



AUSTRALIAN BUSINESS DEANS COUNCIL

ABDC submission

DISCUSSION PAPER: A NEW PLAN FOR ARC-FUNDED RESEARCH

11 April 2025

The ABDC welcomes the ARC's review of the National Competitive Grants Program and the opportunity to give feedback on the proposals outlined in the discussion paper.

The Australian Business Deans Council is the collective voice of Australian university business schools, which educate 16% of all domestic students and 36% of the nation's international students.

Our 37 members teach and research the areas vital to the success of the businesses that underpin the economy. The ABDC's aim is to make business schools even better.

As their peak body, ABDC's role is to ensure that those with political, social, cultural and economic influence appreciate and support how business education contributes to Australia's future.

1. Does the proposed model provide a strong and clear basis for the NCGP over the next 20 years?

The ABDC generally supports the new foundation for ARC-funded research outlined in the discussion paper, particularly the streamlining of processes for grant awards. The focus on opportunities for early-career research (ECR) and mid-career research (MCR) academics for higher-risk, higher-reward research will encourage greater risk tolerance and support innovation. This approach is necessary to improve Australia's overall culture of innovation, and responsiveness to meet global environmental, social, and economic challenges.

The ABDC cautions that the replacement of three- and four-year fellowships with two-year fellowships that are embedded into projects runs the risk of creating uncertainty for ECRs. The two-year timeframe may not align with the project timelines that ECRs are involved in.

It is commendable that the ARC is taking a long-term view of the NCGP and its adequacy over a 20-year horizon; however, many global disruptions occur across shorter timeframes. In recent years developments in AI, environmental challenges, and pandemic response have required significant research mobilisation in the span of months, not years. Embedded in the model should be a medium-term view of the model's adequacy over a five- or 10-year horizon.

2. Does the proposed model adequately address your concerns or those expressed in the initial consultations?

The proposed model's focus on reducing the complexity of the current scheme and limitations in funding for ECRs and MCRs is welcome. However, we have concerns about:

- The increasing cost of doing research in all disciplines, the full cost of research, and if the proposed model accounts for this.
- Whether shorter-term funding will ultimately be attractive for ECRs if it creates ongoing uncertainty about continued funding and career prospects.

- The impact of removing three- and four-year fellowships on international recruitment in areas of skill shortage. Shorter-term, two-year funding opportunities may reduce Australia's competitiveness as a destination for talented researchers.

3. Do you foresee any unintended consequences or significant risks which have not been accounted for in the proposed model?

Removing three- and four-year fellowships: The ABDC reiterates its concern about the implementation of shorter-term fellowships that have conflicting timeframes with project horizons.

Longer-term prospects for Initiate scheme are unclear: A related issue is that the link between Initiate scheme funding and longer-term prospects for ECRs is unclear. ABDC welcomes the wider availability of grants for the ECR cohort, but the grants need to be bolstered by strategies to articulate embedded fellowships into research career pathways.

4. What issues would need to be addressed in the transition from the current NCGP schemes to the new model?

Evaluation of the ECR/MCR focussed schemes: The Initiate scheme, with an estimated 900 grants awarded per round, should be expected to attract a high number of applications. This raises questions about how to award grants fairly across disciplines, and how to evaluate applications based on project quality. Careful consideration will need to be given to evaluation criteria, processes and assessor training.

Different schemes, different evaluation: The proposed model does not specify the differing requirements for assessing applications for the Initiate, Breakthrough, and Prioritise schemes. We note that the ARC will undertake this work and support the general approach of building on and reviewing existing expertise and procedures.

5. Are there any features that you would add to, or remove from, the model?

Incentives for industry collaboration: The ABDC welcomes proposals to streamline processes and reduce administrative burdens for industry partners across the schemes to facilitate collaboration.

Embed impact evaluation: We encourage the ARC to require a percentage of project budgets to include a formal external evaluation component.

Clarify supports for research translation: Given the vast array of translation and impact approaches, we encourage the ARC to consider developing a national framework for this purpose.

Embed recognition of Indigenous capability across all schemes: The targeted 'Realise Indigenous Capability' scheme is welcomed but should work in tandem with strategies to increase the pipeline of Indigenous researchers across all schemes. This program might consider support for indigenous researchers from community through to higher education.

6. Do you have any feedback on the proposed grant schemes and their likely effectiveness?



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While difficult to predict, the scheme should break some of the existing barriers to gaining grants and redraw boundaries for grant success. Building in an impact evaluation will assist with assessing effectiveness. Providing a wider canvass for industry collaboration grants (not limiting these to any one scheme) will provide more opportunities to bring in businesses and co-create research programs that deliver meaningful end user outcomes.