Fundación Consejo
España Australia

8TH EDITION

AUSTRALIAN LEADERS PROGRAMME 2026

Horizon Europe

Barcelona and Madrid
28.09.2026 - 02.10.2026

Australia has a distinctive landscape of **university networks**, in which institutions voluntarily group together around shared missions, profiles and policy priorities. For example, the Group of Eight (Go8) brings together Australia's leading research-intensive universities, while the 2050 Alliance represents universities with a strong focus on students, communities, equity and the future skills needs of Australia, Australian Technology Network (ANT) is focus on industry collaboration, enterprise and applied, real-world research. These networks do not have an equivalent in Europe, as they could act collectively as influential voices in policy, advocacy, funding and innovation debates. This trip includes delegates from universities from different Australian university networks, alongside key innovation and industry organisations, such as AROSE, creating a unique opportunity to showcase the diversity of Australia's higher education, research and innovation ecosystem. And the Open Universities Australia (OUA) working towards giving more people access to higher education.

2050 ALLIANCE

This is the renamed successor to the Innovative Research Universities (IRU) group, which was originally founded in 2003 by six universities sharing common origins as research-intensive institutions established in the 1960s and '70s. In 2026, the group repositioned itself entirely: it relaunched as the "2050 Alliance," a name taken from the participation target set out in the Australian Universities Accord, with its chair, Western Sydney University vice-chancellor George Williams, describing it as a response to "the biggest transformation in our higher education system since the 1980s." The relaunched alliance brings together nine universities from metropolitan, regional and outer-suburban Australia, Australian Catholic University, Flinders University, Griffith University, James Cook University, La Trobe University, Murdoch University, University of Canberra, Victoria University and Western Sydney University, together supporting more than 285,000 students across 65 campuses nationwide. Its main goal is equity and access rather than research prestige: raising tertiary attainment to 80% of the working-age population by 2050, with particular focus on students and communities historically under-represented in regional, remote and outer-suburban areas.

Professor Luis Salvador-Carulla

Delegate of the University of Canberra and Honorary President of the Spanish Researchers in Australia and the Pacific

Professor Luis Salvador-Carulla is Honorary President of the Spanish Researchers in Australia and the Pacific (SRAP) and an internationally recognised academic whose work has focused on public policy, health systems, research evaluation and innovation. Based in Australia, he has developed a distinguished career dedicated to improving the effectiveness and societal impact of research and public services through interdisciplinary collaboration and evidence-based approaches.

Over the course of his career, Professor Salvador-Carulla has worked extensively with universities, governments and international organisations, contributing to the development of research frameworks and policy initiatives that strengthen connections between scientific knowledge and public decision-making. His expertise spans multiple disciplines, reflecting a long-standing commitment to addressing complex societal challenges through collaborative research and innovation.

As Honorary President of SRAP, Professor Salvador-Carulla has played a key role in supporting the Spanish research community across Australia and the Pacific while promoting stronger scientific and institutional links between Spain and Australia. His work has consistently emphasised the value of international cooperation, research excellence and knowledge exchange in addressing global challenges and advancing innovation ecosystems.

2050 ALLIANCE

Holli Evans

Delegate of Griffith University

Holli Evans is Strategic Manager, Major Research Funding at Griffith University, where she leads the development of competitive research funding strategies and supports the University's engagement with major national and international funding opportunities. Working within the Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research), she collaborates with academic leaders, researchers and external partners to strengthen research capability, foster interdisciplinary collaboration and maximise the impact of research initiatives.

With extensive experience in research development and grants management, Holli plays a key role in advancing Griffith University's global research agenda by facilitating strategic partnerships with government, industry and international institutions. Her work contributes to expanding the University's participation in large-scale collaborative projects, including those supported through international funding programmes, while promoting innovation and research excellence across a broad range of disciplines.

AUSTRALIAN TECHNOLOGY NETWORK (ATN)

Established in 1999, with roots tracing back to 1975 as the Directors of Central Institutes of Technology, the ATN is a network of Australian universities known for their strong focus on industry collaboration, enterprise and applied, real-world research. Its current members are Curtin University, Deakin University, RMIT University, The University of Newcastle, University of South Australia and University of Technology Sydney. Its main goal is producing job-ready graduates and driving practical, industry-relevant research and innovation, positioning itself as a bridge between higher education and the needs of the economy, with member universities working closely with government and industry partners on policy, professional development, and applied research programs.

Dr. Craig Richmond

Delegate
RMIT
University

Dr. Craig Richmond is Grants Manager in the European Research Projects Office for RMIT University, a position that allows him to leverage his technical and transversal training as a researcher, his knowledge of funding mechanisms, and networks to identify and support collaborative opportunities in Europe for RMIT's research community.

He has extensive expertise in the Horizon funding framework programmes (since H2020) and plays a key role in supporting the proposals and projects that strengthen RMIT's research and innovation partnerships between Europe and Australia. Examples of such initiatives supported by Dr. Richmond and led by RMIT are the AuSpire and AUFRAND networks (co-funded through the MSCA COFUND), which support close to one hundred research positions for doctoral and postdoctoral researchers across Spain, France and Australia.

Prior to joining RMIT Europe, Dr. Richmond trained as a synthetic chemist, obtaining Masters and PhD degrees from the University of Glasgow, followed by postdoctoral stays at the Institute of Chemical Research of Catalonia (ICIQ), and the University of Zurich.

AUSTRALIAN TECHNOLOGY NETWORK (ATN)

Anika Gauja

Pro Vice-Chancellor Research of the University of Technology Sydney, Delegate of UTS

As Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research), Anika provides leadership and strategic assistance and support to the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research) on the delivery of UTS 2030 and implementation of the Research Strategy.

Prior to joining UTS, Anika was the Executive Director (Social, Behavioural and Economic Sciences) at The Australian Research Council. She has also held research leadership roles at the University of Sydney as Associate Dean Research and Director of Research Development (Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences).

Anika is a Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences in Australia and an internationally recognised researcher on political parties, participation and electoral democracy. She is the author and editor of ten books, and more than 60 journal articles and chapters with leading outlets such as Oxford University Press, Cambridge University Press, the European Journal of Political Research, Governance and Party Politics.

She is a regular political commentator in Australian and international media and has worked with parties and governments to establish more meaningful opportunities to participate in politics and political finance reform.

GROUP OF 8 (Go8)

Formed in 1999 and headquartered in Canberra, the Go8 brings together Australia's most research-intensive universities: Adelaide University, the Australian National University, the University of Melbourne, Monash University, UNSW Sydney, the University of Queensland, the University of Sydney, and the University of Western Australia. It's considered the most prestigious tier of Australian higher education, often compared to the UK's Russell Group, and its member universities consistently top the country's rankings, seven of the eight are ranked among the world's top 100 universities, and all eight sit within the global top 150. Its main goal is to influence long-term national higher education and research policy, and to build elite international alliances and research partnerships. In short, to protect and grow Australia's standing as a global research leader. This weight is reflected in its output: the Go8 enrols one-third of all postgraduate students in Australia and its institutions have produced over half of the country's doctors, dentists and veterinarians.

Professor Sergio León-Saval

Delegate of the University of Sydney and Founder Member of the Spanish Researchers in Australia and the Pacific

Professor Sergio Leon-Saval is a distinguished researcher in photonics and optical fibre technologies and a leading figure in the Spanish scientific community in Australia. Based at the University of Sydney, his research has focused on the design and application of advanced optical fibre systems, contributing to developments with significant implications for telecommunications, sensing technologies and scientific instrumentation. His work has earned international recognition, including the prestigious John Love Award from the Australian Optical Society.

Throughout his career, Professor Leon-Saval has worked at the intersection of fundamental research and industrial application, collaborating closely with both academic institutions and industry partners. His research spans diverse fields, including astronomy, photonics, robotics and environmental sensing, reflecting a multidisciplinary approach that has helped strengthen links between scientific discovery and practical innovation.

Professor Leon-Saval is also the founder and former president of the association of Spanish Researchers in Australia and the Pacific (SRAP). Through this role, he has been instrumental in fostering scientific collaboration between Spain and Australia, including through the Australia-Spain Research Forums supported by the Spain-Australia Council Foundation. His efforts have contributed significantly to strengthening research networks and promoting international scientific cooperation across both countries.

OPEN UNIVERSITIES AUSTRALIA (OUA)

Established in 1993 and headquartered in Melbourne, OUA is an online higher education organization, previously known as the Open Learning Agency of Australia. It's owned and governed by seven Australian universities that nominate directors to its board, alongside up to five independent directors, and delivers courses from a further 20 partner universities beyond its owning members. Unlike the Go8 or the 2050 Alliance, OUA isn't a research or policy alliance, it's a shared online-learning marketplace, allowing students to study fully online and graduate with the same qualification as an on-campus student. Macquarie University is one of the seven owning universities of OUA, alongside institutions such as Adelaide University, Griffith University and Monash University, and it offers a range of undergraduate and postgraduate units and full degrees through the platform, including pathways for students without standard entry requirements to later transfer into on-campus Macquarie degrees.

Professor Mohsen Asadnia

Delegate of Macquire University

Professor Mohsen Asadnia is a biomedical and mechatronics engineer currently serving as a Full Professor and Associate Dean (Research) in the School of Engineering at Macquarie University. He also serves as Director of the Master by Research programme within the Faculty of Science and Engineering. With more than 20 years of experience in research and innovation, he has made significant contributions to the fields of biomedical and mechanical engineering, with a particular focus on smart materials and their applications in health, sensing technologies and energy systems.

Professor Asadnia obtained his Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Mechanical Engineering before pursuing a PhD at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore. During his doctoral studies, he specialised in the development of biomimetic microsensors for applications in healthcare and robotics. Following the completion of his PhD, he joined the Singapore-MIT Alliance for Research and Technology (SMART Centre), where he worked as a postdoctoral researcher on advanced artificial auditory hair cell sensors inspired by biological systems.

He later joined the University of Western Australia, where he served as Assistant Professor and led the development of advanced transistor-based chemical sensors for applications in the oil and gas industry. Throughout his career, Professor Asadnia has combined interdisciplinary research with practical technological applications, establishing himself as a leading expert in smart sensing systems, biomimetics and advanced engineering solutions that address global challenges across healthcare, industry and sustainability.

Jason Crusan

Chief Executive Officer AROSE

Jason Crusan is Chief Executive Officer of AROSE (Australian Remote Operations for Space and Earth), a not-for-profit, industry-led consortium based in Perth, Western Australia. AROSE acts as a neutral integrator across the resources, energy, defence, agriculture and space sectors, translating remote operations and autonomy capability in both directions between terrestrial industry and the space economy.

Jason is a technology executive with more than 25 years' leadership across the space and energy sectors. He was previously Vice President of Technology and New Energy at Woodside Energy, where he led technology deployment across oil and gas operations, hydrogen and ammonia, and carbon capture and utilisation. Before that he held senior executive roles at NASA, including Director of Advanced Exploration Systems and Chief Technologist for Space Operations, where he developed the strategy for the Lunar Gateway and the human lunar return architecture for the Artemis Program, oversaw the first commercial human-rated module flown to the International Space Station, and founded the United States Government's Center of Excellence for Collaborative Innovation.

Jason holds a Master of Computer and Information Science, a Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering and a Bachelor of Arts in Physics, and is currently completing a Doctorate of Engineering.