

Institute for Culture and Society, Western Sydney University

#### ARC Role and Mission

The ARC's role and mission 'in terms of impact across Australia's research system' (5) needs to be clarified. While the 'role and mission' may be defined as such, and impact elaborated slightly as 'economic, social and community outcomes', the substantive meaning and practical effect of 'impact' needs detail.

Presumably, impact is accounted for in some way. Whether this is through systems of measure or explanatory narratives, or a mix of both, or perhaps something else entirely is a matter that warrants further elaboration.

It is important and indeed strategic to note that in supporting activities that benefit the nation, the ARC should not lose sight of the significance of research that investigates and builds partnerships in the Indo-Pacific region and more widely across international scales.

#### Establishment of an ARC Board

The general remit and terms of reference are well articulated. In terms of the composition of the Board, it would make sense to consider the inclusion of advisory board members associated with peak international funding agencies such as the European Research Council, the Economic and Social Research Council (UK), the British Academy, the National Research Council of Canada, the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research, the Singapore Agency for Science, Technology and Research and the German Research Foundation (DFG).

In doing so, the ARC will be better positioned to 'ensure Australia's world-leading research continues to enhance our reputation as a leading nation in research' (6). Without this input of representatives from international funding bodies, there is a strong risk of this aspiration for international research excellence ringing hollow within the echo chamber of the national.

#### Approval of Grants

The Institute for Culture and Society, Western Sydney University, does not find the case sufficiently compelling for Ministerial approval of funding recommendations for ARC Centres of Excellence, Industrial Transformation and Training Centres, and Industrial Transformation Research Hubs. An ARC Advisory Board that invites input from relevant ministerial portfolios, industry representatives and previous recipients of funding for these particular schemes would, in our view, provide relevant expertise that compliments recommendations made by the College Experts.

Such an approach ensures the integrity and autonomy requested of the ARC in the many feedback submissions made through the ARC review and consultation process by stakeholders in the sector is realised. Further, such an approach does not in our view diminish the flexibility of Government to invest in specific research priorities or build

research capabilities, which is a process that currently happens in parallel to the various funding schemes of the ARC.

The document frames the Minister for Education as having ‘the ability to approve funding’ (7), which is different from having the *authority* to approve. Ability is assumed in the statement and is far from a given. Further, the follow-up statement that ‘this will enable Government flexibility to invest in specific research priorities’ is redundant. This is a check-box procedure in Part A of applications that is then read by assessors against content in the project description. Unless, that is, specific research priorities or areas of ‘strategic investment’ are contingent on prevailing circumstances. If that is the case, then it is not fair to applicants who have spent a year or more developing their applications with an understanding of national research priorities articulated at the time of the scheme’s announcement. Moreover, it is not really a strategic approach to investment in research if the term ‘strategic’ is understood to correspond with a longer-term outlook on prospects.

#### Funding Arrangements

The proposal for the Government to amend the ARC Act by ‘removing the requirement for the Minister for Education to split funding between different categories of research programs’ (8) is intriguing. It would be helpful to know what this means in terms of strategy and implementation.

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