



ACOLA[®]
AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL OF LEARNED ACADEMIES

ANNUAL REPORT

2024





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Acknowledgement of Country

ACOLA acknowledges all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Traditional Custodians of Country and recognises their continuing connection to land, sea, culture and community. We pay our respect to the Elders both past and present.

We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as Australia’s first scientists and researchers, and in particular the people and lands on which our staff work:

- the Ngunnawal and Nambarri people in Canberra
- the Bunurong Boon Wurrung and Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung peoples in Melbourne
- the Turrbal and Yuggera peoples in Brisbane.

Who we are: our vision, mission, values and objectives

Purpose

Advising Australia – advancing discussions on complex issues through trusted, independent, and interdisciplinary evidence-based advice.

Vision

ACOLA aims to be a key source of high-quality, robust, and independent interdisciplinary advice for Australia’s decision-makers and the public on complex challenges and issues.

Mission

To provide a forum that brings great minds, broad perspectives, and knowledge together to help solve complex societal issues for the benefit of Australia’s social, cultural, economic and environmental wellbeing.

Values

Integrity, rigor, transparency, inclusiveness, creativity, collaboration and interdisciplinarity.

Objective

Policy

To deliver evidence-informed interdisciplinary advice to support and guide policy decision-making processes

To engage and contribute interdisciplinary perspectives to public debate and awareness-raising on emerging national and regional issues

To promote an appreciation within the community and among decision-makers of the value that interdisciplinary research and scholarship provides as an evidence-base for public policy

Research

Engaging disciplinary experts to advance research and scholarship

Promoting the application of interdisciplinary expert knowledge

Declaring and disseminating interdisciplinary expert knowledge

Advocating standards of research and scholarship to encourage excellence

Development

To collaborate with the Learned Academies, professional institutes, other Learned societies and educational institutions in matters of mutual interests

To establish and maintain cooperative relations between the Company and overseas bodies having similar objectives in the disciplines represented by the Company’s members

Chair's report

It is with great pleasure that I present the Australian Council of Learned Academies (ACOLA) Annual Report for 2023–2024.

As in previous years, ACOLA and the Learned Academies have worked together to deliver trusted, independent advice to governments and society. In an era marked by increasing disinformation and mistrust, ACOLA's ability to convene the leading minds of Australian science and research to provide evidence-based, multidisciplinary insights has never been more crucial. Through the expertise of its members, ACOLA continues to inform and shape complex policy initiatives with integrity and rigor.

A key research project for the year was ACOLA's report, *Research Assessment in Australia: Evidence for Modernisation*, prepared for the Office of the Chief Scientist. This report examined the nature and impacts—both positive and negative—of research assessment, offering recommendations to enhance research management, output, and partnerships with industry. It highlighted variations in research practices across disciplines and institutions and underscored the need for refined assessment processes to accurately measure impact and research excellence.

Building on the momentum of this critical work, ACOLA successfully expanded its project portfolio and strengthened its relationships with key stakeholders including the Australian Public Service Commission, the Australian Parliament Library, and several government departments to address other pressing challenges. Highlights include:

Expanding the project portfolio: ACOLA delivered diverse projects and masterclasses addressing critical global challenges facing Australia, with insights into areas such as human rights by design, health, and energy transitions.

Enhancing parliamentary engagement: ACOLA collaborated with the Australian Parliament House (APH) Library to deliver eight virtual parliamentary briefing sessions on key issues for ministers, parliamentarians, and their offices.

Deepening Southeast Asian partnerships: ACOLA served as Australia's delivery partner for the DFAT-funded KONEKSI program in Indonesia, contributing to the mapping of knowledge landscapes and strengthening regional collaboration.

I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to ACOLA's CEO, Ryan Winn, whose exceptional leadership and strategic vision have driven the organisation's growth over recent years. As Ryan concluded his tenure in April 2024, I also wish to acknowledge Tina Parolin, who stepped into the role of Interim CEO, and the senior leadership and policy team for their support during this transition as we searched for a new leader.

Finally, I express my sincere gratitude to the Fellows and staff from across the Learned Academies for their dedication and contributions to expert groups and project activities. Their commitment to ACOLA's mission is vital in delivering high-quality advice and support to Australia's Chief Scientist, Member Academies, the Department of Education, and other government agencies.

Dr Katherine Woodthorpe AO FTSE
Chair, Board of Directors
ACOLA

ACOLA's members

Bridging the disciplines for informed public policy

Australia's five Learned Academies are members of ACOLA. Each academy holds this formal recognition through identification under the Australian Government's Higher Education Support Act (HESA). Through a Memorandum of Understanding, ACOLA appreciates its partnership with the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), to ensure the considerations of Australia's first peoples are incorporate in the design, discussion and analysis of the findings from our activities. ACOLA partners with other appropriate organisations for specific projects and activities.

Australia's Learned Academies



Partners

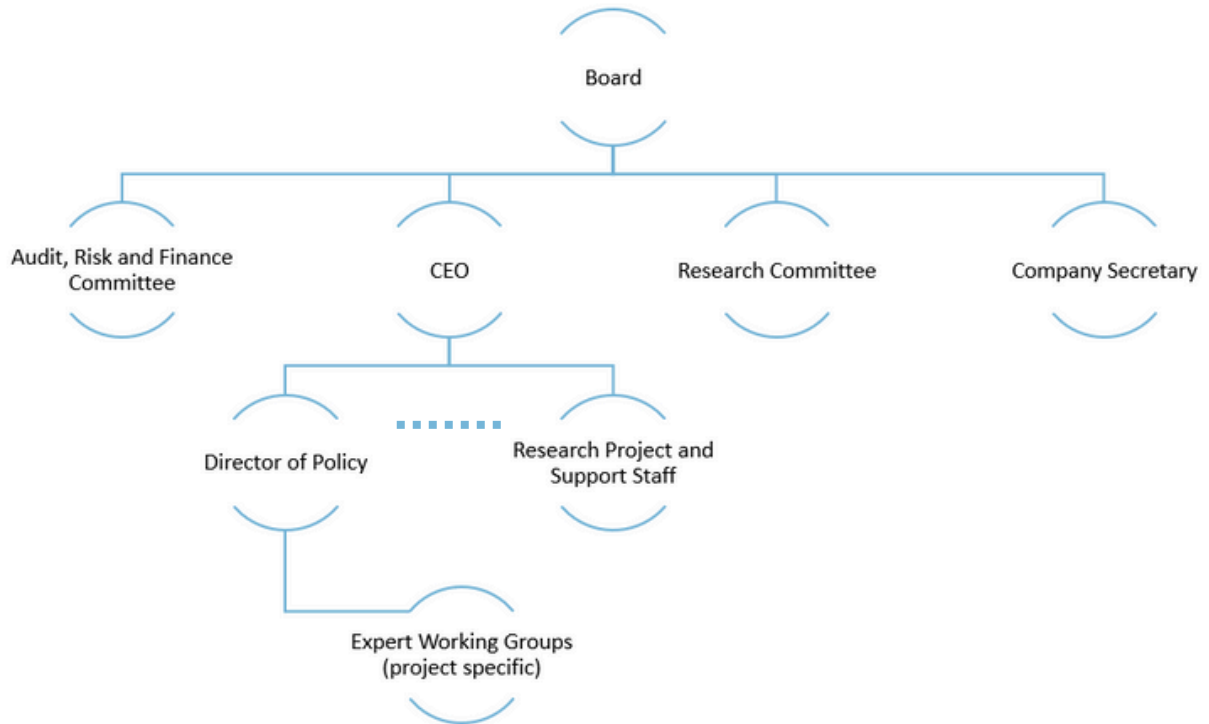


Charity status

ACOLA is an established and approved Australian Research Institute by the Australian Government; is a registered charity with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC); and holds Deductible Gift Recipient status.



Governance structure



The ACOLA team



How we work

ACOLA plays a critical role in fostering evidence-based, multidisciplinary research to address complex societal challenges. By facilitating collaboration across diverse academic fields, ACOLA is uniquely positioned to generate research that has tangible, broad-reaching impact and provide insights to Government to shape and determine policy that benefits Australia.

Our activities span:



We maintain a robust framework to ensure our analysis and support enables new and timely policy insights.

Our activities seek to; expose, synthesise and translate what is known and not known; present evidence informed vision of future states and directions; and present analysis on the various variables, considerations and trade-offs for policy options. We rarely provide specific recommendations, as our goal is to lift policymakers' quality, capability and capacity to bring research and robust evidence to the centre of their thinking and decisions – not to advocate a position or drive for specific policy settings.



Issue identification

In close partnership with funders, we identify and scope requirements, including workshops with Fellows.

Convene experts

An Expert Working Group (EWG) is convened, comprising Academy Fellows and other experts, to ensure a broad interdisciplinary focus on technological, social, cultural and economic aspects. The EWG is critical to identifying specific areas for analysis and balancing disparate opinions and evidence from across stakeholders.

Consultation, data collection and analysis

Core to any project is the collection, collation and evaluation of all the evidence, expert insights, opinions and other inputs received. This includes assessing the breadth, depth and potentially contradictory information. A focus and priority is placed on robust peer-reviewed and authoritative research evidence.

Peer Review

To ensure findings are evidence-based, balanced, comprehensive and independent, a peer-review process is undertaken. Reviewers are Academy Fellows and appropriate industry and government experts.

Finalise report

ACOLA works with the EWG and ACOLA Board to consider feedback from peer reviewers and project sponsors to finalise the report. It then undergoes design, final copy-editing, printing etc.

Sponsor briefings

Before release, ACOLA works with project sponsors to provide briefings to key Ministers, senior departmental executives, decision-makers and other key stakeholders on the report, as appropriate.

Release and post-report activities

A key value proposition for project sponsors is post-release activities. As reports are undertaken in partnership, ACOLA works with sponsors to explore appropriate opportunities to promulgate reports with key stakeholders and the wider public, e.g. through briefings, social and traditional media and panel sessions.

Year in review

Published reports

[Research Assessment in Australia: Evidence for Modernisation](#)



In early 2023, ACOLA was commissioned by the Office of the Chief Scientist to undertake a review of how research assessment affects the careers and publishing behaviours of Australian researchers. This review was to inform the Chief Scientist's advice to Government. The work was undertaken in collaboration with the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia.

The report was developed in the context of other federal government reviews and strategic discussions concerning the higher education, research and science systems. It sought to understand how research assessment influenced the diversity of Australia's research workforce and shape research quality, outputs and impact.

The report was published on 15 November 2023 and is available [here](#).

- **Expert panel members:**
 - Professor Kevin McConkey AM FASSA (Chair)
 - Professor Ana Deletic FTSE
 - Professor Louisa Jorm FAHMS
 - Professor Duncan Ivison FAHA
 - Professor Robyn Owens FAA FTSE
 - Professor Jillian Blackmore AM FASSA
 - Professor Adrian Barnett FASSA
 - Kate Thomann (March-June 2023)
 - Caroline Hughes AM (June-September 2023)
 - Professor Andrew Peele FTSE
 - Dr Guy Boggs
 - A/Prof Raffaella Demichelis

The Pillars of Modern Research Assessment

Modernising Research Assessment - ACOLA

ACOLA has identified six pillars of modern research assessment to improve the practices in Australia moving forward:



The findings from this report contribute to broader efforts by the Office of the Chief Scientist, the National Science and Technology Council (NSTC), and other government initiatives to support the knowledge economy and address barriers to retention and diversity in STEM fields.

Projects

During 2023-24 ACOLA delivered a range of Government activities. While not all projects are public, notable projects include:

- **KONEKSI**: ACOLA has supported Australia's flagship program in the Indonesia knowledge and innovation sector funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) since 2023. ACOLA's role is to support effective collaborative research, partnerships and knowledge dissemination. This is a 5-year project. In September 2023, ACOLA facilitating a high-level roundtable discussion on Australian innovation ecosystem with DFAT Jakarta and KONEKSI and supported KONEKSI's second call for grant proposals on the topic of Digital Transformation in the areas of health, energy and food security.
- **Mapping Australia's Indonesia Research Capability**: ACOLA developed a report mapping the knowledge landscape in terms of Australia's capability to engage with Indonesia through research. This report informed DFAT efforts through programs like KONEKSI to strengthen Australia-Indonesia collaborative research relationships. The work was undertaken in collaboration with the Australian Academy of the Humanities, especially in relation to their expertise in delivering similar prior work on Australia's China Knowledge Capability. It sought to identify past and current organisations active in facilitating research with or about Indonesia, as well as examine Australia's publication outputs and disciplinary knowledge in this space. The report will be launched in November 2024.
 - **Expert panel members:**
 - Emeritus Professor Louise Edwards FAHA FASSA FHKAH (Chair)
 - Professor Peta Ashworth OAM
 - Professor Edward Aspinall FAHA
 - Professor Ken Baldwin FTSE
 - Professor Vedi Hadiz AM FASSA
 - Professor Joe Lo Bianco AM FAHA
 - Professor Budiman Minasny
 - Professor Anushka Patel FAHMS
 - Emeritus Professor Kathryn Robinson FASSA
- **Prime Minister and Cabinet**: Long term insights briefing report: Preparation of an ACOLA hosted workshop on human rights by design in the future of government service delivery
- **Australia's Energy Transition Research Plan**: In 2024, led by the Expert Advisory Group, ACOLA has continued to communicate the findings of previous reports and undertaken further analysis around vulnerable groups as part of Australia's energy transition.
 - **Expert panel members:**
 - Professor Ken Baldwin FTSE (Chair)
 - Professor Lesley Head FASSA FAHA
 - Professor Fran Baum AO FAHMS FASSA
 - Professor Thomas Maschmeyer FAA FTSE
 - Emeritus Professor Sue Richardson AM FASSA
 - Merryn York FTSE

Other Activities | Seminars, webinars and submissions

ACOLA continued to support the Australian Chief Scientist, National Science and Technology Council (the Council), Parliamentary Inquiries (both Federal and State/Territory) through briefings and reports as commissioned.

ACOLA has coordinated and provide support to various inquiries, reviews and discussions with international bodies and governments in Europe and the Asian Pacific region and statements regarding major international events, such as climate change and security.

Collaboration between ACOLA and Australia Parliament House Library

Established in late 2020, the partnership between the Parliamentary Library and ACOLA continues to grow. The collaboration has enabled Australian federal members of Parliament and their offices to access research to generate discussion on topical issues and inform decision making on key policy initiatives. Up to 150 parliamentarians, political advisers and staff at Parliament House attend the hybrid sessions held during non-sitting weeks.

There were nine topics this year:

- Health and the sustainability of Australia's health care system
- Building Australia's Mega-Engineering
- Technology and the law
- Critical Technologies
- Geoengineering
- Emerging Battery Technologies
- Emerging Neurotechnologies
- Future of Australian Workplaces
- Implication of climate change on agriculture

Where appropriate recordings are published on the [ACOLA](#) and [Parliament House](#) websites.

Collaboration between ACOLA and Australian Public Service (APS) Academy

In partnership with the five Learned Academies, ACOLA has continued its collaboration with the Australian Public Service (APS) Academy, on the design and delivery of a Mastercraft Series to build capability on critical topics for senior public servants across the Commonwealth. The goal is to bring Academy Fellows and other experts together into discussions with policymakers that drive an uplift in policy thinking, capability, and capacity.

Sessions involved a panel of experts, presenting thoughts and provocations, followed by a wider discussion with 100 and 250 public servants.

Two deep dive sessions included:

- Health and the sustainability of Australia's health care system (APS Academy and the Department of Health)
- AI in Education (APS Academy and the Department of Education)

Workplan for 2024 – 2025

- Awareness: Further building awareness of ACOLA through active presence at events and forum with key stakeholders and refreshed website that provides a portal for evidence to inform policy development, drawn from research of ACOLA and its member Academies.
- Convening and thought leadership: ACOLA continues to act as facilitator between policy makers and Academies, especially through APS Academy, Parliamentary Library, and PM&C. Where appropriate and agreed, ACOLA will help support statements/submissions by the Academies where a single or united voice proves most effective.
- Research to support evidence-informed policy: Coordinate or undertake where appropriate new project work building on previous ACOLA reports (i.e., disability responsiveness) and/or where the project brief requires the interdisciplinary focus and expertise across member Academies.

Board and Committees

ACOLA maintains a robust governance framework to enable to meet its various legal and operating requirements, including best practice.

Board of Directors



Dr Katherine Woodthorpe
AO FTSE
Director, ACOLA (Chair)
President, Australian Academy
of Technological Sciences and
Engineering

Dr Katherine Woodthorpe AO is an experienced Chair and Non-Executive Director serving for over 20 years on the boards of a variety of organisations including listed entities, government boards and for-purpose organisations. She has a strong track record in a broad range of innovation-dependent industries including healthcare, renewable energy and environmental and climate science. She has been cited in various media as one of Australia's most influential people in innovation.

Amongst her many board roles, she has been Chair of both the Antarctic Climate and Ecosystems CRC and also the Antarctic Science Foundation as well as Natural Hazards Research Australia. She Chaired the Commonwealth Government's National Climate Science Advisory Committee which developed the "Climate Science for Australia's Future" report and is also Chair of the Vision 2040 committee examining medical research investment by the Commonwealth.



Professor Richard Holden FASSA
Director, ACOLA
President, Academy of the Social
Science in Australia

Richard is professor of economics at UNSW Business School, and President of the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia. He is one of Australia's leading economists. Professor Holden received a PhD from Harvard University and was a faculty member at MIT and the University of Chicago before returning to Australia.



Professor Stephen Garton
AM FAHA FASSA
Director, ACOLA
Fellow, Australian Academy of
the Humanities, the Academy of
Social Sciences

He is a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities, the Academy of Social Sciences in Australia, the Royal Australian Historical Society and the Royal Society of NSW. A graduate of the University of Sydney (BA) and UNSW (PhD), he has held a number of senior management positions at the University of Sydney, including Head of the History Department (1996-98), Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Arts (1999), Dean of the Arts Faculty (2001-9), Provost and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (2009-2019), Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor (2019-21) and he was interim Vice-Chancellor (December 2020-July 2021). In November 2023 he was appointed President of the Australian Academy of the Humanities.

In 2003 he was awarded the Centenary Medal for services to Australian history and in 2020 was made a Member of the Order of Australia for services to tertiary education administration and to history.



Professor Louise Baur AM
FAHMS

Louise Baur holds the Chair of Child & Adolescent Health and is an NHMRC Leadership Fellow at The University of Sydney. She is a consultant paediatrician in Weight Management Services at The Children's Hospital at Westmead. Louise has made research contributions in many aspects of the treatment and the prevention of child and adolescent obesity and in aspects of paediatric nutrition. She is Director of the NHMRC Centre of Research Excellence in Translating the Early Prevention of Obesity in Childhood (EPOCH CRE).

Louise is currently President of the World Obesity Federation (2022-2024) and President of the Australian Academy of Health & Medical Sciences (2023-2026).



Professor Chennupati Jagadish
AC PresAA FTSE
Director, ACOLA
President, Australian Academy
of Science

Jagadish is a Distinguished Professor and Head of Semiconductor Optoelectronics and Nanotechnology Group in the Research School of Physics, at The Australian National University. He has published widely in semiconductor physics, materials science, optoelectronics and nanotechnology. He is the Editor-in-Chief of Applied Physics Reviews, editor of 2 book series and serves on editorial boards of 19 other journals. He has received many Australian and international awards, including a UNESCO medal for his contributions to the development of nanoscience and nanotechnologies, and has been an ARC Federation Fellow and Laureate Fellow.



Ryan Winn
Chief Executive Officer,
ACOLA (until March 2024)

Ryan brings two decades of experience leading strategy policy, research and program areas across various Australian Government departments to ACOLA. During that time, his broad areas of focus were higher education, research, research infrastructure, family violence and early childhood. He also had significant experience working on policies and programs that support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Ryan has a Masters of Business Administration (Innovation and Leadership) from the University of Canberra and a Bachelor of Social Work from Curtin University.



Dr Christina Parolin
Interim Chief Executive
Officer, ACOLA

Tina is an experienced policy leader and researcher, with extensive relationships across the Australian research sector. She served as Executive Director of the Australian Academy of Humanities (AAH) from 2010 – 2023, during which time the AAH successfully incubated a new start-up, the arts and culture think tank A New Approach, delivered several major reports to government, including the milestone Australia's China Knowledge Capability project, and led a diversity and inclusion agenda for the organisation. Most recently (to March 2024), she worked as Senior Advisor, Research Integrity Review, at the Australian Research Council (ARC). Tina gained her PhD in history from the Australian National University, where she was awarded the J. G. Crawford Prize for her study.

Research Committee

Professor Katherine Woodthorpe AO FTSE (Chair)
Professor Chennupati Jagadish AC PresAA FTSE
Professor Richard Holden FASSA
Professor Stephen Garton, AM FAHA FASSA
Professor Louise Baur FAHMS

Audit, Risk and Finance Committee

Professor Jagadish Chennupati (Chair)
Kylie Walker, CEO, Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering
Anna-Maria Arabia, Chief Executive, Australian Academy of Science
Inga Davis, Executive Director, Australian Academy of the Humanities
Dr Chris Hatherly, Chief Executive, Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia
Catherine Luckin, CEO, Australian Academy of Health and Medical Sciences,
Ryan Winn, ACOLA CEO

Legislative & Contractual Compliance

For the report period, ACOLA is up to date in its compliance with the provisions of relevant Federal corporate and tax legislation, as well as State legislation. All commercial contractual obligations are also up to date.

Auditor

AccountAbility (ACT) Pty Ltd



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Drawing on the expert network of our member Academies, ACOLA is a trusted adviser to industry, government, education, and society.

We provide interdisciplinary timely, proactive and solution focused advice on national challenges and beyond.

