



2026 Westpac Research Fellowship
Funding Guidelines

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1. Introduction to the Westpac Scholars Trust

100 Scholarships a year, forever.

We're committed to transforming the future of Australia by investing in a new generation of leaders with the passion and drive to bring big ideas to life.

Valued at over \$4M a year, we invest in 100 remarkable individuals with a genuine desire to reach their full potential and create a more sustainable, innovative, inclusive or globally connected Australia.

Scholarships are offered across five programs: Asian Exchange, Young Technologists, Social Change, Future Leaders and Research Fellowships. Beyond funding, our programs also offer leadership development opportunities, global experiences and access to a lifelong community (the W100).

Westpac Scholars are individuals who share a bold vision for Australia's future. They lead change, reimagine challenges and create innovations yet to be imagined - united by a commitment to contribute to something greater than themselves.

2. The Westpac Research Fellowship

2.1 Overview

The Westpac Research Fellowship is a unique opportunity for outstanding early career researchers to accelerate bold ideas and shape a better future for Australia. In partnership with Australia's leading research universities, Westpac Scholars Trust will award up to two Fellowships in 2026, each valued at over \$400,000 over three years (with the potential to extend to five years by agreement).

These Fellowships empower researchers to advance their research, strengthen their leadership, expand networks and create global connections - all to help shape Australia's future.

Fellows will be outstanding researchers with a passion for discovery, a drive to lead and a deep commitment to contributing to the community. They will be undertaking research with the potential to create meaningful change in one of the Trust's priority areas and help shape Australia's future:

Sustainable Futures Responding and adapting to climate change is one of the world's most urgent challenges. We want to accelerate innovative solutions to reduce Australia's environmental impact and build a more sustainable future.	Australia in Asia-Pacific The Asia Pacific is a dynamic and complex region deeply intertwined with Australia's future. We want to strengthen people to people connections and foster ideas beyond borders.
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An Inclusive Country

Our nation holds enough space for all Australians to be included. We want to back changemakers building resilient communities and overcoming social injustice.

Thriving Tech Sector

Technology is intertwined with our future, and today's bold ideas will transform lives tomorrow. We want to back the next generation of innovators creating solutions to benefit all Australians.

Scholars will join the Westpac Scholars Network (W100) - a community of leaders, innovators and changemakers. Driven by scholars and supported by the Trust, the W100 offers ongoing opportunities for connection, leadership and collaboration across all five scholarship programs.

2.2 Fellowship Program

Each Fellowship is valued at over \$400,000 across three - five years. The final value may vary, as each Fellow's salary and research budget / on-costs depend on their host university and appointment level. The Fellowship includes:

- **Salary and Research Support**

The Fellowship covers the Fellow's full-time salary and a research budget (approved by the university) for up to three years. Funding may be spread over five years by agreement but must be fully utilised within five years.

- **Westpac Professional Development Fund (WPDF) & Leadership 360**

Fellows will receive access to a \$30,000 Westpac Professional Development Fund, administered by the host university. This fund is designed to support tailored professional development and global experiences that enhance research impact, leadership and career goals. Activities may include conferences, research travel / collaborations, short courses, coaching and leadership programs. Participation in the **Leadership 360 Program** is a compulsory component of the WPDF and includes:

- A comprehensive Leadership Circle 360° assessment with one-on-one debrief.
- A facilitated group workshop with current Westpac Research Fellows
 - For full details, see Section 8: *Westpac Professional Development Fund Budget Guidelines*.
 - Note: Accessing the WPDF does not preclude Fellows from using other sources of support (e.g. department funds, VC travel grants).

- **Westpac Research Fellow Impact Network**

Fellows have the opportunity to join the Westpac Research Fellow Impact Network - a community of past and current Research Fellows - to connect, collaborate and lead together on shared opportunities and challenges in research and research leadership in Australia.

- **Westpac 100 Scholars Network (W100)**
Money can help launch a vision - but it takes a network to sustain it. Every Westpac Research Fellow joins the Westpac 100 Scholars Network (W100), a growing community of over 930 scholars across five programs. The W100 connects bold thinkers and changemakers committed to building a better future for all Australians.
- **Westpac Scholars' Summit — Late March 2026**
All 100 Westpac Scholars across the five programs will come together in Sydney in late March 2026 for the Westpac Scholars' Summit. This two-day event includes tailored workshops, keynote speakers, and opportunities to connect with fellow scholars. Participation is compulsory and funded by the Trust.

2.3 Fellowship Funding

The Westpac Research Fellowship is co-funded by the Westpac Scholars Trust and the host university, as follows:

a. Salary Funding

Funded by Westpac Scholars Trust.

Amount: \$110,000 per year, for three years. Your university covers the salary difference (see point b).

The Westpac Research Fellowship does not fund salaries of Fellows who are receiving another salary funding Award (e.g. DECRA) at the same time. If you are currently on another salary funding Award / Fellowship, or are the recipient of a salary funding Award at the time the Westpac Research Fellowship is awarded, you may request:

- A reallocation of the Westpac-funded amount (\$330,000 or part thereof) to another resource (or resources) that will directly contribute to your research (e.g. research costs and / or a research assistant); and/or
- An extension of up to an additional two years to utilise the Westpac Research Fellowship salary funding (which for the avoidance of doubt is capped at \$330,000). For example, (i) the Westpac-funded amount could be apportioned over five years, (ii) the Westpac-funded amount could be utilised over years three to five following two years of a DECRA Award; or (iii) the Westpac-funded amount could be utilised over years four and five following three years of a DECRA Award with the remaining \$110,000 reallocated to another resource that will directly contribute to your research.

These requests must be approved by the Westpac Scholars Trust and your host university and will be assessed on a case-by-case basis. Please refer to Section 9. Fellowship Conditions for other options for the Fellowship.

b. Salary Top-Up

Funded by host university.

Salary top-up is provided by the university to top up the \$110,000 provided by the Trust each year to fund the Fellow's salary. The salary top-up is over three years and subject to changes in the university award rate over the period.

c. Westpac Professional Development Fund

Funded by host university.

Amount: \$30,000 over the length of the Fellowship.

d. Research Budget

Funded by host university.

Amount: as agreed by the host university.

A research budget for the project is required in the application. This budget should be prepared with the support of the university.

The Research Budget must exclude those costs funded by the Fellowship (i.e. salary, on costs and Westpac Professional Development Fund).

Note, the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research) or equivalent will be required to confirm support for the proposed Research Budget in their **Letter of Support**.

2.4 Participating Universities

The Westpac Research Fellowship is offered at the following host universities:

- The Australian National University
- The University of Melbourne
- The University of Queensland
- The University of Sydney

2.5 Funding Priorities

Successful applicants will need to be able to demonstrate how their proposed research will contribute to the future growth and prosperity of Australia in at least one of the following priority areas:

- An Inclusive Country
- Australia in Asia-Pacific
- Sustainable Futures
- Thriving Tech Sector

Funding requests for the purpose of **medical and health research** as defined in the ARC Medical Research Policy available on the [Australian Research Council](#) website will not be considered.

2.6 Funding Period

Funding is available to commence by 30 June 2026 for a maximum of five years (subject to agreement per sections 2.2 and 2.3(a)).

3. Eligibility

3.1 Eligibility Criteria

- a. You must be an Australian citizen or permanent resident.
- b. You must have been awarded a PhD between 2019 and 2022 or have obtained an Eligibility Exemption from the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research) or equivalent (refer to section 3.2).
- c. You must commence your Fellowship by 30 June 2026.
- d. Your proposed research must contribute to the future of Australia in one of the Trust's priority funding areas, refer section 2.5, and be able to demonstrate impact and world-class research excellence.
- e. You must supply the supporting documentation as detailed in section 7 below.
- f. Should your application progress to the final stage, you must attend the **National Assessment Centre** in person in Sydney on **3-4 December 2025** (domestic travel paid for by the Trust); and
- g. If successful, you must attend the **Westpac Scholars' Summit late March 2026** in Sydney (paid for by the Trust).

3.2 Eligibility Exemption

If your PhD was awarded before 2019, you may be considered for an exemption to the eligibility criteria detailed in section 3.1b if you have received an Eligibility Exemption from the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research) or equivalent.

An Eligibility Exemption will be provided up to a maximum of four years for the following career interruptions:

- Caring responsibilities
- Disability
- Disaster management and recovery (e.g. affected by bushfires, floods)
- Limited or no access to facilities and resources, e.g. through workplace interruptions.
- Medical conditions
- Parental leave
- Non-research positions, not concurrent with research employment

Confirmation of your Eligibility Exemption must be included in the Letter of Support accompanying your application.

3.3 Letter of Support

Each applicant must obtain and include in their online application a Letter of Support from the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research) or equivalent that the proposed research meets the Fellowship eligibility criteria. The template is available on the [Westpac Scholars Trust](#) website once applications are launched.

If your PhD was awarded before 2019, the Letter of Support must include a confirmation of your Eligibility Exemption by the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research) or equivalent.

The Letter of Support must also include confirmation from the host university of support for the proposed Research Budget.

4. Selection Criteria

Successful candidates will demonstrate:

- Academic excellence and impact - a strong track record of achievement and contribution in their field.
- Potential for future contribution - a clear articulation of how the proposed research can contribute to Australia's future growth and prosperity, aligned with one of the Trust's priority funding areas.
- Supportive research environment - evidence of a high-quality and supportive research environment at their host university.
- Leadership and alignment - demonstrated leadership potential and alignment with the attributes of a Westpac Research Fellow (see Appendix A).
- Commitment to community - a desire to actively contribute to and engage with the Westpac 100 Scholars Network.
- A strong connection to Australia and a demonstrated commitment to shaping its future.

5. Selection Process

The selection process is a comprehensive approach that draws on a range of online assessment tools and the expertise of selection panels within the Westpac Scholars Trust, participating universities, and a National Selection Panel. This may be subject to changes.

Stage 1: Eligibility assessment

Westpac Scholars Trust to assess all applications for eligibility.

Stage 2: Online assessment

Eligible applicants will be invited to complete an online self-assessment with Korn Ferry to evaluate alignment with the Westpac Research Fellowship. The results, along with the applications and CVs, will be provided to each relevant university to assist in their shortlisting assessment.

Stage 3: Shortlisting – host university shortlisting

Each university's selection panel will assess applicants for their university. The universities may interview applicants at this stage. Each university will select two finalists.

Stage 4: National Assessment Centre – 3-4 December

Finalists will be invited to attend the National Assessment Centre in Sydney to be interviewed by the National Selection Panel. The National Selection Panel will comprise 10 senior industry, academic and research representatives who will select up to two 2026 Westpac Research Fellows.

The Westpac Scholars Trust will notify all finalists of the National Selection Panel outcome by mid-December 2025.

6. Key Dates

1 July	Applications open
30 July 1 - 2pm AEST	Information webinar
25 August	Applications close 5:00pm AEST
26 – 29 August	Westpac Scholars Trust eligibility checks
1 – 5 September	Candidates complete Korn Ferry online assessment.
15 September – 13 October	University shortlisting
16 October	Shortlisted applicants invited to attend the National Assessment Centre. Unsuccessful applicants notified of outcome
3-4 December	National Assessment Centre, Sydney. All shortlisted applicants will be required to attend an interview in Sydney. The Westpac Scholars Trust will nominate which date candidates will attend and advise of date allocated when finalists are selected. Domestic travel and accommodation costs will be covered by Westpac Scholars Trust
Mid-December	Notification of Fellowship recipients
Late March 2026	Westpac Scholars' Summit in Sydney
30 June 2026	Latest commencement date for Fellowship

7. Application Form

All applications must be submitted through Westpac Scholars Trust's online application system. A link will be live [here](#) when applications launch on 1st July 2025.

The following documents are the only supporting documents that will be considered with your application. Please do not include any additional documentation:

- your **Curriculum Vitae**, including at a minimum:
 - a) Formal qualifications and any prizes, awards, honours and other esteem indicators.
 - b) Appointments, including consultancies.
 - c) Research/creative activity outputs, including bibliographic details, year of publication, individual contribution by percentage, and evidence of impact; and
 - d) Research/creative activity funding, including title of grant, funding body, grant category, individual contribution and role in the grant, year, total grant value, any patents and evidence of impact.
- **Letter of Support** from the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research) in the form of the template provided on the [Westpac Scholars Trust website](#) (will be live once applications launch).
- **Two references**, from different referees, using the reference templates located on the [Westpac Scholars Trust website](#):
 - a) The first is an **Academic Reference** and needs to be completed by a person who is familiar with your academic record and understands the importance of your research; and
 - b) The second is a **Personal Reference** and needs to be completed by a person who can demonstrate that you have the attributes of a Westpac Research Fellow and has known you for at least two years. This can be a previous work colleague or supervisor, however, should not be a family member or a person who currently reports directly to you (or previously reported directly to you).

Any additional documentation will not be considered.

You may be required to present proof of citizenship or permanent residency at any time during the selection process.

8. Westpac Professional Development Fund Budget Guidelines

You are required to prepare a draft Westpac Professional Development Fund budget as part of your application. The Westpac Professional Development Fund provides \$30,000 over three years to support global experiences and professional development. If your application is successful, the host university will work with you to finalise your Westpac Professional Development Fund.

The Westpac Professional Development Fund specifically excludes the following:

- Bench fees or the costs of scientific equipment or similar academic resources. The Trust expects such core costs to be covered by the host university; and
- Costs not directly related to studies (e.g. professional association fees, fees for patent applications, costs of dependents, mobile phones etc.).

The Westpac Professional Development Fund may include the following components (excluding GST):

Item	Description	Guidance
Leadership 360 Program	This is a mandatory component of the Fellowship. Include \$5,000 in the budget.	\$5,000, one off cost.
Professional Development	This is a mandatory component of the Fellowship with activities aligned with the researchers development goals.	
Conference & Short Course Fees	Fees related to attending and/or presenting at conferences and short courses that support your proposed field of study or research.	Convert to AUD at rate prevailing at date of application.
Travel	Travel costs reasonably associated with your proposed research and international experience e.g. airfares, travel, accommodation, visa costs, insurance, etc.	

9. Fellowship Conditions

When applying for the 2026 Westpac Research Fellowship the following should be considered:

- The recipient must commence no later than 30 June 2026.
- Funding will typically be paid over the three-year Fellowship with options to extend to five years on approval: (i) subject to the Fellow submitting an Annual Progress Report; (ii) subject to the Fellow continuing to undertake the research as agreed with the host university and the Trust; and (iii) in line with the agreed final Research Budget administered by the host university.
- Options can be explored to pursue the Fellowship on a part-time basis (up to 0.5FTE), subject to approval by both the university partner and Westpac

Scholars Trust to accommodate carer/parental responsibilities and/or health-related factors.

- The completion date of the Fellowship may be extended by the length of any parental leave approved by the host university.
- The Fellowship aims to provide a research-intensive focus for the applicant.
- If undertaking the Fellowship on a full-time basis, Fellows may allocate up to 0.2FTE for 'other duties/responsibilities' which serve the purpose of supporting the Westpac Research Fellow advance their professional development, academic experience and enhance community engagement. This may include teaching, leadership roles and/or administrative responsibilities.

10. Reporting Requirements

10.1 Annual Progress Reports

Fellows are required to submit an Annual Progress Report.

Progress reports (in a form to be agreed between the Trust and host university) must be submitted to the Trust one month prior to the annual anniversary of the Fellow's commencement date.

10.2 Final Report

Fellows must submit a Final Report to the Trust within three months of completing their Fellowship.

Appendix A - Westpac Research Fellow Attributes

We are looking for Westpac Research Fellows who possess the following attributes. This is a comprehensive list, and successful candidates may not have all of these. Applicants will be assessed on the demonstration of these attributes throughout the selection process.

Attribute	Definition
Collaborative Team Builder	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Works collegially with others, is inclusive, and builds effective teams and partnerships.• Shares knowledge to bring academia and broader society together.• Seeks to mentor and share skills and information with others.• Identifies opportunities to work with others and leverages different skills for common goals.
Comfortable with Complexity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can identify issues quickly and has the ability to draw linkages to root causes and introduce new ways of looking at problems.• In determining the way forward, thinks laterally and considers different perspectives in developing the approach and the solution and tolerates a degree of risk.
Connected Communicator	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Patient, attentive listener who seeks to understand and relate to others.• Can clearly communicate their ideas to diverse groups of people.• Adapts own style to better connect with others.• Can translate complex ideas into simple concepts.• Influences others through robust storytelling.
Driven to Succeed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sets high standards, strives for excellence, pushes for positive results.• Inspired to seek out challenges, identify gaps and seize opportunities to progress thinking and change.• Can make things happen and achieves results in a manner that doesn't have negative impacts on their team or stakeholders.
Emotionally Intelligent	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understands their own strengths and weaknesses.• Is aware of their impact on others and ensure their behaviour creates a positive culture and environment.• Insightful and reflective.• Willing to take on feedback and suggestions from others, including advice on development and growth.
Exercises Good Judgment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Has ability to determine and focus on what is most important and impactful.• Analytical, thorough, and detailed.• Takes in information from all perspectives before drawing conclusions.• Thinks outside of own discipline, maintains a vision of the big picture.
Enables Diversity & Openness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fundamentally believes in the strategic advantage of diversity and enables a culture of open expression of diverse ideas and opinions.• Interested in and respectful of people with different backgrounds and ideas to their own.• Has empathy and concern for the wellbeing and welfare of others and fosters such culture.
Innovative Thought Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Adopts an entrepreneurial approach to own field of study.• Future focused, has clarity of purpose to work towards long term goals.• Shows vision and imagination and enables creative thinking in others.• Leads debates and inspires intrigue.• Uses knowledge, insights to shape long term advancement in their field.
Resilient	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• When faced with obstacles and setbacks, perseveres, remains optimistic, committed, and focused.• Courageous and confident to take on challenges.• Willing to go outside of their comfort zone, they remain calm and lead with clarity and empathy.