



Australian Historical Association Statement on Proposed Changes to ARC Funding and Governance Arrangements

The Australian Historical Association, which is the peak national organisation of historians, has serious concerns about the changes recently announced by Stuart Robert, Acting Minister for Education and Youth, in relation to the Australian Research Council (ARC).

Our objections, in the first place, concern the absence of consultation about these changes. The announcement is surprising and without due respect for stakeholders.

The proposal to repurpose funds to government commercialisation goals in fields such as manufacturing represents a serious threat to the funding of historical research. There are multiple schemes already in place for funding research into these government priority areas. The redirection of already limited funds administered by the ARC to purposes already being served by other large funding pools and schemes has no justification.

Historians have been successful in forging relationships with industry partners and winning ARC Linkage Grants, but there is also a large domain of nationally and internationally renowned historical research that occurs outside such a context.

The AHA is concerned that the strengthening of the National Interest Test will pave the way for further political interference in peer-review processes. The research careers of members of our organisation have already been damaged by the lamentable interference of this kind practised in the past.

Our organisation also has serious concerns about proposals to increase the role played by industry in the determination of grant outcomes. Peer-review is designed to ensure the quality of research and, in an ARC context, that the academic merit of proposals and capabilities of researchers are properly accounted for in the use of public funds. These processes have international standing. They should not be diluted.

The historical profession has played a productive role during this pandemic. Senior policy-makers and administrators have called on members of our organisation for guidance based on their expertise in fields such as medical history. AHA members have played a key role in maintaining the educational effort of Australia's universities. They have contributed to public debate through the media, and they have participated in adult education and lifelong learning opportunities for many Australians whose horizons were otherwise limited by the disruptions of COVID-19.

It is of great concern to the Australian historical profession that an already limited pool of funds available for basic historical research is in serious danger of being further diminished. We believe that these proposals rest on a narrow understanding of the purposes of university research and will do nothing but further undermine the humanities and social sciences.

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AHA President

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