

## RSAA Review: Responses and Plan

	Recommendations	Action	Responsible	Time
1	<b>RSAA should adopt an explicit focus on building a culture of internal and external collaboration at all levels. This will help ensure that RSAA remains scientifically competitive and impactful and will keep the school's technical competencies competitive and at the cutting edge.</b>			
1 a	We recommend that every effort should be made to systematically create and grow collaboration and strategic partnerships at all levels – within RSAA (including between AITC and the rest of RSAA), within ANU, and with a selected set of relevant national and international partners.	As part of its strategic planning in 2025, RSAA will systematically analyse its local, national and international collaborations and partnerships, and identify opportunities to grow collaboration.	Director / Head AITC	ongoing
1 b	We recommend co-supervision of HDR students as one key way to begin building the needed internal and external partnerships and will naturally lead to broader collaboration.	RSAA already undertakes co-supervision is, minimally at the level of ANU requirements (1 primary/chair and $\geq 2$ co-supervisors), but often goes significantly beyond that (such as $> 2$ co-supervisors and/or inclusion of external panel members). RSAA will consider a requirement for at least one external panel member.	AD (HDR)	2025
1 c	We also recommend establishing a pyramidal mentoring program for staff and students from undergraduates through to senior staff.	RSAA will consult students, E/MCRs and professional staff to establish scope and focus of a mentoring program. One opportunity is to set up mentoring trees which build off current buddy programs in place for undergraduate and HDR students.	AD (IDEA)	2025

2	<b>RSAA should evolve its research profile and its approach to hiring faculty. Rebalancing of the School's research portfolio will mitigate the current strong dependency on facilities with uncertain future access, will position RSAA to capitalise on the coming flood of data in radio astronomy and time-domain astrophysics, and will ensure that the demographic profile of its faculty becomes a key component of the school's commitment to research excellence.</b>			
2 a	We recommend that RSAA consider future faculty searches targeted by (broad) research topic, rather than fully open searches, in order to rebalance its research portfolio to increase capability in radio astronomy and time-domain science.	As part of its strategic planning in 2025, RSAA will systematically identify priority areas for research, including radio astronomy and time-domain science, and consider restriction of future hiring to priority areas identified.	Director	2025
2 b	RSAA should undertake an open-minded, systematic analysis of the immediate- and mid-term future state of the national and international astronomical landscape... to develop a bold set of strategic goals that will create opportunity regardless of externally decided factors.	As part of its strategic planning in 2025, RSAA will systematically analyse local, national and international capability and opportunity.	Director	2025
2 c	We recommend that RSAA seize the opportunity to capitalise on its strong record of equity, inclusion, and climate by reforming the way in which it approaches hiring and retention for continuing positions, in order to create a faculty complement that looks like Australian society and like modern astronomy.	RSAA will work through its IDEA committee to broaden its approach to hiring and will update its equitable hiring strategy to include actions that focus on broad aspects of diversity beyond gender.	AD (IDEA)	2025

3	<b>RSAA should optimise the positioning of its infrastructure and facilities for future discoveries and applications, both by continuing to pursue socially relevant and industrial invested opportunities at Siding Spring Observatory (SSO), and by enhancing the capacity of the Advanced Instrumentation and Technology Centre (AITC) for research and innovation. The latter can be realised by providing overall base recurring funding to AITC that is not project based, and by ensuring that individual AITC staff have some fraction of their time that does not need to be charged to projects.</b>			
3 a	We recommend that SSO and AITC be maintained	SSO and AITC are both core parts of RSAA.	Director	ongoing
3 b	RSAA should continue to pursue technology and project offerings enabled by SSO, especially in socially relevant and industrial invested interest areas.	RSAA is pursuing current and new opportunities in space situational awareness, communications and astro-tourism as SSO.	SSO Director	ongoing
3 c	An explicit decision should be made on whether the long-term goal for AITC is to be a place that innovates and is a leader in instrumentation research, in addition to its focus on delivery of projects.	As part of RSAA strategic planning in 2025, AITC should determine its ambition to grow as a leader in innovation in addition to excellence in delivery of facility grade instrumentation based on past innovations. Part of this work will include review of project and activity portfolio to identify un-actioned opportunities and gracefully exit unproductive programs.	HEAD AITC / Director	2025
3 d	If AITC is to focus on innovation, we recommend that AITC receives overall base recurring funding that is not project based, and that individual AITC staff have some fraction of their time (e.g., 20%) that does not need to be charged to projects.	RSAA is revising the budget model for AITC, including potential for future increase of base funding and how strategic funds within AITC can be utilised.	Director / School Manager	2025

4	<b>RSAA should revitalise Mt Stromlo as a destination for the public by renovating the cafe and re-opening the outreach centre. This will allow RSAA to better promote its scientific, educational, and technological contributions to the community, and will provide new philanthropic investment opportunities.</b>			
4 a	We recommend that the planned and sensibly scoped investments be urgently made to open the Visitor and Events Centre and associated cafe.	Philanthropic funds are identified for renovation of the café, and planning with ANU Campus services are advanced.	Director / School Manager	2025

5	<b>RSAA should ensure that its astronomy major remains relevant, accessible, and integrated with other related programs, so that ANU remains the destination of choice for Australian undergraduate students who wish to major in astronomy. The curriculum should undergo continued review to ensure that it is not just a set of excellent subjects, but a well-curated, well-integrated, and coherent program of education.</b>			
5 a	We recommend that the curriculum should undergo continued review to ensure that it is not just a set of excellent subjects but a well-curated, well-integrated, and coherent program of education.	Continued curriculum review is part of college process. RSAA will focus during 2025 and 2026 on defining core aspects of the curriculum in collaboration with other schools, while acting within the ANU flexible degree structure.	AD (Education)	ongoing
5 b	The first-year large astronomy courses should be maintained and continually revitalised, and that succession planning should be put in place to develop the next education leaders that can take over from Paul Francis.	Paul Francis is leading collaborative revitalisation of first-year courses this year. The need for succession planning to take over from Paul Francis is noted, and RSAA will have a plan in place by mid-2027.	Director / AD (Education)	2026 - 2027

	Additional Findings	Action	Responsible	Time
I	<b>Strengthening our National Mission and meeting our unique responsibilities</b>			
I a	RSAA will need to make a major decision around the future of SSO's largest telescope, the AAT, when the current complement of survey program ends in ~2028	Funding for the AAT is secured until mid-2027. RSAA does and will continue to engage with the consortium partners and the Department to develop a sustainable future and direction for the AAT.	Director / SSO Director	2026
I b	SSO and AITC are both self-sustaining and RSAA should not consider either program as a significant opportunity for cost-savings or cutbacks.	RSAA does not plan on reducing activity or investment within SSO or AITC.	Director	ongoing
I c	To better align AITC with the academic and research missions of the School, RSAA may want to consider a re-examination of the structure of AITC-based PhDs, to reduce the risk to AITC students and to ensure they can complete on time.	a) RSAA will examine potential avenues, which could include constructing AITC based projects around a combination of astronomy and instrumentation projects that can run concurrently or extending the AITC PhD stipends. b) RSAA will consider establishing a grant based innovation program to provide appropriate PhD opportunities that are often not available within many of the larger programs.	AD (HDR) / Head AITC	2025
I d	It is recommended that AITC create a formal risk register, and that AITC adopt a disciplined approach to risk management.	RSAA will implement a risk register, including key recognised risks of (experienced) staff availability and timely project managment.	Head AITC / Technical Director	2025
II	<b>Conducting research that transforms society and creates national capability</b>			
II a	The ANU 2.3-metre is a powerful facility and the review panel noted that there is only a small RSAA user base, and more generally that RSAA doesn't do time-domain and transient research that warrants the investment in the 2.3-metre	a) RSAA will discuss modifying the time allocation policy to encourage large RSAA led programs. b) RSAA has initiated a community discussion to augment the 2.3m telescope's current capabilities with a new facility-grade science instrument.	Director / Head AITC	2025

II b	The review panel affirms RSAA's own observation that it does not have critical mass in radio astronomy. RSAA should consider options to make strategic scientific investments in radio astronomy.	RSAA will take this advice as key input to the development of its research strategy and workforce plan.	Director	2025
II c	RSAA may want to consider establishing a strong, structured visitor, conference, or workshop program to build substantive collaborations and to establish itself as a hub of astronomical activity	a) RSAA has a strong visitor program but this could be revamped to offer more short visits. b) RSAA will explore possibilities to make use of the Mt Stromlo site as a workshop locale, similar to the recent ANITA summer school.	AD (Research) / Head AITC	2025

III	<b>Delivering a student experience equal to the world's best</b>			
III a	RSAA could benefit from better transparency, clarity, and processes relating to central pools of funding (e.g., travel funding) available for use by HDR students.	a) From 2025, new students receive \$5k for use towards travel, replacing the previous application process. As suggested by the panel, building awareness might involve requiring short reports on the use of funds - this could be part of the HDR annual review report form. b) RSAA will reinstate its exit interviews to surface issues the need to be addressed	Director / AD (HDR)	2025
III b	AITC and RSAA can likely benefit from better overall oversight and integration of AITC-based HDR students and postdocs, so that they are better embedded in the overall culture and mission of the school.	a) RSAA will consider establishing smaller innovation programs, that focus on instrumentation technology for astronomy, and could better embed PhD students in the wider school. b) In relevant cases AITC student panels could have an RSAA-based non-AITC co-supervisor, which is part of the overall AITC PhD to serve as the main advisor for one of the three PhD sub-projects.	AD (HDR) / Head AITC	2025
III c	RSAA may want to consider an awards and recognition program for its HDR students and ECRs, to recognize different categories of contributions (research, mentoring, IDEA work, etc), and to help people feel valued.	a) The RSAA IDEA committee will ensure HDR and ECRs continue to be nominated for ANU, ASA and other national awards. b) RSAA will celebrate the recognition of RSAA staff and students in regular news letters and at events such as the end-of-year celebration.	Director / AD (IDEA)	ongoing

III d	RSAA could recruit more domestic HDR students through approaches including encouraging more PhB students to stay at ANU for their postgraduate studies and by targeting domestic undergraduate students who come from regions where there are limited options for local HDR studies, such as South Australia and New Zealand.	RSAA will advertise its PhD program more regularly and systematically via channels such as the ASA mailing list and through other relevant professional organizations.	AD Education / AD (HDR)	ongoing
III e	RSAA can likely benefit from identifying and offering co-supervision opportunities with AITC, Physics, Statistics, Computer Science, Engineering, and the Centre for Gravitational Astrophysics.	a) RSAA will consider a requirement for at least one co-supervisor on AITC PhD panels, who is RSAA-based, but not AITC-based to advise one of the three sub-projects. b) RSAA will investigate how improving links and cross-collaboration between ANU schools and institutes can be driven through HDR supervision.	AD (HDR)	2025
III f	RSAA could increase ongoing communication to undergraduate students to provide opportunities for advice on prerequisites and degree pathways.	RSAA notes the challenge in having access to intending major students at key points in their education. RSAA will advertise that non-first year students are welcome at O-week to 1st year physics classes, improve online information/contact information and explicitly discuss career pathways within ASTR2013.	AD (Education)	2025
III g	RSAA could consider undergraduate cohort feedback that they felt curricular reform was needed. Their perception was that many of the courses offered in the major are too difficult, that too many assessments are due at once, that more key courses need to be offered every year, and that some existing courses need overhauls or rewrites.	a) RSAA is making gradual overhauls and rewrites as per the RSAA teaching guidelines, which now recommend new conveners at regular intervals. The key difficult course in the major has already been partially reformed for 2025 (ASTR3013). b) RSAA is considering an additional key course within the transdisciplinary framework. However additional specialise ASTR coded courses within the flexible double degree structure are not realistic.	AD (Education)	ongoing

III h	RSAA may want to consider providing welcome packs and a series of orientation/induction sessions for new undergraduates, postgraduates, and postdocs when they join the school.	a) RSAA will introduce more systematic induction processes, including an ECR induction living document on overleaf. ECR and student handbooks are currently accessible outside the RSAA intranet so that they can also be made available to visitors. b) RSAA will continue with Honours and Masters induction days. c) RSAA will assign a buddy peer for HDR and postdocs before they arrive.	Director / AD (IDEA)	2025
III i	The review panel agrees with the sentiment from RSAA academics that the master's program could be simplified or streamlined. This may involve retiring the coursework Masters option and/or exerting more control over which students are accepted.	Given the turbulence in university staffing and curriculum in 2025, it is challenging to understand how much control RSAA will be able to exert over student acceptance or to make a decision on retiring the degree by the June 4 deadline. RSAA will aim to slightly reform ASTR8010 in 2025, and make a decision on retiring the coursework Masters option before June 2026.	Director / AD (Education)	2026

IV	<b>Being a standard-bearer for equity and inclusion</b>			
IV a	RSAA leadership may want to consider the perception produced by the strong institutional messaging on gender parity, and the signal this may be sending to people of colour and those from other under-represented identities	a) RSAA will update the Equitable Hiring Strategy and Distinguished Visitor Program to place greater emphasis on supporting broader diversity. b) The RSAA Colloquium Committee will also consider broader diversity when selecting invited speakers. c) RSAA will explore the possibility of inviting mentors from under-represented groups from outside RSAA to participate in the mentoring program.	Director / AD (IDEA)	2025
IV b	Conversations with RSAA faculty suggest that efforts to build a diverse application pool and then help those applicants write strong applications as part of diverse hiring could be increased.	RSAA will include building of a diverse applicant pool as part of an updated Equitable Hiring Strategy, particularly with-respect-to faculty and continuing positions.	Director / AD (IDEA)	2025
IV c	RSAA may want to consider standardising the benefits offered to ECRs (and students), so that everyone is treated equitably	RSAA will develop and publicise a relocation policy to build on the existing ANU policy.	Director	2025