

DDCA

The Australian Council of Deans and Directors of Creative Arts

DDCA STATEMENT ON PROPOSED ARC CHANGES

The Australian Council of Deans and Directors of Creative Arts (DDCA) shares sector concerns about the changes outlined for the Australian Research Council (ARC) programs and governance in the Letter of Expectation from Acting Minister for Education & Youth, the Honorable Stuart Robert MP, addressed to ARC CEO Professor Sue Thomas.

The DDCA acknowledges that the Government needs to adjust its research efforts to focus on identified national priorities, and that public interest be considered in the allocation of Federal research funding. Short-term priorities can and should set the agenda for strategic programs, but this must be balanced with resourcing longer-term basic research from which new knowledge and innovation can emerge. This position aligns with the much-published research on the correlation between research time and research significance.

The DDCA believes that research into and through the creative arts is crucial to the health and welfare of all Australians. It has repeatedly been shown that participation in and engagement with the creative arts improves health and wellbeing of all communities, and that research into and through the creative arts underpins innovation and enterprise. Recent examples of this can be seen in team projects such as Professor Susan Luckman's 'The value of craft skills to the future of manufacturing in Australia' (DP190100349) and Professor Jen Webb's 'So what do you do? Graduates in the Creative and Cultural Industries (DP160101440) as well as Special Research Initiatives such as Associate Professor Robert Burke's 'Diversifying Music in Australia: Gender Equity in Jazz and Improvisation' (SRI 200200311) and Associate Professor Naomi Sunderland's 'The role of First Nations music as a determinant of health' (IN210100044).

In addition, the benefits of the arts to the cultural and economic conditions of all Australians has been well documented (Australia Council, 2020; A New Approach, 2021) and with 98% of all Australians engaged in the creative arts (Australia Council, 2020), it merits inclusion in ongoing research agendas in organisations such as the ARC. The creative arts narrates the nation through stories, images and sounds. Australian stories are told, held and handed down by our sector. The creative arts have been hit hard in the COVID 19 pandemic and should be part of any funding model supporting post-COVID national recovery.

The DDCA notes the move to align 70% of funding to the Linkage programs, based on the six National Manufacturing Priorities. We acknowledge that industry collaboration is crucial, but believe that the creative arts are just as important as based STEM-based disciplines when pursuing these national priorities. Cross-disciplinary collaborations between the arts and other disciplines are a highly valuable alignment for the future benefit of enterprise innovation, and research conducted for the Chief Scientist has shown Australia's most innovative enterprises value this skill mixing (Turner & Brass, 2014). We also know that future students benefit from multidisciplinary engagement in their learning at both undergraduate and postgraduate university levels.

The DDCA is also concerned that the independence and rigour of the ARC's funding assessment processes of the ARC remain. Involvement in ARC committees requires a deep understanding of research and end-user applications, inclusive of business, community and not-for-profit sectors. The independence of the ARC's leadership and its Advisory Board is vital in retaining confidence and trust in the institution, which is currently recognised as an international leader.

We join other peak bodies such as Universities Australia, DASSH and AAH in the call for the development of a funding model for social, cultural and economic research that will facilitate a post-COVID national recovery. We hope to see the total allocated funds for the NPILF divided into a range of distinct functional streams reflecting the diverse needs of Australian society, a society in which the creative arts play a key role now and in the future

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