impact	**Met**	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘

	Performance Measure	Description	Key Activity	Target	Year			
					22–23	23–24	24–25	25–26
7	Use of EI program data to inform and support the needs of Australian universities and the Australian Government	**Outcome:** EI program reports and activities assist in the development of Australian Government policies and the strategic planning of Australian universities. **Methodology:** Desktop review and analysis of Australian university planning and reporting documents, and requests for information from Government, and relevant feedback captured from outreach activities. **Type:** Qualitative	Assess research quality, engagement, and impact	**Met**	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘
8	The percentage of research integrity investigation outcomes actioned on time.	**Outcome:** ARC funded research is undertaken with integrity and complies with national codes on research ethics and the *ARC Research Integrity Policy*. **Methodology:** The percentage of outcomes from investigations notified to the ARC under its *Research Integrity Policy* considered and actioned by the ARC within 6 weeks. **Type:** Quantitative	Safeguard research integrity	**>90%**	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘

Acronyms

ALG: ARC Leadership Group

CEO: Chief Executive Officer

CSIRO: Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation

EI: Engagement and Impact

ERA: Excellence in Research for Australia

ITRP: Industrial Transformation Research Program

NCGP: National Competitive Grants Program

NHMRC: National Health and Medical Research Council

NISDRG: National Intelligence and Security Discovery Research Grants

NSSTC: National Security Science and Technology Centre

ONI: Office of National Intelligence

PGPA Act: *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013*

R&D: Research and Development

RMS: Research Management System

RGS: Research Grant Services

SRIs: Special Research Initiatives

Glossary

Applied research: Research that aims to address real-world problems by applying existing research theories or practices in a novel or innovative way.

Fundamental research: Also known as basic research, is research that contributes to understanding the world through discoveries and the creation of new knowledge, theories and practices.

GrantConnect: Australian Government's whole-of-government grants information system, http://www.grants.gov.au.

Partner Organisations: National or international organisations (other than Eligible Organisations) that satisfy the eligibility criteria for partner organisations under the NCGP including business, industry, not-for-profit, government and international higher education organisations.

Peer review: Evaluation of research applications by experts, usually in the same research discipline.

ARC contact details

Cover Images

Credit: Dr Adam Frew, University of Southern Queensland.
Description: An image of a fungi. New research is showing that a particular type of fungi can be a game-changer for plants' resistance to insects.

Credit: UNSW / iCinema Centre for Interactive Cinema Research, incorporating part of an image titled: Gregory fire Queensland, iStock.com/Philips 2022 (all rights reserved).
Description: The image shows an AI-driven immersive visualisation suite that recreates the experience of being in a wildfire in order to transform how we understand, respond to and prepare for the phenomenon.

Credit: Mr Greg Joseph of the Yidinji People from Northern Queensland.
Description: The artwork depicts the diversity of ARC employees who took part in workshops with Mr Joseph to create the artwork. The artwork commemorates the launch of the ARC's first Reconciliation Action Plan in 2015 and is currently displayed in the ARC's office.

Credit: Professor Jamie Ross John, Monash University, incorporating an artwork.
Description: Image of an artwork created by Dr Erica Tandori titled: Branching Out – branched chain fatty acids, B. Fragilis and Natural Killer T Cell activation in the gut biota.

Credit: Flickr (Creative Commons).
Description: The image shows an ice sheet along the edge of the Amundsen Sea.

Credit: NASA.
Description: The image shows two black holes merging to become one.

ARC.GOV.AU