



RESEARCH INSIGHTS CAPABILITY CONSULTATION DRAFT



SUBMISSION TO:
AUSTRALIAN RESEARCH COUNCIL

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Submission to the Australian Research Council Research Insights Capability Consultation Draft

The Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia (the Academy) is an independent, not-for-profit organisation that brings together the multidisciplinary expertise of our nation's leading thinkers to provide practical, evidence-based advice on important social issues facing society.

As the pre-eminent organisation in Australia representing excellence across the social science disciplines, we welcome the opportunity to respond to the Australian Research Council (ARC) consultation draft for the Research Insights Capability.

The Academy appreciates the early insights on the ARC's thinking about the future direction of national research evaluation. We acknowledge that the development of the Research Insights Capability is in its early stages, with further detail to come, including as the ARC finalises the various components of the Research Data Framework. With this in mind, the following feedback is high-level and intended to help guide the ARC as it tests and refines the final Research Insights Capability design. We look forward to continuing to engage as further detail is made available.

To discuss any matters raised in this submission, please contact Dr Honae Cuffe, Policy Director at honae.cuffeh@socialsciences.org.au.

The value of research evaluation

Australia is seeking to be a global leader for research, development and innovation, with its research and researchers positioned for the future. The ARC schemes support both the investigator-led, discovery research which builds the fundamental knowledge for new ideas and innovations and demand-led research which promote cross-sectoral research partnerships that drive knowledge and skill transfer, innovation, and economic and societal wellbeing. A robust, fit-for-purpose approach to research evaluation is critical to maintaining Australia's research excellence, as well as ensuring funding schemes are fit-for-purpose and respond to changing national priorities.

The Academy views the proposed Research Insights Capability is a strategic investment in deepening knowledge of Australia's research ecosystem, with the potential to reinforce the ARC's position as the steward of research that is connected, impactful and of the highest quality. The new capability and many of the proposed processes are consistent with our previous submissions to the Review of the Australian Research Council Act 2001 and the Policy Review of the National Competitive Grants Program.¹

¹ Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia (14 December 2022) '[Academy submission to the review of the Australian Research Council Act 2001](#)'; Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia (13 May 2024) '[Academy submission to the Policy Review of the National Competitive Grants Program](#)'; Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia, '[Academy submission to the Policy Review of the National Competitive Grants Program: Discussion Paper: A New Plan for Australian Research Council-Funded Research](#)' (10 April 2025).

The Academy has previously called attention to the need for strengthened data collection and analysis capabilities, and we welcome the proposal to leverage the power of diverse data sources using open, modern analytics to better understand Australia's research ecosystem.² The *ACOLA Research Assessment in Australia: Evidence for Modernisation* report highlights the administrative burden of research evaluation on institutions and individuals researchers, and provides an evidence-based blueprint for automating and enhancing insights to support research assessment.³ The Academy is, therefore, particularly supportive of the ARC's commitment to streamlining and simplifying research evaluation.

The value in the outputs of the proposed Research Insights Capability

We welcome the ARC's aspiration to highlight research impact and excellence, and to marshal this to inform strategic directions and respond to government and sector needs. For the Academy's purposes, the proposed Research Insights Capability outputs would be most valuable in terms of highlighting the breadth and depth of research, our sovereign research capabilities and areas where further investment may be needed, and opportunities for cross-sectoral and cross-disciplinary collaboration. These insights will help us better understand and celebrate the strengths of Australia's social sciences researchers, and ensure our programs of work are responsive, timely and provide solutions to the pressing challenges facing society.

We understand that the proposed targeted reports and State of the Research Environment Reports will draw on the academic community to make sense of and validate data and provide disciplinary expertise related to specific issues. As the new Research Insights Capability is implemented and outputs are developed, we welcome the opportunity to connect the ARC with Academy Fellows and relevant social science expertise.

Further points for consideration

We support the use of existing collections in research evaluation, including academic open access (OA) repositories. However, we note that there are inconsistent practices across institutions for collecting, maintaining and making available OA scholarly material. It is notable also that many Australian universities are not yet signatories to the Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) or the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA). The successful design and implementation of the new Research Insights Capability will require underpinning infrastructure and specific guidance for metadata standards, types of repositories and new data management infrastructure – such as data commons outside academic institutions – and clarifying how compliance and quality control of research outputs and metadata will be monitored. This should be coupled with consideration for how best to maintain and future-proof repositories. Repositories, for instance, often struggle to capture corrections or retractions, undermining the reliability of the research record). The *Research Assessment in Australia* report

² Recommendations 15 and 16, Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia (2022) 'Academy submission to the Review of the Australian Research Council Act 2001'; Recommendation 4, Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia (2024) 'Academy submission to the Policy Review of the National Competitive Grants Program'.

³ ACOLA (2023) [Research assessment in Australia: Evidence for modernisation](#), A report to the Office of the Chief Scientist, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.

provides evidence-based recommendations on the investments needed to support OA, and we encourage the ARC to consider these recommendations as it refines the Research Insights Capability model and its overarching Research Data Framework.

We strongly welcome the proposal to draw on diverse data as evidence of research excellence and impact, and to consider national and discipline strengths. This approach will help deliver more holistic and equitable research evaluation by remedying the disciplinary differences in publication practices and the bias of assessment indicators which limited the previous Excellence Research Australia process, and well as the rapid global increase in publications and the risk of skewed assessments. The Academy notes the difficulty when tracking, measuring and standardising much evidence of impact, such as translation and uptake. Social science disciplines' publishing practices and sector engagement leading to research uptake are distinctive, so we are mindful of ensuring that the proposed capability fairly and usefully represent social sciences research. The Academy encourages the ARC to engage with the academic community as it refines and implements the Research Insights Capability. We look forward to opportunities to connect the ARC with the knowledge and disciplinary expertise of our Fellows as it considers discipline-specific needs and options for inclusive assessment practices.