Dear XXX/ Tanya Plibersek,

I am writing to you as my local Member/ the Shadow Minister for Education share my serious concerns regarding changes to Australian Research Council (ARC) programs and governance outlined in a Letter of Expectation from Acting Minister for Education & Youth, the Hon. Stuart Robert MP, to ARC CEO Professor Sue Thomas, on December 6 (<https://www.arc.gov.au/letter-expectations-minister-arc>).

As you know, the ARC is Australia’s single most important source of merit-based research funding for ground-breaking basic research. ARC funding is the lifeblood of Australian research in non-medical fields. This is how expert researchers––in whom the Commonwealth has invested years of high-level specialist training––are supported to develop innovations that advance knowledge to benefit Australia and the world. The new knowledge produced by our research community is essential for a thriving advanced democracy, culture and economy.

Yet the changes the Government has outlined would see **70% of all ARC funding focused on manufacturing**. The Government is **removing $75 million from basic research** to invest in commercial-partnership research on the 6 demarcated areas of resources technology, minerals processing, food and beverages, medical products, recycling and clean energy, and national defence. As important as these areas are, they already have other specific funding schemes allocated to them. Funding is being removed away from inventive research––including **all arts, humanities and social sciences funding**––to focus on these areas only.

Without the lifeline of ARC funding, Australia risks becoming an intellectual backwater. This is in stark contrast with our regional neighbours; most notably China, whose spending on higher education, basic research, and research and development has been growing consistently at around 16% year-on-year and is now set to overtake the US (let alone a defunded Australian research sector: <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/science/article/3141263/china-set-pass-us-research-and-development-spending-2025>). Can Australia afford to fall so far behind in the global and regional research game?

Removing government support for Australian research will inevitably lead to national brain-drain. The nation’s best and brightest will seek research opportunities in other nations rather than remain in a country where their skills and expertise are devalued and wasted, and their research careers cannot advance.

Removing government support for basic research will not only affect researchers themselves and the knowledge we produce, but will also land a body-blow to the nation’s education system as a whole. Our top universities achieve their high global status based on academics’ capacity to conduct original research and feed the cutting-edge knowledge that generates directly into the curriculum to prepare our graduates to thrive and make a difference in a fast-changing world. Breaking the research-teaching nexus in our universities will seriously degrade the quality of education that our next generation receives.

The Government’s attempt to put research into the service of commercialization, and the nation’s top intellectual resources into the service of manufacturing, is ideologically driven, short-sighted, backward-looking, and fundamentally wrong-headed. I hope that you and the Australian Labor Party will fight this attack tooth and nail. I look forward to learning about what concrete steps you will take in this urgent matter.

Sincerely,

XXX (affiliation)