

Brett Lethbridge

HINCHINBROOK PRESS...



Grant me the serenity of a huge research handout

Mike O'Connor



If you're doing it tough – and it seems that the poor get poorer every year while the rich get richer – then you could consider applying for a grant from the Australian Research Council (ARC).

You might care to title your application A Study Into Why I Can't Feed The Kids or maybe How To Work Two Jobs And Still Have The Arse Out Of Your Trousers.

Don't bother putting out your hand for money to create an Indigenous policy for "culturally respectful and environmentally responsible space exploration" because that's already been taken, with The University of Newcastle getting \$528,491 to "embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge in Australian space policy", according to the ARC's grants list for 2026.

This research will aim to "broaden understandings of outer space by identifying and supporting Aboriginal connections between space and life on earth", while contributing to culturally respectful and environmentally responsible space exploration, the ARC says.

It is, of course, incredibly important

to do this given that Australia does not have and never will have a space exploration program.

Still, if we ever do it's reassuring to know we will have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge to back us up. I wish I'd thought of it first.

The more creatively minded among you might have thought to have a crack at getting a handout for reimagining public toilets.

Sorry. That one's been taken too, with Monash University pocketing \$712,282 to do what could be described in non-scholarly terms as a deep dive into public dunnies.

What the boys and girls from Monash will seek to do with this money – and we must hope that the research group is gender inclusive – is "reimagine Australian public toilet infrastructure as a multi-purpose amenity shaped by diverse socio values and cultural needs".

"In the context of rapid urban change, this project deploys a needs-based approach to public toilet design to speculate on a contemporary, inclusive amenity for sanitation."

I'm all for needs-based. I can never find one when I feel the need.

Wondering who to blame for the fact that electricity prices have gone up by 37 per cent in the past 12 months?

Sydney's University of Notre Dame should be able to help after it's spent \$490,495 of your money working on a new theory of "what

blame is, what it is for and how it can be used for both good and bad".

"The project will fill a significant gap in our understanding of the moral emotions and how blame can be abused," the university says.

If you want to get a financial leg-up by winning the research equivalent of Gold Lotto, then you are going to have to think outside the square like the academic from Monash University, who scored \$525,650 to watch online pornography.

The end result of this will help us understand "porn creation as a form of digital sexual labour using qualitative methods that centre the experiences of porn creators and audiences".

Yes, I know – you wish you'd thought of it first.

There's more, much more, with RMIT University scoring \$463,655 to "decolonise cultural policies",

while the Australian National University will spend \$352,449 to transform our understanding of women's handwriting.

There's an opening for you there. How about lobbying a request for a \$500,000 handout to transform our understanding of men's handwriting.

Under the previous Coalition government, the education minister had the right to veto projects that he or she felt were without merit, a power removed by the Albanese government.

If all else fails, then your best shot might be to make it your business in the New Year to get a job in the federal public service, for according to the Institute of Public Affairs, public service workers, on average, now make 26 per cent more than their colleagues in the private sector, earning about \$96,309 a year, compared with \$76,424.

Get in the queue to sign up. With the federal public service growing by 5.6 per cent to 386,000 this financial year compared with a population growth of 1.6 per cent you've got to be a good chance to score a gig.

Since Albo moved into The Lodge there has been an almost 25 per cent increase in the public service headcount and only one in three turn up in the office five days a week.

I'm working on my own research grant application for next year – \$1m to research the precise location of every public toilet in the country.

Wellbeing in schools needs full attention

Lee Casuscelli



Across Queensland, young people are feeling the weight of a system under strain. New figures show more Australian children than ever are being diagnosed with autism. The Future Healthy Countdown 2030, published in the Medical Journal of Australia, reveals wellbeing has stagnated or declined across 21 of 22 measures. It's a sobering snapshot demanding urgent action.

The 2024 Young & Wise report shows rising mental health challenges, social disconnection and declining optimism. Based on five years of data from more than 10,000 young Australians, it found only 38 per cent of 14–17-year-olds believe schools support wellbeing.

Teachers face growing student anxiety, behavioural issues and trauma, often without specialist support. They are not just educators but case managers, first responders and trusted adults.

At Schools Plus, we see this complexity daily. Through partnerships across Queensland and nationally, we support educators working with limited time and services. Our mission is to break cycles of disadvantage by equipping schools with programs, funding and expert help so every child can thrive.

Wellbeing is now the top concern, especially in under-resourced communities. Our Every Child, Every Opportunity report highlighted the need for wellbeing coordinators to embed mental health support into the school day. These roles ease the load on teachers but require proper training, service linkages and clear measures of impact.

The ARACY Young & Wise Report echoes these recommendations, calling for wellbeing literacy across all learning settings and for student voices to shape school and policy design. Teacher burnout is also at record highs, driven by emotional labour and administrative overload. Real change will come only when red tape is reduced and time created for meaningful professional learning.

The challenges are layered, and solutions must be too. It will take co-ordinated effort across government, philanthropy, education and health to weave together student support, teacher wellbeing, family engagement and community partnerships. The good news is we know what works, and the community is ready for change.

Lee Casuscelli is Australian Schools Plus education director

I'm all for needs-based. I can never find (a toilet) when I feel the need