

Committee Secretary

Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

30 January 2020

Dear Committee,

The Australian Technology Network of Universities (ATN) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to the Committee on the Australian National Audit Office's (ANAO) report into the Australian Research Council's (ARC) administration of the National Competitive Grants Program (NCGP).

ATN is the peak body representing Australia's four most innovative and enterprising universities; University of Technology Sydney, Curtin University, RMIT University and University of South Australia. Collectively, ATN received \$133 million in funding through the NCGP between 2016 and 2018.

We wish to emphasise the importance of an independent approach to the awarding of research grants. The ANAO report affirms ARC is an important part of this process and provides impartial, reliable and authoritative advice to the Minister for Education. While the grants processes broadly align with Government objectives such as the Science and Research Priorities, it is important that the independent outcome of the process is respected.

ATN also supports the promotion of successful grants which emphasises the local impact and relevance of the research being undertaken. It is important however that these announcements are made in a timely manner according to published schedules to allow universities begin undertaking necessary work such as recruiting and appointing staff and purchasing and leasing necessary equipment.

The ANAO's report also highlights the importance of peer review to the process of awarding grants. General Assessors and Selection Advisory Committees are drawn from the ARC's College of Experts which ensures that applications are judged by people with appropriate expertise in the field. Peer review is an important part of academic culture and practice, so it is important that it is a part of the ARC's processes.

The ANAO report recommends that the ARC ensures that its monitoring and assurance activities (in particular institutional reviews) are risk-based and contribute to the ARC's assurance that NCGP objectives are being achieved. ATN notes that risk-based approaches have been adopted by other government agencies operating in tertiary education (such as the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency and the Australian Skills and Quality Authority) and, as such, there are existing principles of good practice.

ATN would welcome the opportunity to provide further information on any of the issues raised in our brief submission, if requested.

Yours sincerely,

Luke Sheehy
Executive Director
Australian Technology Network of Universities