

# *2023 ARMS Conference Report*

Shifting Sands: Embracing the Diverse Future of Research Management

The first in-person ARMS conference since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic took place at Sydney's International Convention Centre between 5-8 September 2023. True to the Conference theme, many institutions presented their experience navigating research funding challenges arising from the pandemic and navigating the widespread uptake and availability of artificial intelligence tools like ChatGPT.

Professor Seyedali (Ali) Mirjalil, Director of Torrens University's Centre for Artificial Intelligence (AI) Research and Optimisation, opened the Conference by introducing delegates to AI and its potential applications to research management, as well as associated risks and opportunities. This was followed later that morning with a brilliant case study by Nicole Murfitt of the University of Wollongong, who tested ChatGPT's outputs by prompting it to write a grant application. Nicole showed how the ARC and NHMRC guidelines deal with the use of AI and outlined ways in which AI use could risk breaching those guidelines, as well as discussing other risks such as inadvertent IP theft and AI 'hallucinations'.

Other institutions shared more positive experiences with AI and information technologies more broadly. Sonia Lee showed how Macquarie University brought Frank, a taxidermy Kodiak bear at Macquarie University's School of Natural Sciences, to life in the cloud as a ChatGPT bot which answers all Macquarie Research Fellowship Scheme questions. Frank's digital afterlife, reminiscent of Netflix's 'Upload', helped Macquarie University reduce email traffic by 80% year-on-year. Monash University, the University of Melbourne, and the University of Wollongong, meanwhile, were just some examples of other institutions sharing their experience with centralisation and automation, with the latter implementing 'One-UoW' and the University of Melbourne adopting a hybrid structure supported by technology to manage ethics applications, referred to by Michelle Grainger as a 'shared service model'. Smaller universities can do this too, advocated Andrew Johnson of Johnson Research, suggesting smaller universities share ethics resources and adopt Lean Manufacturing principles to generate economies of scale.

Indeed, external collaboration was another resounding theme at this year's conference, with Jodi McLean reporting on the activities of the CRC for High Performance Soils, and several universities explaining their successes achieved from engaging external consultants for major reforms. La Trobe University presented to a packed room the story of how external grants advisors and university-wide buy-in to its Fellowship Support Program grant pipeline generated a marked uptick in Discovery Early Career Researcher Award outcomes. Meanwhile, in the Cockle Bay Foyer, Western Sydney University co-presented with Impact Research Management, a consulting firm they engaged to develop strategic research initiatives relating to their research themes, before the University of Queensland presented on its \$50M investment over 7 years in strategic recruitment through its Health Research Accelerator.

The Conference received a human touch from Dr Will-John Martin, Director Māori Research, Science and Innovation of New Zealand's Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, who spoke of new pathways for indigenous knowledge and people in research, and Australian comedy legend Anthony Ackroyd, who reminded us of the importance of using humour and laughter to boost our happiness, energy and success. Perhaps the most personal presentation, however, was delivered by Associate Professor Siouxie Wiles, whose personal experience in overcoming systemic biases and the research sector's reluctance to prioritise science communication undoubtedly hit a chord with all 800 delegates filling the Cockle Bay Foyer during the second day's keynote speech.

The Conference provided me great ideas for improving engagement to improve research, including using humour to connect with others and being cognisant of the challenges that researchers face, as well as the relevance of impact to grant applications and how different institutions manage pre- and post-award processes. I was undoubtedly not alone in leaving this year's Conference with a greater appreciation for the hurdles and solutions this vibrant research management community has grappled with in recent years, inspired and excited for next year's ARMS Conference in Darwin, where we will have the opportunity to connect with new friends from the Malaysian Association of Research Managers and Administrators.

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