

Australasian Course in Advanced Neuroscience
Board of Directors

22 March 2021

Prof Russel Gruen
Dean of ANU College of Health

Prof Brian Schmidt
Vice-Chancellor of ANU



Dear Prof Gruen and Prof Schmidt,

This letter is in response to the devastating news that the Eccles Institute has been designated for closure. The news comes as a shock to the neuroscience community. As one of the premier Neuroscience Institutes in the world, there is much evidence as to why the decision should be reversed. In this letter we will focus on the contributions that neuroscientists at ANU have and continue to make to the Advanced Course of Australian Neuroscience (ACAN).

Founded by the former Chief Scientist of Australia and Eccles Institute alumnus, Dr Alan Finkel, ACAN has been running for over 15 years and has trained over 180 young neuroscientists. With national and international Faculty, the course teaches a selected number of high-quality students both the practical and theoretical skills needed to complete cutting-edge neuroscience research. This includes electrophysiology, imaging and systems neuroscience. ACAN is the only such course within the Asia Pacific region and plays an essential role in nurturing young neuroscientists in our community. A remarkable number of leading neuroscientists working around the globe stems from this course, including 30 established PIs in Australasia and 9 in the UK, Europe and the US. This can all be directly credited to neuroscientists at ANU.

The concept of ACAN was forged within the JCSMR more than 15 year ago. Dr Alan Finkel, along with neuroscience leaders in Australia based in ANU, recognized a need for establishing a neuroscience training node in Asia Pacific. ACAN was modelled on highly successful neuroscience courses in the USA (Woods hole) and UK (Plymouth). The previous director of ANU's Neuroscience department Prof Steve Redman set up the first ACAN course in 2005, and Prof John Bekkers—still a researcher at the Eccles Institute today—took over as Director in 2006, a position he held for over a decade. During this time, the course became a multi-institutional and international initiative recognised worldwide. The ACAN Faculty is still today dominated by Neuroscientists with a direct connection to ANU Neuroscience, and this includes the current members of the Eccles Institute (Prof John Bekkers, Prof Greg Stuart and Prof Ehsan Arabzadeh) and many more ANU Neuroscience alumni and trainees (Stephen Williams, Maarten Kole, Lucy Palmer, Chris Reid, Nathalie Dehorter and Brian Billups).

This is only a part of the amazing story that is ANU Neuroscience, which extends far beyond Australasian borders. Science needs to celebrate excellence, vision and community mindedness. The neuroscientists at the Eccles Institute represent a vital cornerstone in the international scientific landscape. Their continued support must be viewed in the context of the long-term investment for the benefit of Australia and the world. It is inconceivable to imagine Australian Neuroscience without its founding institution.

We strongly urge you to reconsider your decision.

Sincerely,

Christopher Reid
ACAN Director

Lucy Palmer
Co-Director

J Bertran-Gonzalez
Co-Director

Karl Iremonger
Co-Director

Ian Forster
Co-Director

Sam Berkovic AC
Chair, Committee

Stephen Williams
Former ACAN Director

Cliff Abraham
Former ANS President

Alan Finkel AO
Founder