

# Policy Review of the National Competitive Grants Program

## Terms of Reference

### Purpose of the review

A strong research sector generating world-leading, impactful research is vital for Australia's future productivity and prosperity. As the primary Commonwealth funder of fundamental and applied research in Australian universities through the National Competitive Grants Program (NCGP), the Australian Research Council (ARC) plays a central role in the national innovation and research system.

Following the independent review of the ARC, the Australian Government is amending the *Australian Research Council Act 2001* to reform and strengthen the ARC to drive world-class Australian research, now and into the future. The Review builds on these reforms by examining the NCGP to ensure it continues to deliver economic, social, environmental, and cultural benefits for all Australians by funding excellent pure basic, strategic basic and applied research.

### Key areas for review

#### Purpose and impact of ARC research grants

- The purpose and objectives of the NCGP and its capacity to support ground-breaking research, including how the program:
  - supports fundamental research in Australian universities
  - promotes research collaboration, translation and impact to generate economic, environmental, social and cultural benefits for Australia
  - aligns to the ARC's defined role and purpose set out in the Objects of the *Australian Research Council Amendment (Review Response) Bill 2023*.

#### Program structure and design

- The design and structure of the NCGP in the context of international best practice to ensure it:
  - limits administrative burden and is easy for researchers to understand and interact with
  - promotes strong research outcomes by encouraging collaboration across disciplines, universities, and with a diverse range of local, national, and international research partners and end-users
  - supports the collection and communication of research outcomes and impacts to demonstrate the value of public funding and investment.

#### Alignment with other government research funding programs

- In line with the ARC's unique role in supporting pure basic, strategic basic and applied research, consider opportunities to better align ARC and other government research funding programs to strengthen Australia's research and innovation ecosystems, including through the promotion of university-led and industry co-designed research.

#### Strong and diverse research sector

- The role and impact of the NCGP in promoting a strong and diverse research sector, including by identifying and addressing potential barriers for the participation and success of researchers and industry partners and end-users in the program.

### **Advancing support for Indigenous Australian research and researchers**

- The capacity of NCGP to promote, embed and support Indigenous research and knowledge systems in Australia's research sector, including through initiatives to:
  - promote Indigenous academic leadership in shaping and producing knowledge of benefit to the community, and
  - strengthen the pipeline of emerging Indigenous researchers.

### **National priorities for research**

- The capacity of NCGP to support the revitalised National Science and Research Priorities, the National Reconstruction Fund, and other relevant government priorities, including through:
  - focused and scaled investment to address emerging and significant research opportunities and complex problems facing Australia.

### **Administration and timings**

The Review is being undertaken jointly by the Australian Research Council and the Department of Education. It is supported by a steering group, made up of members with expertise from Australian universities, industry, and government sectors.

The Review will undertake consultations with stakeholders across the higher education research sector, industry and other end-users of research, in the first half of 2024. A discussion paper to inform the consultation process will be issued on the ARC website and submissions will be invited.

Following the conclusion of the consultation process, a final report will be delivered to the Minister through the ARC Board in the second half of 2024.