

**Saturday November 3, 2018**

**Statement on Ministerial intervention in ARC grants, 2017-2018**

The Journalism Education and Research Association of Australia calls on the Federal government to reverse its decision to veto 11 ARC-recommended grants in the 2017-18 Discovery Project, Discovery Early Career Researcher Awards and Future Fellowship rounds; and to fund them in the forthcoming round.

This personal intervention by the then-Minister Simon Birmingham has received widespread condemnation from the national and international research community — including in the world’s leading scientific journal, Nature.

The intervention potentially does irreparable harm to Australia’s reputation as a nation that values academic freedom and independence.

The vetoed projects were judged by numerous peer reviewers, and the distinguished ARC College of Experts, to deliver work of national importance and benefit.

It is rare for Ministers not to accept the advice of the ARC, and even rarer for the Minister to intervene in so many grants — the last time this happened was in 2005 and Ministerial intervention was confirmed in only 3 grants at that time.

We note that all 11 vetoed grants were in the Humanities, with several researchers working in our field of media, journalism and communication directly affected.

JERAA celebrates its 40th anniversary this year and is committed to the centrality of media, communication and journalism research in the modern Humanities.

JERAA Vice President (Research), Professor Susan Forde said better understanding of our media systems and content, and the role media play in society, was one of the most pressing considerations for many advanced nations experiencing major media change. Research from our field has clear social and national benefit.

“If we don’t defend these researchers now, the independence and autonomy of the academy is under threat. The ARC is the primary source of funding for the best Australian research.

“The flow-on effect of this is what concerns us most — will researchers now start self-censoring their research ideas and the expression of them if they sense it might not ‘get through’ the Minister?”

“Will the ARC College of Experts put to the bottom of the pile projects that they feel might also be rejected, in order to protect the pot of funding allocated for Humanities grants?”

The former Minister has indicated that the \$4.1 million in lost funding was ‘reallocated’, but he has not indicated where; and it appears it was not reallocated to other Humanities projects.

We are now within weeks of the new funding announcements being made — this means the Minister currently has the ARC’s recommendations for 2019 projects before him for sign-off.



We therefore call on the new Minister to help regain Australia's reputation in the eyes of the world by confirming the projects vetoed by former-Minister Birmingham will now be funded as part of his 2019 Project announcement.

We also call on Minister Tehan not to intervene in the decisions for new grants that have already been confirmed and recommended by the highly regarded Australian Research Council.

**For media enquiries, contact Professor Susan Forde, 0438 513249 or [s.forde@griffith.edu.au](mailto:s.forde@griffith.edu.au)**