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**Response – Australian Research Council Act 2001 – Proposed Amendments**

The Western Sydney University welcomes the opportunity to respond to the above consultation paper. Western is a young multi-campus university which, according to THE 2022 and 2023 rankings, ranks 1<sup>st</sup> in the world for impact. Western is a university that defines itself as ‘research-led’ with ‘regional, national and global impact’ supported by a ‘dynamic and innovative culture that secures success’.

Central to Western’s research is the ambition to construct a better global future. The University’s research is aligned with four broad themes: Education and Work; Environment and Sustainability; Health and Wellbeing, and Urban Living Futures and Society. These themes encompass research across all disciplines and produce outcomes ranging from new technologies to practice and policy change.

Western has structures, policies and supports in place for collaborative, cross-disciplinary research that is built around grand challenges. Our research cohorts include industry partners and research end-users within their governance structures and as part of the research teams. These strategies ensure not only translation but also that the challenges central to industry, in the broadest definition of the term, are addressed.

Informed by this intent, Western sees the proposed changes to the ARC Act as predominantly positive and supportive of a strong national research culture. We are pleased to see the commitment to transparency proposed by the establishment of an ARC Board of ‘providing clear and empowered governance over the ARC will ensure the independence and integrity of the institution and its decision-making processes.’ We welcome the recognition of the importance of grant decisions being made by experts through peer review rather than by Ministers.

We welcome the above amendments to:

- a. promote and conduct activities to shape and foster the Australian research community for the benefit of the nation
- b. administer funding of excellent pure basic research, strategic basic research, and applied research in all disciplines except medical research.

to the Objects of the ARC Act which Western believes correctly asserts the intent and purpose of a national research funding agency.

The articulation of the role of the ARC Board (5) to 'provide assurance to Government that there is day-to-day scrutiny of decisions and processes, and ensure that specific grant decisions are made by experts based on the peer review process, rather than by Ministers' asserts the natural compact that should exist between researchers, funders and the broader community.

Western sees the appointment of a First Nations representative to the Board as essential. We also see the need for the Board to maintain gender and disciplinary balance, including within the roles of Chair and Deputy Chair.

The importance of independent and informed decision making is crucial to maintaining transparency in funding decisions and similarly vital in ensuring Australia produces world leading research across all disciplines. Consideration should be given to the inclusion on the Advisory Committee of members associated with peak international funding agencies, or assurance of reference to those agencies.

The appointment and role of the CEO (6) becoming a remit of the Board aligns with what appears to be the general intention of the proposed changes of leveraging expertise and knowledge effectively. Western encourages this change in the hope that this will see suitably qualified CEOs appointed into the future.

The approval of grants by the Board is seen entirely appropriate by Western. The suggested separation of large bids which are supported through Centres of Excellence, Industrial Transformation Training Centres and Industrial Transformation Research Hubs to fall under the remit of the Minister is not endorsed by Western. The reasoning offered that this aligns with the ministerial role of creating research capability is not viewed as a compelling reason to move away from expert assessment which will be better provided by research and industry in collaboration. The need for the Minister to create research capability should lie outside the realm of funding approval and be applied in the development of schemes and programs to support funding.

Finally, Western recommends the Department of Education publish an Exposure Draft of the ARC Act for consultation prior to the implementation of these changes.