

13 July 2018

Committee Secretariat
Parliamentary Inquiry into Funding Australia's Research
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600
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Dear Committee Secretariat,

[SUBMISSION TO THE PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY INTO AUSTRALIA'S RESEARCH]

The Australian Mathematical Sciences Institute (AMSI) welcomes this review and the opportunity to make a submission concerning the improvement of the administration of Australia's research funding.

As a lead organisation for mathematics in Australia, the Australian Mathematical Sciences Institute is well placed to make comment and provide advice pertaining to mathematical sciences research and its applications. For a general summary of AMSI's policy position on mathematical sciences research and building research infrastructure we refer to the 2017 AMSI policy document "[Improving Australia's Maths Grades](#)". The following observations and recommendations are the result of consultation with research-active academics in the mathematical sciences, employed by AMSI's university members.

ARC funding for the mathematical sciences relies heavily on the Discovery Project grant scheme. In the period 2011-2018 the large majority of ARC projects funded in the mathematical sciences were Discovery Projects, followed by DECRA's, Future and Laureate Fellowships. The success rates for research proposals in these schemes are generally on par with, or higher than the combined average success rates for the other STEMM areas. However, of the 34 ARC Centres of Excellence granted between 2011 and 2018 only one is a Centre in the Mathematical Sciences. The mathematical sciences are not represented as the primary research field in LIEF projects, Industrial Transformation Research Hubs or Training Centres (albeit with some mathematical researchers involved in a supporting capacity). Importantly, the mathematical sciences do not receive any ARC funding for research infrastructure, unlike other STEMM areas. AMSI therefore maintains that available ARC funding for the mathematical sciences is limited in range and leaves significant gaps in the support of the discipline.

We note that the current review, while welcome and necessary, does not address these gaps.

This submission centres around the opportunities to maximise the impact of funding by ensuring optimal simplicity and efficiency for researchers, as outlined in the Terms of Reference. Within the mathematical sciences discipline there is broad agreement that the success rate of ARC funding applications is not commensurate with the amount of time and effort required from researchers to submit funding applications. The issue is not the writing of the actual research proposals, but rather the disproportionate amount of time and effort necessary to complete the supporting elements.

AMSI recommends that the supporting elements of funding applications be scaled back and automated as much as possible:

- Sections requiring repetitive information and subjective self-assessment of track record should be pared back as much as possible;
- Bibliographic information required for lists of publications should be automatically downloadable from SCOPUS and saved in RMS accounts, saving precious time in re-doing publication lists every year;

- The calculation and justification of a detailed budget, especially if this has no bearing on the eventual funds being granted, should be replaced with a “tick box” budget with standard elements such as postdoctoral fellowships and conference travel.

With regard to the peer review process, AMSI recommends against speeding up or tightening assessment procedures. On the contrary, it would be beneficial to give unsuccessful applicants more detailed feedback from the Panel of Experts. More comprehensive feedback will shorten the path to grant success. However, it should be noted that there appears to be no justification for the considerable time lag between the College of Experts’ meetings and the sign off by the Minister.]

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Geoff Prince". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'G' and 'P'.

Professor Geoff Prince

AMSI Director