

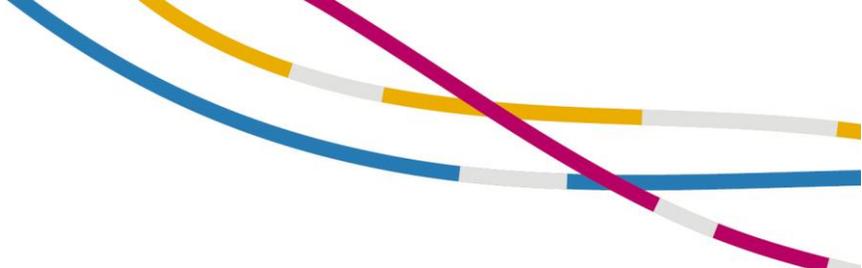


Australian Government  
Department of Education,  
Skills and Employment

# Regional Research Collaboration

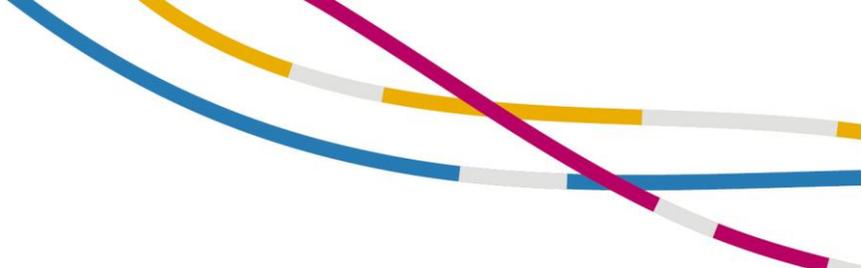
## Program Guidelines





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# 1 Introduction and Overview

- 1.1 The Australian Government's Job-ready Graduates package was announced on 19 June 2020.
- 1.2 The Job-ready Graduates package includes a measure to enhance the research capacity of regional universities. This measure will be delivered as the Regional Research Collaboration (RRC) Program. The RRC Program will fund research collaboration between regional universities, industry and other higher education providers to help regional universities to develop their research strengths.
- 1.3 RRC Program projects will be selected via a competitive process through annual selection rounds. The RRC Program allows for up to \$20.5 million to be allocated each year, to support projects over a three to five year lifespan.
- 1.4 The RRC Program is being implemented to improve support for regional areas by strengthening rural research capacity. This will also have a positive flow-on effect by creating more opportunities for residents to pursue post-graduate qualifications and opening up more opportunities to develop local industry.
- 1.5 The RRC Program is intended to complement other aspects of the Government's agenda for reform of the Australian higher education system, particularly the Excellence for Research in Australia and University Research Commercialisation Agenda.
- 1.6 The RRC Program will be administered by the Department of Education, Skills and Employment ('the Department').
- 1.7 Funding awarded under this Program is not eligible for inclusion as research income in the Higher Education Research Data Collection.
- 1.8 These Guidelines set out the eligibility requirements, application process, evaluation criteria and selection mechanism for the RRC Program. Applicants should read these guidelines and any related documents carefully before completing an application for RRC Program funding.
- 1.9 Amendments or clarification to these guidelines may be made by the Department at any time before the closing dates for applications and will be published on the RRC Program webpage at <https://www.dese.gov.au/regional-research-collaboration-program>.



## 2 Program Objectives and Outcomes

2.1 The RRC Program forms part of the Australian Government's agenda for reform of the nation's higher education system.

2.2 The RRC Program will contribute to the Government's goal of increased collaboration and has specific objectives. The Program will:

- help regional institutions develop their research strengths, particularly through skills development;
- effectively develop long-term collaborative partnerships with other research organisations and/or industry, including internationally;
- contribute to local and regional priorities;
- help address the challenges associated with undertaking research in regional institutions.

2.3 Long-term expected outcomes are:

- development of research skills at regional universities;
- sustainable partnerships or collaboration between higher education institutions and industry;
- contributions to realising institutional missions or goals;
- attracting, developing and retaining research staff at regional universities;
- increased research capacity, including increasing the number of research groups performing at world class levels;
- contributions by projects to regional research and industry;
- contributions by projects to national research and innovation priorities<sup>1</sup>; and
- increased awarding of post graduate qualifications.

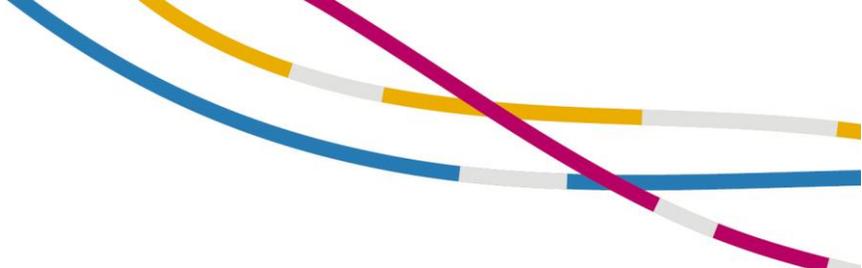
2.4 An immediate expected outcome of the RRC Program is a measurable increase in the level of research collaborative activities between universities. This could be reflected by (but is not limited to):

- an increase in joint research publications;
- an increase in joint applications for Australian Competitive Grants and other competitive grants;
- an increase in joint supervision of Higher Degree by Research Students;

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.industry.gov.au/data-and-publications/science-and-research-priorities>

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- an increase in or maintenance of the number of ‘research active’ or ‘research only’ staff;
  - an increase in the number of students studying for post graduate qualifications;
  - an increase in the number of academic staff with Higher Degrees by Research;
  - improved efficiency in research administration resulting from the use of shared facilities and resources; or
  - other measures showing increased collaboration or improved efficiency, to be determined on a case-by-case basis.
- 2.5 The RRC Program is intended to be flexible. Projects may involve existing or emerging areas of research and applications should include a rationale clearly showing relevance to participating institutions’ strategic directions. Projects need not be limited to specific fields of research and may have more than one element with different partner institutions for each element.
- 2.6 The Minister may from time to time issue round-specific RRC Program objectives.
- 2.7 The reporting requirements and key performance indicators for RRC Program projects will vary between projects. They will be agreed between the institution and the Department and specified in the Condition of Grant (CoG). The reporting requirements will be aligned to the outcomes above. While it is intended that the reporting requirements for RRC Program projects will not be onerous, they will require participating institutions to provide supporting data in addition to that submitted as part of the Department’s annual data collections.
- 2.8 The RRC Program contributes to Outcome 2 of DESE’s Portfolio Budget Statement 2019-20:  
*Promote growth in economic productivity and social wellbeing through access to quality higher education, international education, and international quality research, skills and training.*
- 2.9 Specifically, the RRC Program supports *Program 2.6: Research Capacity*:  
*Research advances our knowledge and drives our potential for innovation, economic competitiveness and social change. The program aims to increase the production, use and awareness of research knowledge and to improve collaboration between government, industry and the research sector in the production of research knowledge.*



### 3 Eligibility

3.1 The RRC Program is open to institutions listed in Table A of HESA which, in 2019:

- i had a higher than average proportion of Equivalent Full-time Student Load (EFTSL) (Commonwealth Supported Places) for students enrolled at their regional campuses, or
- ii had their main campus located in a regional or remote area as defined by the Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) classifications.

3.2 Based on these eligibility criteria, eleven institutions will be eligible to apply for RRC Program funding:

- i Charles Darwin University
- ii James Cook University
- iii CQUniversity
- iv University of Southern Queensland
- v Southern Cross University
- vi University of New England
- vii Charles Sturt University
- viii La Trobe University
- ix Federation University of Australia
- x University of Tasmania
- xi Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education

3.3 Applications will only be accepted from institutions listed in Section 3.2 (above).

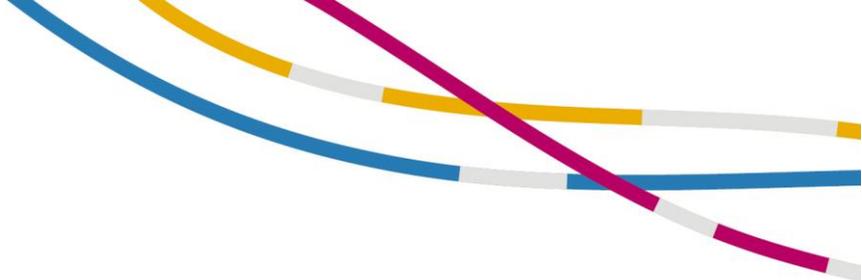
3.4 To be eligible, applications must at a minimum include:

- i a private sector partner (Organisation/Business/Industry/'Not for Profit' Organisation) from a regional area.
- ii a higher education provider listed in Table A or B of HESA whose inclusion will demonstrably lift skills in the eligible institution.



## 4 Funding and Use

- 4.1 RRC Program funding is available for any purpose which supports research capacity building. This could include, but is not limited to:
- staff engaged specifically for or in RRC Program projects – salaries for the proportion of their time spent on RRC Program activities;
  - teaching relief for academic staff engaged specifically for or in RRC Program projects, including salaries for the proportion of their time spent on RRC Program activities;
  - fellowships for RRC Program project activities;
  - staff and student exchanges;
  - joint supervision or staff development arrangements;
  - creating shared research infrastructure;
  - access to major Australian research facilities, such as National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy (NCRIS) facilities, including the development and implementation of innovative access measures; or
  - costs associated with establishing and strengthening collaborations.
- 4.2 Funding may be used to support activities set out in Section 4.1 (above) undertaken by the applicant institute, and/or activities set out in Section 4.1 undertaken by:
- any higher education provider listed in Table A or B of HESA which is participating as an identified partner in RRC Program projects;
  - private sector partners, international institutions and/or publicly funded research agencies (such as the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation) which are participating as an identified partner in RRC Program projects.
- 4.3 The RRC Program will not duplicate funding for research, including infrastructure, already funded by the Commonwealth. The Department reserves the right to determine if a RRC Program project duplicates or is likely to duplicate research being funded by another Commonwealth source.
- 4.4 There is no set duration for RRC Program projects. Funding from the RRC Program will initially be awarded for up to three years. High performing projects may receive funding for a further two years (i.e. five years in total from commencement). RRC Program applications must describe expected outcomes both within and beyond the lifetime of project proposed.

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- 4.5 Funding will be provided to the lead institution on a calendar year basis. Lead institutions may transfer Program funding from the lead institution to one or more partner institutions. The funding and governance arrangements for an RRC Program funded project must be reflected in a partnership agreement or other agreement between the participating institutions, such as a Memorandum of Understanding.
  - 4.6 Funding will be provided to the lead institution under a CoG with the Department. The CoG will be separate from but made within the framework of the annual Compact between the institution and the Commonwealth. CoGs will include key performance indicators and milestones appropriate to each project. The details of CoGs, including the payment schedule, will be negotiated with successful lead institutions.
  - 4.7 RRC Program funding can also be used to meet the costs of establishing collaborations, such as meeting with potential collaborating institutions. Funding to establish collaborations can include payments to partner institutions where it can be demonstrated that this is an actual cost that will add value to the collaboration. An example is where costs such as travel are involved in negotiating and organising the collaborative relationship. Costs to facilitate collaboration are to be included in project budgets where applicable.
  - 4.8 Under most circumstances RRC Program funding will be paid in instalments on the completion of the milestones set out in the CoG.
  - 4.9 RRC Program funding may be provided to projects which address priorities identified from time to time by the Minister. The same eligibility, selection and assessment criteria will apply for these projects as for others.
  - 4.10 RRC Program funding will be provided exclusive of GST.



## 5 Application Process

5.1 Application for RRC Program funding will involve an application process.

5.2 Eligible institutions will be invited to submit an application to be considered for funding by the RRC Program Selection Panel.

5.3 The application must include:

- the name of the applicant institution from Section 3.2;
- details of the private sector partner required by Section 3.4(i);
- details of the Table A or B HESA higher education partner required by Section 3.4(ii), and a succinct explanation of the beneficial skills transfer;
- a description of the project, which may have more than one element. The project description should include all proposed partners and their roles, the proposed objectives, expected long-term outcomes, impacts and benefits arising from the project and for the region ;
- a description on how the project will contribute to Australia's national interest through its potential to have economic, commercial, environmental, social or cultural benefits to the Australian community'.
- a rationale for why the project should be supported through the RRC Program, rather than by funding from other sources and the long-term sustainability of the project;
- a statement explaining how the project meets the Program objectives (as detailed in Section 2) and the selection criteria (see Section 6.3 below);
- a detailed budget showing the amount of funding sought, an approximate breakdown of main expenditure, the resources (cash and in-kind) to be contributed by each participant and from other sources, and, where appropriate, any amount for payments to facilitate collaboration;
- where appropriate, a description of project development costs (amount and purpose), which are expected to be the subject of payments to facilitate collaboration (see Section 4.7);
- a project detailed timeline, including proposed major milestones;
- a description of how an independent evaluation will be undertaken, including types of data and other information to be collected on project outcomes;
- a business plan setting out governance arrangements (including partnership or other agreements covering the RRC Program project) and a risk management plan; and
- a statement of support from each of the proposed partners, endorsed by each partner organisation's Vice-Chancellor or equivalent.

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- 5.4 Each eligible institution can submit only one application as the lead institution in each selection round.
  - 5.5 There is no limit on the number of RRC Program projects in which an institution can participate as a partner.
  - 5.6 The Department may also call for applications for RRC Program projects which address specific priorities identified by the Minister.
  - 5.7 Applications for RRC Program funding must be submitted by the lead institution by no later than six weeks after the invitation to apply is issued.
  - 5.8 Applications should be submitted to the Department as PDF documents, sent to the RRC Program mailbox: [RRC@dese.gov.au](mailto:RRC@dese.gov.au).
  - 5.9 Late submissions of Applications will be considered only in exceptional circumstances beyond the lead institution's control.
  - 5.10 A lead institution which must, as a result of exceptional circumstances, submit a late Application should provide the earliest possible notification to the Department, in writing, of its intention to do so, along with evidence in support of its claim of exceptional circumstances. The Department may seek further information from the lead institution on the circumstances leading to the late Application.
  - 5.11 The Department will accept late Applications only if there is sufficient time to adequately assess such Applications. The Department's decision with respect to the consideration of late Applications will be final. The lead institution will be informed in writing of the Department's decision. No other correspondence in relation to the decision will be entered into.
  - 5.12 The Department, at its discretion, may seek additional information, or allow applicants to remedy minor errors, but will not accept responsibility for any misunderstanding arising from the failure by an applicant to comply with the requirements set out in these guidelines, or arising from any ambiguity, discrepancy, inconsistency, error or omission contained in the Application.

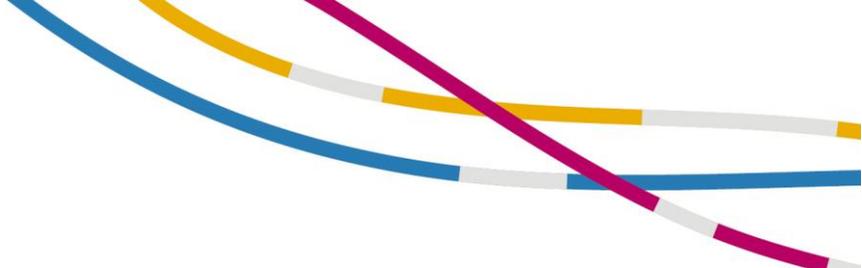
## 6 Selection Process

6.1 RRC Program projects will be selected via a competitive process through annual selection rounds.

6.2 Applications will be assessed by the RRC Program Selection Panel made up of one or more Departmental officers and one or more independent external advisors. The external assessor/s will have regional expertise in areas such as applied research, industry, science and skill development. Advice may be sought from discipline experts from the Australian Research Council or National Health and Medical Research Council as required.

6.3 Applications will be assessed against the following selection criteria:

- how well the project meets the RRC Program objectives (as detailed in Section 2), in particular the development of research skills at the regional university and the balance of activities between regional, remote and other areas;
- how well the project supports:
  - the strategic direction of the participating institutions;
  - local and regional priorities; and
  - the National Manufacturing Priorities. For more information on these priorities, please visit: <https://www.industry.gov.au/data-and-publications/make-it-happen-the-australian-governments-modern-manufacturing-strategy/our-modern-manufacturing-strategy>
- the capacity of the lead institution and partner organisations to deliver the Research and Development (R&D) elements of the project, including the ability of the staff employed or proposed to be employed;
- the extent to which end-users will benefit from the R&D activities of the project, including the potential to commercialise or other end-user benefits and the resources to be provided to achieve them particularly end-users in local regional communities; and
- the expected long-term outcomes and impact of the project, including how these long-term outcomes will be sustained after the funding period of the project ends. These outcomes may include:
  - long-term partnerships, including formal partnership agreements for R&D and/or commercialisation;
  - skills development, including the expected skills transfers and the subsequent application of these skills;
  - educational outputs, including increased regional and remote enrolments, and increased higher degree by research completion rates;
  - research outputs, including improved publication and citation rates;
  - commercial outputs, including creation or improvement of products, employment, firms and businesses, business investments and sales; and

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- other benefits, to be identified and justified by the applicant.

6.4 No weighting will be applied to the selection criteria.

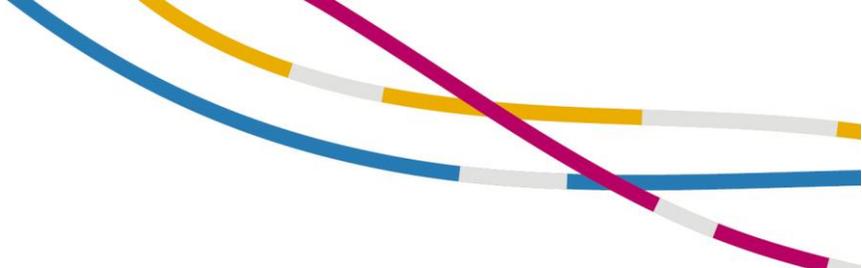
6.5 There is no maximum grant amount for any successful application.

6.6 There are no set limits on the number of successful applications for each selection round.

6.7 The Selection Panel recommendations will be provided to the Minister on which RRC Program applications should receive funding.

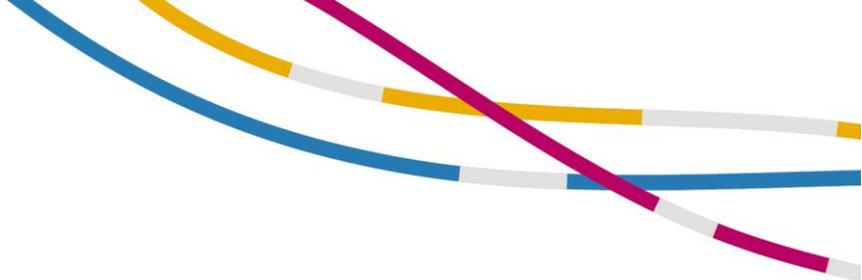
6.8 Successful projects will be announced by the Minister. The lead institution will be notified in writing prior to any announcement.

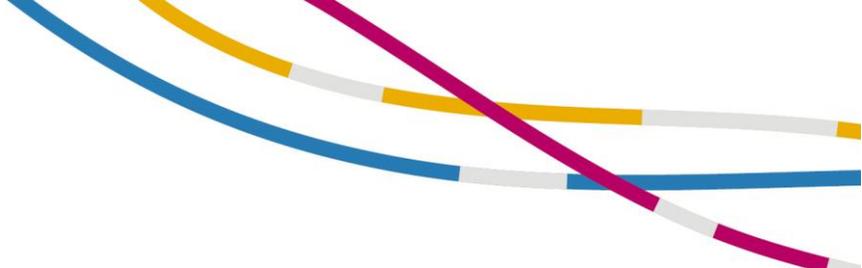
6.9 Funding beyond the initial project period may be available for high performing projects. These projects will be determined on the basis of the level of actual and likely long-term benefits (see Section 6.3). Lead institutions will need to submit another application in support of further funding at the end of the initial project period (ie if a project is funded for three years, an application seeking additional funding may be made in the final year of funding).



## 7 Administration of Funding

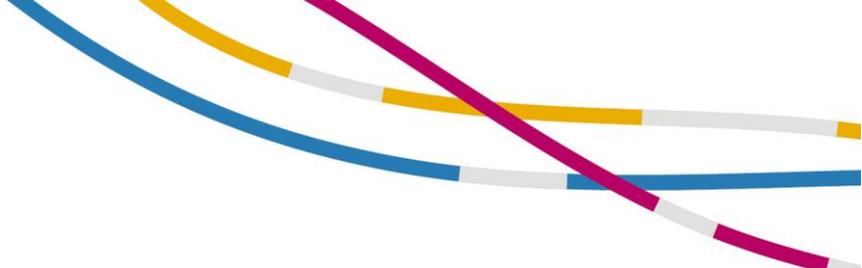
- 7.1 The lead institution for each successful RRC Program project will enter into a CoG with the Commonwealth through the Department. The executed CoG defines the obligations of both the lead institution and the Commonwealth.
- 7.2 The CoG will include:
- the project partners;
  - total funding for the project;
  - a description of activities to be undertaken;
  - agreed performance indicators, outcomes and impact for the project;
  - agreed milestones and associated payments; and
  - the reporting requirements, including the type and frequency of information required in reports and the independent evaluation plan.
- 7.3 At a minimum, the lead university for each RRC Program project will be required to submit an annual report on the project, setting out:
- expenditure to date;
  - activities undertaken;
  - progress towards the achievement of milestones and project outcomes as specified in the CoG; and
  - any significant obstacles or challenges and mitigation plans to address these.
- 7.4 Reporting requirements are likely to vary between projects, but will include progress and final reports setting out:
- expenditure to date;
  - activities undertaken;
  - progress towards the achievement of milestones and project outcomes as specified in the CoG;
  - other outcomes which can be directly attributed to the collaboration;
  - any significant obstacles or challenges and likely impact on outcomes;
  - information on how the collaboration will be supported in future (including institutional and other funding); and
  - an audited financial statement for all project funds.

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- 7.5 The Department may elect to terminate RRC Program funding should the project fail to meet key milestones or deliver key objectives as specified in the CoG.
  - 7.6 Universities' Compacts will include reference to any RRC Program project(s) in which they are participating.
  - 7.7 The CoG will require that the lead institution must not make changes to the activities, timeline or budget of a RRC Program project without the prior written approval of the Commonwealth.
  - 7.8 Generally, such changes will require a variation to the CoG. Requests to vary the CoG must be made in writing and addressed to the Program Delegate specified in the CoG.
  - 7.9 Approval of variations to the CoG is at the discretion of the Minister or the Minister's delegate. All variations to the CoG will be by written agreement of the parties. The Commonwealth is not obliged to agree to any particular variation requested.
  - 7.10 Failure to obtain the approval of the Commonwealth prior to making a change is a breach by the lead institution of the terms of the CoG and may affect the payment of Commonwealth funding.



## 8 Program Evaluation

- 8.1 The Department will undertake an evaluation of the RRC Program in 2024
- 8.2 The evaluation will examine the effectiveness of the Program in delivering the outcomes specified in Section 2, above.
- 8.3 The purpose of the evaluation is to provide evidence of the benefits delivered broadly through the RRC Program. This includes the extent to which the program has met the program objectives and outcomes and any unintended consequences.
- 8.4 The evaluation will include consideration of RRC Program CoGs, project reports and project-specific outputs, as well as other relevant information.
- 8.5 RRC Program funding recipients are required to collect and maintain information relevant to the evaluation of the Program, including information on:
- Project outputs:
    - the achievement of agreed milestones; and
    - the research, teaching and learning, commercial, industrial and knowledge transfer outputs of RRC Program projects, including intellectual property.
  - Project outcomes:
    - the economic, environmental and/or social benefits of projects;
    - impact of the project on the local area; and
    - improvement in the quality of research conducted at the lead institution.



## 9 Roles and Responsibilities

### 9.1 The role of the Minister

9.1.1 The Minister for Regionalisation, Regional Communications and Regional Education has overall responsibility for the RRC Program and makes decisions including:

- which applications will be funded;
- the level of funding offered;
- the conditions of any funding offer;
- changes to the level of funding; and
- the termination of agreements.

9.1.2 The Minister may appoint a Program Delegate and authorise the Program Delegate to carry out certain functions.

### 9.2 The role of the Program Delegate

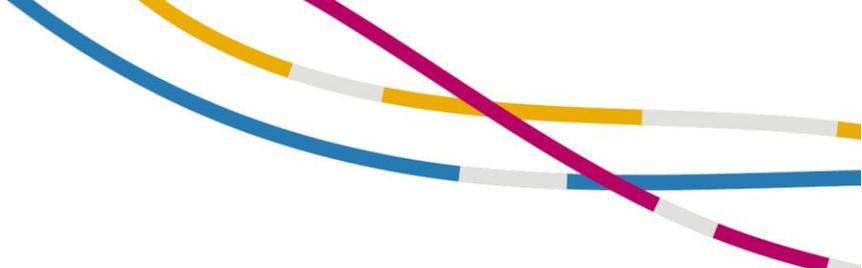
9.2.1 The Program Delegate in the Department will carry out such functions as empowered by the Minister, or otherwise duly authorised, in respect of the RRC Program.

### 9.3 The role of the Department

9.3.1 The Department is responsible for administering the RRC Program and carrying out functions authorised by the Minister.

9.3.2 The department will:

- determine the information to be provided in applications, and the form in which applications must be submitted;
- undertake the assessment and merit ranking of applications for RRC Program funding;
- provide advice to the Program Delegate on which projects the Selection Panel recommendations should receive funding under the Program;
- enter into CoGs on behalf of the Commonwealth with successful applicants; and
- administer and exercise delegated powers under the CoG.



## 10 Additional Information

### 10.1 Conflict of Interest

10.1.1 Policies and procedures for handling conflicts of interest will be addressed in the CoGs.

### 10.2 Confidentiality

10.2.1 In general, the information contained in RRC Program expressions of interest or applications will reflect publicly available information about the lead institution's strategic direction and research capabilities.

10.2.2 However, under some circumstances such information may be subject to commercial-in-confidence or other considerations. Where this is the case the lead institution must notify the Department in writing, at the earliest viable point in the application process, the information that should be treated as confidential, and provide the reasons for the request.

10.2.3 Information will be treated as confidential if it meets all four of the conditions below:

- it is clearly identified as confidential and an explanation is provided as to why it should be treated as confidential;
- the information is commercially sensitive;
- revealing the information would cause unreasonable harm to the Applicant or other parties; and
- the information is provided with an understanding that it will stay confidential.

### 10.3 Freedom of Information

10.3.1 The department is subject to the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* ('the FOI Act'). The object of the FOI Act is to make available information about the operations of departments, to create a general right of access to information in the possession of Ministers, departments and public authorities and also to create a right for people to amend records containing personal information that is incomplete, incorrect or misleading.

10.3.2 Anyone can make an FOI request. An applicant is not obligated to state a reason for their request, nor can the department ask for a reason.

10.3.3 All documents held by the department are subject to FOI, however, in some cases exemptions may apply.

10.3.4 A valid request is one which is in writing, provides enough information about a requested document to enable its identification, specifies an address in Australia, be sent by post or delivered to the department.

10.3.5 All requests should be made directly to the FOI Coordinator: [foi@dese.gov.au](mailto:foi@dese.gov.au).



## 10.4 Privacy

10.4.1 The department is bound by the Information Privacy Principles in the *Privacy Act 1988*. The department uses personal information only for the purposes in which it was provided, or for purposes which are directly related to one of the department's functions or activities.

10.4.2 The department does not give this information to other agencies, organisations or anyone else unless:

- the individual has consented;
- the individual would reasonably expect, or has been told, that information of that kind is usually passed to those individuals, bodies or agencies;
- it is required or authorised by law;
- it will prevent or lessen a serious and imminent threat to somebody's life or health; and
- it is reasonably necessary for the enforcement of the criminal law or of a law imposing a pecuniary penalty, or for the protection of public revenue.

10.4.3 The department takes all reasonable measures to ensure that personal information collected by us is accurate, up to date and complete. These measures include updating and maintaining personal information when we are advised by individuals that information has changed.

10.4.4 The department also takes all reasonable steps to ensure that the personal information it holds is protected against loss, unauthorised access, use, modification or disclosure and other misuse.

10.4.5 Any individual may contact the department to obtain information about how to request access to or changes to the information the department holds about them.

10.4.6 Access may be given unless we consider that there is a sound reason under the Privacy Act, the Freedom of Information Act or other relevant law to withhold the information.

10.4.7 All requests for personal information should be made to the Privacy Officer:  
[privacy@dese.gov.au](mailto:privacy@dese.gov.au)

Or in writing to:  
Privacy Officer  
Legal Services  
Department of Education, Skills and Employment  
LOC: C50MA10  
GPO Box 9880  
Canberra ACT 2601

## 10.5 Complaints and Review of Decisions

10.5.1 Questions or complaints concerning the RRC Program must be lodged in writing.

10.5.2 Questions or complaints concerning the RRC Program assessment and/or decisions must be directed to the RRC Program Manager in the first instance at:

Regional Research Collaboration (RRC) Program Manager  
Department of Education, Skills and Employment  
GPO Box 9880  
CANBERRA ACT 2601  
Australia  
Email: [RRC@dese.gov.au](mailto:RRC@dese.gov.au)

10.5.3 If the question or complaint is not satisfactorily resolved by the RRC Program Manager, the matter can be taken to the:

First Assistant Secretary  
Higher Education Division  
Department of Education, Skills and Employment  
GPO Box 9880  
CANBERRA ACT 2601  
Australia  
Email: [RRC@dese.gov.au](mailto:RRC@dese.gov.au)

10.5.4 Unresolved issues can be lodged as a complaint with the Commonwealth Ombudsman. The Ombudsman has offices in all states and territories. Contact details can be found on the Ombudsman's website at: [www.ombudsman.gov.au](http://www.ombudsman.gov.au).

## 11 Contact information

11.1 Questions, feedback or comment on the RRC Program are welcome and can be submitted by email to [RRC@dese.gov.au](mailto:RRC@dese.gov.au).