



STATEMENT FROM THE EXECUTIVE OF AUSTRALIAN WOMEN'S AND GENDER STUDIES ASSOCIATION CONDEMNING MINISTERIAL INTERFERENCE IN THE AUSTRALIA RESEARCH COUNCIL PROCESS

In 2005 and 2006, then Federal Education Minister Brendan Nelson refused funding to a number of projects in the humanities and social sciences, all of them concerned with sexuality and all of them approved through a rigorous national peer-review process that sees only 20% of such proposals funded. In 2018, it has been revealed former Federal Education Minister Simon Birmingham has similarly refused funding to a number of projects in the humanities and social sciences.

With our higher education institutions, academic colleagues and our communities, we condemn this misuse of process and the failure to respect the expertise and commitment of the ARC and those academics whose work has been directly and indirectly impacted.

Social sciences and humanities research, which includes gender studies, addresses critical issues of everyday life including those under topic areas such as sexuality, social inclusion, and historical and cultural representations. Our understanding of these areas is fundamental to how we develop and change as a society, and how we create inclusive, safe, nurturing and successful communities. Academic research has contributed to change in how we as a society and community think about sexual and family diversity, how we understand the importance of gender equality in confronting domestic and family violence, and how we respond to struggles and aspirations of young people facing mental health challenges, to name just a small number of impact points. Research questions and projects emerge from key social questions, are always already assessed against national interest and scholarly excellence and, if successful, are only partially funded.

Ministerial interference does not protect national interest however it is defined. Instead, it diminishes our capacity as a society to create meaningful change based on informed understandings of the everyday struggles and aspirations of all of us.

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