

8 October 2021

Professor Sue Thomas
Chief Executive Officer
Australian Research Council
Via email: ceo@arc.gov.au

Dear Professor Thomas,

Thank you for your letter of 29 September 2021 regarding the changes made to the ARC's policy on pre-prints.

We appreciate that the ARC responded quickly to this issue by consulting with the sector and ultimately aligning the handling of pre-prints with modern publication standards and research practices in the relevant sectors.

The national professional bodies for the physical, chemical, astronomical and mathematical sciences (the AIP, RACI, ASA and AustMS) urge the ARC to continue to consult with the learned societies in the research sectors impacted, in order to avoid any similar situations arising in the future. We suggest setting up a formal process for involving learned societies in the development of new ARC rules and procedures.

This type of engagement and consultation is a critical element for the acceptance of significant policy change in grant awards and research funding management, especially one that is incongruent with international practices. We feel that the next Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) audit should reflect on this critical issue.

We note however that despite the ARC's efforts to redress this situation for future funding rounds, it is disappointing that more than 30 Future Fellowship and DECRA applications, all in the physical sciences, remain in limbo. We understand the need for a formal appeals process and hope that this will lead to a swift and fair resolution.

It is concerning that only applications from the Field of Research Code 02, the physical sciences, appear to have been affected in the schemes announced to date. This appears to go against the tenet of equity that features heavily in ARC deliberations. The removal from consideration of some of these grants must call into question the overall excellence of this funding round for these schemes.

We would hope to be further engaged in discussions around avoiding the process that led to this unbalanced outcome. Such transparency is important in retaining the confidence of our members in the professional and impartial status of the ARC.

The number of applications that face an uncertain future will grow significantly if the Discovery Project applications are assessed in the same manner as the Fellowships, as the ARC has seemingly indicated. We hope that a fair and transparent resolution of these issues will not lead to a significant delay in the announcement of the DP outcomes and that the results are not also subject to the same distortions.

The learned societies involved remain committed to seeking a fair and appropriate resolution of this problem, for both current and future applications, and one that delivers an equitable, timely and transparent outcome that addresses the significant and legitimate concerns of our members.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Sven Rogge, President, Australian Institute of Physics (AIP)

Professor Steven Bottle, President, Royal Australian Chemical Institute (RACI)

Professor John Lattanzio, President, Astronomical Society of Australia (ASA)

Professor Ole Warnaar, President, Australian Mathematical Society (AustMS)