Australian Academy of Science

Response to

ARC Consultation Paper:

ARC Peer Review Processes

Respondent Survey
If you are submitting personal feedback the ARC would appreciate your taking the time to complete the following respondent survey. The extent of your response to each question is completely optional. Information gathered using this survey will enable the ARC to analyse feedback received by type of respondents. Any reporting of respondent information will be aggregated and will not be used to identify individual respondents.

If you are providing feedback on behalf of an organisation please specify the name of the organisation, then proceed to the "Feedback" section of the template (page 6). |

Personal Details		
Name (optional)	Professor Bob Williamson Secretary (Science Policy)	
Organisation (optional)	Australian Academy of Science	
Contact details (optional)	Phone:	03 8344 4181
	Email:	r.williamson@unimelb.edu.au

Are you an Australian citizen or permanent resident?	☐ Yes *Not Applicable* ☐ No
Please indicate your gender?	☐ Male *Not Applicable* ☐ Female
Please indicate your age	☐ < 30 years ☐ 30-39 years ☐ 40-49 years *Not Applicable* ☐ 50-59 years ☐ 60-69 years ☐ 70 / + years
Please indicate the number of years since your PhD?	☐ 0-5 years ☐ 6-15 years *Not Applicable* ☐ 16-20 years ☐ 21/+ years ☐ N/A
Please tick or highlight any categories that best describe your current role	☐ Researcher – university-based ☐ Researcher – other publicly funded agency ☐ Researcher – other ☐ Deputy vice-chancellor / Pro vice-chancellor ☐ University research office staff ☐ ARC grant recipient ☐ ARC partner investigator ☐ ARC College of Experts member ☐ Member of peak body ☐ Member of business group ☒ Other (please specify below) **Australian Academy of Science**
Which title best describes your academic status?	☐ Postgraduate student ☐ Postdoctoral research associate or fellow ☐ Assistant Professor ☐ Associate Professor ☐ Full Professor ☐ Professor Emeritus ☒ Other (please specify below): **Australian Academy of Science**

Description of your research (optional)

Please tick or highlight the category that best describes your field(s) of research	☒ Biological sciences and biotechnology ☐ Engineering and environmental sciences ☐ Humanities and creative arts ☒ Mathematics, information and communication sciences ☒ Physics, chemistry and earth sciences ☐ Social, behavioural and economic sciences
Do you consider your research to be interdisciplinary?	☒ Yes ☐ No If yes, which disciplines does your research span? (please specify below)

Experience of ARC (optional)

In the past five years, have you been a participant on a proposal submitted to one of ARC's NCGP schemes? http://www.arc.gov.au/ncgp/default.htm	☐ Yes *Not Applicable* ☐ No If yes, please provide a summary of your participation in the table below:

Scheme	No. proposals	Your role(s) e.g. CI, PI, NC, OI, Fellow

Which category would best describe the success rate of proposals in which you were a participant based on the number of proposals submitted?	☐ 100-76% ☐ 75-51% *Not Applicable* ☐ 50-26% ☐ 25-0%

Are you intending to participate on future proposals submitted to the ARC?	☐ Yes ☐ No *Not Applicable* If yes, please indicate in the table below which scheme(s) your proposals are likely to be submitted to and your role: <table><tr><td>Scheme</td><td>Your role(s) e.g. CI, PI, NC, OI, Fellow</td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td></tr></table>
Are you currently a lead person or participant on any on-going ARC projects?	*Not Applicable* If yes, please provide a summary of your participation in the table below: <table><tr><td>Scheme</td><td>No. of on-going ARC projects</td><td>Your role(s) e.g. CI, PI, NC, OI, Fellow</td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr></table>

Have you ever been involved in ARC's peer review process?	☐ Yes
	☐ No *Not Applicable*
	
	If yes:
	    Approximately how many proposals do you currently review each year: _____
	
	    Which roles have you undertaken:
	    ☐ Selection Advisory Committee member
	    ☐ College of Expert member
	    ☐ Australia-based reader (Ozreaders)
	    ☐ International reader (Intreader)
	    ☐ Other (please specify below):

Experience of other funding agencies (optional)

Have you ever applied to or received funding from other national or international research funding agencies?	☐ Yes *Not Applicable* ☐ No If yes, which agencies (please specify below):
Have you ever participated in the peer review processes of other research funding agencies?	☐ Yes *Not Applicable* ☐ No If yes, which agencies (please specify below):

Further information

Would you be willing to discuss your comments in confidence with an ARC staff member?	☒ Yes ☐ No Comment:
	Contact: Professor Bob Williamson Secretary (Science Policy)

	Feedback
Please use the following tables to provide your feedback in regard to any or all issues outlined in the ARC Peer Review Processes Consultation Paper.	

1. The role of assessors

(Issue 3.1, page 5)
Changes to the roles and responsibilities of assessors used in ARC schemes.

i. Do you agree with the proposed changes to the role and composition of assessors used in ARC schemes?	☒ Agree ☐ Partially agree ☐ Disagree
If you do not "Agree" to the proposed changes, please comment on your reasons for disagreement:	
ii. Do you have any alternative suggestions regarding the roles and responsibilities of ARC assessors which would address the aims outlined in Issue 3.1?	The Australian Academy of Science believes that peer review is the gold standard for assessing the quality of research. We must guarantee that Australian research is of the highest quality, benchmarked internationally, carried out by teams of professional scientists headed by women and men of the highest quality, in Universities, Institutes and Hospitals with excellent capacity.

2. Payment of assessors

(Issue 3.2, page 8)
Changes to the payment arrangements for assessors.

i. Do you agree with the ARC's proposal not to pay Level 2 Panel Reviewers under the new structure?	☒ Agree ☐ Partially agree ☐ Disagree Senior scientists, such as Fellows of the Academy,

	regard grant assessment as an important part of their role; in a sense, it is one component of mentoring and setting standards for the science community.
	We agree that assessors should not be paid, and that there are some grants schemes such as Linkage Grants where scientific excellence is only one of the criteria for award, which may mean assessment should be more flexible.
If you do not "Agree" to the proposal, please comment on your reasons for disagreement:	

3. Participation of assessors

(Issue 3.3, page 8)
Identification of possible mechanisms for encouraging assessor participation.

i. Do you agree with the changes being considered?	☐ Agree ☒ Partially agree ☐ Disagree
If you do not "Agree" to the proposed changes, please comment on your reasons for disagreement:	
ii. Do you have any suggestions for encouraging participation by assessors?	There should be attempts to recruit early career researchers (ECRs) as assessors, perhaps as "extra" assessors, so that they can learn the process. Assessment of grants should be the subject of specific mentoring, and should be a requirement for all ECRs.
iii. Do you have any suggestions on ways to improve the assessor recruitment process?	See above. In addition, use should be made of the lists of Academy Fellows (both the Australian Academy of Science and Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering, and the practice of telephoning potential assessors to request help should be considered, particularly if it can be done efficiently by Panel Chairpersons.

4. Assignment of proposals to assessors – matching expertise

(Issue 3.4, page 9)

Matching Peer Reviewers with research proposals using Field of Research codes at the 6-digit level and other classifiers such as keywords.	
i. Do you agree with the process proposed for assigning proposals to Peer Reviewers?	☒ Agree ☐ Partially agree ☐ Disagree
If you do not "Agree" to the proposed process, please comment on your reasons for disagreement:	
ii. Do you have any suggestions about how this process might be strengthened?	Further consultation process to identify other classifiers, particularly in the context of interdisciplinary research, where the six digit codes often do not work well.

5. Assignment of proposals to assessors – avoiding conflict of interest

(Issue 3.5, page 9) Assessor Conflicts of Interest can create inequalities in the peer review of proposals.	
i. Do you have any suggestions to improve the ARC's handling of assessor Conflicts of Interest?	The Academy does not have strong views on this point, apart from noting that most senior scientists have very clear understanding of the concept of conflict of interest, and work hard to avoid any conflict.

6. Selection criteria – clarity and composition

(Issue 3.6, page 10) The clarity of the selection criteria descriptions, particularly those relating to 'significance and innovation' in the *Discovery Projects* scheme.	
i. Do you have any suggestions to improve the clarity and composition of selection criteria used in ARC schemes?	The Academy is pleased that the ARC does not propose to move away from rigorous peer review for grants submitted as "discovery projects".

7. Selection criteria – assessment of track record

(Issue 3.7, page 11)
Improving the assessment of track record.

i. Please comment on the proposed replacement of "track record" with "research opportunities and performance evidence".	The consultation paper suggests new ways of looking at "track record", which it argues would give more opportunity to young researchers and to those (mostly women) who have had a career interruption for family reasons.
	The Australian Academy of Science is concerned that every effort should be made to specifically support Early Career Researchers, and to find ways to balance family needs with work.
	The Academy hopes that at least part of increase in research funding provided in the last budget will be used to support these groups, which have often not done well in our major grant systems.

8. Selection criteria – weighting of individual criterion

(Issue 3.8, page 12)
The appropriateness under the *Discovery Projects* scheme of the weighting allocated to different selection criteria (that is, investigator versus project).

i. Do you consider the current selection criteria weightings to be appropriate?	☐ Yes ☐ No
If you selected "No", what selection criteria weightings do you consider to be more appropriate and why?	No specific comments, apart from reiterating that new and early career investigators, and those proposing novel projects, should be favoured.

9. Early-career researchers

(Issue 3.9, page 12)
Encouraging proposals from early-career researchers (ECRs).

i. Do you agree with the possible introduction of an alternative ECR scoring mechanism?	☒ Agree ☐ Partially agree ☐ Disagree
If you do not "Agree" to the proposed change, please comment on your reasons for disagreement:	
ii. Do you have any alternative suggestions?	The Academy suggests that one way to ensure that ECRs are better supported would be to reserve a proportion of funding(s) for allocation to early career investigators.

10. Career interruptions

(Issue 3.10, page 13)
Encouraging proposals from researchers who have experienced career interruptions.

i. Do you agree with the proposed introduction of a 'career support fellowship'?	☒ Agree ☐ Partially agree ☐ Disagree
If you do not "Agree" to the proposed change, please comment on your reasons for disagreement:	
ii. Do you have any alternative suggestions?	Flexibility is essential, and the way in which the document proposes to deal with "research opportunity and performance evidence" offers more flexibility. The Academy believes that funding should always be given, first and foremost, on the basis of excellence of the idea and the person offering leadership. The challenge is to find ways to ensure that our national policies simultaneously fund the best science and also encourage early career scientists, those who have had career breaks or taken unusual career paths, and those with very bright ideas who may not have a conventional track record.

11. Assessment of proposals

(Issue 3.11, page 13)
Increasing the level of confidence in the assessments provided.

i. Do you agree with the proposed introduction of an assessor confidence level indicator?	☐ Agree ☐ Partially agree ☒ Disagree

If you do not "Agree" to the proposed change, please comment on your reasons for disagreement:	The Academy does not think that this will be a useful innovation. If an assessor has no confidence in their assessment, they should not be offering an assessment.
ii. Do you have any other ideas for improvements the ARC could make to the assessor form?	

12. Ranking of proposals

(Issue 3.12, page 14)
Identification of an alternative mechanism for ranking proposals.

i. Do you agree with the proposed introduction of proposal banding?	☐ Agree ☐ Partially agree ☐ Disagree
If you do not "Agree" to the proposed change, please comment on your reasons for disagreement:	
ii. Do you have any suggestions for how an alternative ranking process might be conducted?	Assessment by peer review, whatever its problems, appears to the Academy to be far preferable to any other form of ranking.

13. Research proposal budgets

(Issue 3.13, page 14)
(i) Simplifying proposal budget requests.
(ii) Separation of decisions about budget allocations from decisions about the quality of a proposal.

i. Do you agree with the proposed simplification of proposal budget requests?	☒ Agree ☐ Partially agree ☐ Disagree
If you do not "Agree" to the proposed change, please comment on your reasons for disagreement:	
ii. Do you agree that the ARC should separate responsibilities for assessing the quality of proposals and making budget allocations?	☐ Agree ☒ Partially agree ☐ Disagree
If you do not "Agree" to the proposed change, please comment on your reasons for disagreement:	While the Academy agrees with simplification of the budget process, and the substitution of one line budgets wherever possible, we believe that the peer assessment also should have the right to comment on appropriateness of budget requests.

14. Feedback to applicants

(Issue 3.14, page 15)
(i) Early notification of those proposals identified as being uncompetitive.
(ii) Improvements to the feedback provided to unsuccessful applicants.

i. Do you agree with the changes proposed?	☐ Agree ☐ Partially agree ☐ Disagree
If you do not "Agree" with the proposed changes, please comment on your reasons for disagreement:	
ii. What improvements could the ARC make to the feedback provided to unsuccessful applicants?	No comments on this item.

15. Restrictions on proposals

(Issue 3.15, page 16)
Restrictions on reapplying under the *Discovery Projects* scheme.

i. Do you agree with the principle of restricting proposals?	☐ Agree ☐ Partially agree ☒ Disagree
If you do not "Agree" with this principle, please comment on your reasons for disagreement:	Even though we accept it is frustrating to have to review the same (hopeless) grant round after round, it still would be wrong to prevent a researcher from presenting a grant for assessment. Grants change, fields change, and the risk of injustice is sufficient to more than balance the annoyance of dealing with a grant that has little chance of success.
ii. If you agree with the principle of restricting proposals, do you have any comments on the restriction that has been introduced in the *Discovery Projects* scheme?	

ii. Are there alternative mechanisms the ARC might consider?	No comments on this item. 15

16. Any other comments

Do you have any other feedback and/or suggestions, relating to ARC's peer review processes, that you would like to submit to the ARC for consideration?	The single month offered to consider this Consultation Paper (in particular Question 10) was insufficient. These issues are of sufficient magnitude and importance that they require greater consultation than was allowable in the time permitted.