



Australian Government  
Australian Research Council

ARC

25 February 2022

The Hon Stuart Robert MP  
Acting Minister for Education and Youth  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Minister

I am pleased to respond to the Statement of Expectations outlined by you on 6 December 2021, in your letter to then CEO, Professor Sue Thomas, with this Statement of Intent.

Thank you for acknowledging the important role played by university research in the creation of new knowledge, new social and economic opportunities for our citizens, and in turn, the valuable contribution of the Australian Research Council (ARC) to the research sector.

The ARC is a critical element of Australia's research and innovation system and has a synergetic relationship with other critical elements including researchers, universities, government, the College of Experts, industry, and the peak bodies and learned Academies. Since starting in this role on 1 February 2022, I have been overwhelmed by the level of support I have received, and I thank all parties for their willingness to engage collaboratively and respectfully to enable the ARC and the research system to work as effectively as possible.

I appreciate you outlining your expectations across Government policies, as well as areas of reform. The ARC will continue to play a significant role in the Government's research, and research commercialisation agendas and to optimally align its operations to better support the research pipeline and its translation.

I acknowledge that increasing research engagement with end-users will better harness the benefits of publicly funded research, deliver community value and drive economic growth and recovery over coming years. I look forward to working with you, to achieve greater research translation and national benefit you seek by balancing:

- Government's strong commitment to blue-sky fundamental research, with
- ensuring the ARC takes every opportunity to maximise the benefits of that research through improvements to grant processes and information collection such as the national interest test, evaluation of research excellence and engagement and impact, and the utilisation of the wealth of data and opportunities collected through those activities.

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To achieve this aim, I also look forward to working closely with and receiving the support of the re-established designated Advisory Committee in addressing your expectations and reviewing the operations of the ARC. I am eager to listen and hear the views of the university sector, industry, and government more broadly, to ensure we are addressing these views appropriately, and actively driving the evolution of our innovation environment.

You have outlined four priorities for immediate implementation, which I respond to below in conjunction with an update on progress so far.

### **Supporting National Priorities**

I acknowledge the advantages that a focus on national priorities and vision can contribute to maximising the benefits of publicly funded research. We will ensure that future rounds of our grant schemes identify Government priorities for economic development and revise grant guidelines to require the consideration of the National Manufacturing Priorities and other national priorities in the assessment process. This is expected to be in place for all new rounds.

Success in adoption or translation, and uptake or potential commercialisation of research, is also reliant on the right blend of research outcomes, including humanities and social sciences and multidisciplinary activities, and we will continue to ensure the programs are achieving economic, commercial, environmental, social and cultural benefits to the Australian community.

We will work with applicants and stakeholders to provide clear guidance on how to effectively identify and document the potential public value and outcomes from research applications and show direct linkage with priority areas.

In addition, we are working with the Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) and the Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources (DISER), to ensure that the assessment process supports the funding parameters you have set. We expect this work to be completed in the middle of the year.

### **National Interest Test**

Your letter highlights the opportunity provided by improving the National Interest Test (NIT) to achieve greater translation of research. I understand the importance of robust guidance to applicants to assist them to improve the quality and clarity of NIT statements with the aim of providing a clear line of sight to how their research could be adopted or translated and potentially commercialised. Input from industry and other end-user experts in the process of the NIT assessment is also beneficial, given their knowledge and experience regarding the path to translation success.

This work will also be broadened to consider how we can increase awareness of the NIT statements by industry and other potential end-users, and facilitate greater access and

engagement between universities and industry to increase translation. I look forward to working with DESE, DISER and other stakeholders to identify new opportunities in this area.

We will work with all stakeholders to improve our advice to applicants, and provide you with options regarding an expanded role for industry and other end-users in assessment processes. As you noted, we need to consider the workload of industry assessors in taking on such a role and there is also a need to consider the effectiveness and efficiency of the grant assessment process for all assessors.

The ARC will therefore undertake a root and branch review of its application and assessment processes to design and implement a best-practice approach that takes into account the evolving environment in which we and the university sector operate. We will identify opportunities for improvements, increase transparency in the grants process, improve the experience of researchers, industry and assessors, and take into account the evolving environment in which we and the university sector operate.

To ensure that this process does not cause further delays in launching funding scheme rounds, we will work quickly to identify immediate improvements for your consideration, while also undertaking a consultation process with stakeholders and the root and branch review to provide increased benefits and long-term outcomes. The later activity is expected to be completed by the middle of the year, with implementation of new procedures before the end of 2022.

The College of Experts is integral to determining research excellence. It has over 200 members who are experts of international standing drawn from the Australian research community, from higher education, industry and public sector research organisations.

Nomination for new members across academia and industry typically opens in April/May each year. We have commenced consulting with the sector to identify new members as quickly as possible, and I commit to further enhancing and strengthening industry and other membership on the College as part of this process.

### **Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) and Engagement and Impact (EI) Review**

We are fast-tracking development of more efficient and robust assessments of the quality and impact of Australian research including implementing the recommendations of the review of Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) and the Engagement and Impact (EI) assessment. We have convened the ERA Benchmarking and Rating Scale (BRS) Working Group, and work is well underway in this area. We are also currently working with your department on revising the ERA 'world standard' benchmark and ensuring the new scale provides a comparator that sets a standard over time that more clearly differentiates between universities compared with the world's best.

Given the impending commencement of the ERA 2023 process, we are enhancing the options paper prepared in consultation with the BRS Working Group, and aim to release this in March in order to undertake broader consultation, in advance of the coming ERA round.

We will also work with your department to develop robust quantitative metrics focused on the impact of research for the next EI assessment in 2024. Stakeholder consultation on this will occur in mid-2022.


### **Enhancing Organisational Governance**

The transitioning of the Advisory Council to a Designated Committee under the *Australian Research Council Act 2001* (ARC Act), and the appointment of an independent Chair, will provide direct support to the CEO and is welcomed. I expect that the opportunity to use the expertise and knowledge of the Committee on an ongoing basis will greatly strengthen the operations of the ARC. I particularly look forward to working with the Committee and my leadership team to develop a new ARC Strategy and setting a future focused agenda that aligns with strategy and enables our operations to better meet the priorities of Government and the needs of our stakeholders.

I will shortly provide you with draft Terms of Reference and proposed membership.

I and my team are very pleased to be delivering these priorities for the Australian people and supporting a world class research sector in Australia.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Judi Zielke', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Ms Judi Zielke PSM  
Acting Chief Executive Officer