



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Department of Industry, Innovation and Science commissioned ACIL Allen to undertake an evaluation of the Australia China Science and Research Fund (ACSRF). The evaluation covered the period 2011-12 to 2013-14. It examined the programme from the point of view of: appropriateness; effectiveness; efficiency; integration; performance assessment (is the programme evaluation ready); and strategic policy alignment.


In order to carry out the evaluation, ACIL Allen reviewed ACSRf documentation including its objectives and funding guidelines, policy documents relating to national science objectives as well as other international science support schemes and previous reports and evaluations on similar programmes. We also surveyed all Joint Research Centre (JRC) leaders and five lead researchers identified by each of the JRC leaders, all leaders of Group Missions and all participants in the Australia-China Young Scientists Exchange Programme (YSEP).

The target response rate for the survey was 40 per cent of participants in each element of the programme. This was comfortably exceeded in most cases. We also surveyed a selection of unsuccessful JRC applicants. However, the response for this category was low.

ACIL Allen has made 14 key findings. These are listed below.


### KEY FINDING ES 1      ACSRf IS SUPPORTING COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

ACIL Allen finds that ACSRf funding is supporting the development of enduring collaborative partnerships between Australian and Chinese researchers.



### KEY FINDING ES 2      BREADTH AND DEPTH OF COLLABORATION

ACIL Allen finds that the ACSRf programme has led to collaboration that is sustained, has grown beyond the initial collaborative partner and opened the door to new potential sources of funding.



### KEY FINDING ES 3 RESEARCH BENEFITS

ACIL Allen finds that the ACSRF programme has delivered a broad range of benefits, including increasing the knowledge and expertise of our researchers and providing them with access to facilities and equipment that they otherwise would not have had, which in turn has enabled them to increase their numbers of publications. It has also increased the number of pilot and demonstration plants built and the number of patents and licenses issued, which has flowed through to the development of commercial products and services.



### KEY FINDING ES 4 JRC IMPACTS

ACIL Allen finds that the JRC element of the ACSRF has delivered considerable benefits, including large numbers of publications and reports, access to significant additional revenue, training for PhD students, many patent applications and the construction of pilot or demonstration plants.



### KEY FINDING ES 5 ADDITIONALITY

ACIL Allen finds that the ACSRF programme has achieved good additionality. It has generated a significant number of conference papers, visits, publications, reports, and intellectual property that would otherwise not have been delivered. It has also resulted in the establishment of new linkages between Australian and Chinese researchers that would otherwise not occurred. It has also strengthened a number of existing relationships.



### KEY FINDING ES 6 PROGRAMME DOCUMENTATION AND GUIDELINES

ACIL Allen found that programme participants' levels of satisfaction with the program documentation and guidelines were very high. It is worth noting that the relative inexperience of some of the YSEP applicants may mean that they could benefit from a little more support when completing their applications.



### KEY FINDING ES 7 SYMPOSIA SERIES

Participants in Symposia should be surveyed some 12 months after their attendance at a Symposium to help determine the nature of outcomes that have resulted from that event. This requirement could be built into the contract between the Department and the AAS.



## KEY FINDING ES 8 APPLICATION SUCCESS RATES

Application success rates for the JRC and Group Mission elements of the ACSRF programme are quite low. There appears to have been considerable unmet demand for funding from these elements. Additional funding for the programme would provide the scope to increase the level of research collaboration with China and potentially to broaden the range of areas where collaboration could be supported. Applications should continue to be assessed on their merits, and the process should remain a competitive one.



## KEY FINDING ES 9 GROUP MISSIONS

ACIL Allen finds that many of the reported outcomes of the Group Missions are similar to those reported by the JRCs. Given that the Group Missions grants are significantly smaller than those given to JRCs, the Department should consider revisiting its decision to cancel the Group Missions element of the ACSRF programme.



## KEY FINDING ES 10 APPROPRIATENESS

ACIL Allen finds that the ACSRF aligns well with the Australian Government's broader policy objectives. It supports enhanced engagement between Australian and Chinese researchers, increases our researchers' skills and experience and enhances the diplomatic ties between Australia and China.



## KEY FINDING ES 11 EFFECTIVENESS

ACIL Allen finds that the ACSRF is delivering on the objectives set for it. There are early signs that the many collaborative research efforts supported by the ACSRF programme are both strong and ongoing. Furthermore, despite the programme having only been in operation for a relatively short time, it already appears likely to deliver outputs that will lead to the commercialisation of new products or services.



## KEY FINDING ES 12 EFFICIENCY

ACIL Allen finds that the administration costs for the Group Mission and JRC components of the programme are relatively modest. However, we note that the administrative costs for the YSEP element of the programme were close to a quarter of the funds expended on this element.



**KEY FINDING ES 13****PROGRAMME TIMING**

A number of survey respondents expressed their concerns about the delays in the announcement of the successful JRC applications and noted that this could result in delays to the start of collaborative research due to the differences in timing of funding cycles in Australia and China. ACIL Allen understands that there were a number of one-off factors affecting the timing of the assessment process for the first JRC round but that this was less of an issue for the second round of JRC applications.

The department should continue to show the same degree of flexibility it did with the first round of JRCs where there are delays that are outside the control of the JRCs.

**KEY FINDING ES 14****PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT**

ACIL Allen finds that the ACSRF programme has performed well in delivering against the ten (interim) KPIs that we have proposed. ACIL Allen commends the department's decision to develop KPIs for the extension of the ACSRF programme in consultation with the Evaluation Unit. As part of that process the department should identify what data is required to measure performance against each of the KPIs and ensure that appropriate arrangements are put in place to collect that data.

Particular consideration should be given to determining how best to measure performance against any long term KPIs that are developed.

