Council for the Humanities,

Arts and Social Sciences

Response to

Australian Research Council Consultation Paper:

ARC Peer Review Processes

19 October 2009

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?	Further consultation required

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
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?	Further consultation required
iii. Do you have any suggestions on ways to improve the assessor recruitment process?	

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 required

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?	

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?	Further consultation required with individual CHASS members

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 Council concurs with the consultation paper that these elements of the current selection criteria advantages those in research-only positions, over those in research and teaching, teaching only, and administrative positions, early career researchers, and those who have experienced gender-linked career interruptions or late entry into an academic career.
	The Council agrees that the current selection criteria do not adequately consider research outputs and their impact within their disciplinary context.

| | The tendency of the current selection processes to squeeze researchers into a single model of research career pathway and performance outcomes does not reflect the actual environment in which researchers operate, especially in the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences sector.

The Council welcomes the investigation of a "Research Opportunity and Performance Evidence (ROPE)" criteria, and believes that this mechanism may have the potential to expose and ameliorate these issues. This is an exciting development, with the potential to encourage more competitive applications from the HASS sector.

While the Council believes the proposed ROPE mechanism has potential, our members would like further information on how it would work in practice. In particular, in preliminary consultation concerns have been raised about the potential extra burden the ROPE mechanism may place on the application process.

The Council believes that the proposed "Research Opportunity and Performance Evidence (ROPE)" – Research opportunity criteria should also consider the pathways researchers have taken into a research career. While there is much anecdotal evidence to suggest the differing pathways people in the HASS sector take into a research career, a body of documentary evidence needs to be established to support these stories, and to develop equivalencies in track records to ensure that HASS applications are considered on an equal footing with those from other disciplines. Factors that can delay the entry of HASS researchers into a research career include fewer postdoctoral opportunities, increased casualisation of the academic workforce in HASS disciplines, and a research career in disciplines for which extended work experience is a prerequisite, such as education and architecture.

The Council notes that the opportunity to comment on such factors is already available in the current application process. The Council asks whether these factors are presently taken into account by assessors, and whether the ARC has done any analysis as to whether answering this question has made a difference to success rates of those applicants. |

	The Council suggests that the ARC consult with the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research on the work currently underway on the Research Workforce Strategy to coordinate relevant analysis.

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?	The Council agrees with the ARC's acknowledgement that the 60/40 project/researcher ratio can result in a researcher with an excellent track record receiving funding over a proposal of greater quality by a less-established researcher. However, the Council suggests that it would be premature to alter the current weightings assigned to individuals and project content before the impact of the ROPE mechanism on the selection processes and success rates in the humanities, arts and social sciences can be properly assessed.

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:	The ROPE mechanism and adjustments to the person/project ratio to increase the overall score are both amendments that could have a positive impact on the number of successful ECR proposals. However in preliminary consultation with members, a concern has been raised about the fairness of the

	current ERC budget quota arrangements for mid-career and established researchers. Further information is sought as to whether the suggested amendments would replace the current arrangements for increasing the success rate of ECR proposals.
ii. Do you have any alternative suggestions?	An alternate funding scheme designed only for ECRs might be preferable, to ensure continued rigour and competitiveness of the current schemes in the NCGP. This would allow ECRs to be judged in comparison with their peers rather than mid-career and established researchers, and would help them develop a record of research performance and capacity for future applications.

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?	The Council welcomes the ARC's examination of whether differing career pathways and employment environments may impact on the success rate of proposals for the NCGP. The Council suggests that in the HASS sector particularly, differing career pathways and employment environments may disadvantage them in receiving grants within a system reflecting an older research structure, and which correlates more to pathways in the natural sciences. The Council welcomes the investigation of a "Research Opportunity and Performance Evidence (ROPE)" criteria, and believes that this mechanism may have the potential to encourage more proposals from researchers experiencing career interruptions, and thus may lead to more competitive applications from the HASS sector.

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:	
ii. Do you have any other ideas for improvements the ARC could make to the assessor form?	Further consultation required with individual CHASS members.

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:	Further consultation required
ii. Do you have any suggestions for how an alternative ranking process might be conducted?	

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:	

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?	

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:	
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?	

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?	This review process is a welcome development in a changing research and university environment. The Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences sector, accounts for around 50% of Australia's research community and attracts an average of 20-25% of funding through a range of ARC funding initiatives. The Council's responses above are the results of preliminary consultation with our membership, and should be treated as tentative. With the ERA consultation and the organisation of the Council's signature annual event 'HASS on the Hill', we have not yet been able to undertake a full consultation with our membership. The Council will need to undergo further consultation with our

	membership in order to comment on other proposed changes to the peer review processes. The Council would like to request further information about the review process so as to fully brief our membership on the issues. Our members are also interested in how the ARCs assessment processes compare to counterpart assessment processes internationally. While some of our members will be making individual submissions, we ask that the Council be given further opportunities along the review process to make comments on behalf of our members.