



ERA Consultation – March 2011

Australian Research Council

Excellence in Research for Australia

Submission Contact Details (required)*

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*Anonymous submissions will not be considered.

The IRU provides the following comments to address the major issues identified by IRU universities. Each university will make its own submission detailing its particular experiences as the basis for more detailed proposals

1. ERA 2010 Discipline Matrix

The ERA 2010 Discipline Matrix is available at www.arc.gov.au/xls/ERA2010_discipline_matrices.xls.

Please indicate any changes you would recommend to the indicator set which was used for relevant disciplines in ERA 2010. Please explain the reasons for any recommended changes.

Note that any additional proposed indicators should be discussed in the general comments section below. This question should be used to recommend any changes to the existing indicator set used for each discipline.

Response

The need for a mixed mode of peer review and citation data

The IRU considers that the ERA assessment outcomes would be stronger in many cases through combining peer-review with citation data. This might lead to a more even outcome across the ratings for citation based fields and peer review fields in contrast to the outcomes of the first ERA process. In most cases this would be a question of adding citation data to the peer review process. There are also some citation based fields where IRU members suggest use of peer review to ensure a more nuanced assessment.



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2. Cluster Structure

Please indicate any changes you would recommend to the existing cluster structure indicated in the Discipline Matrix, i.e. any Field of Research codes which should be relocated to another cluster. Please explain the reasons for any recommended changes.

Response

The IRU universities have proposed a number of improvements to the grouping of fields of research in their submissions.

The overarching issue is the impact of any such grouping on ERA’s capacity to include the complete output of many leading researchers. The IRU members have many staff whose output is spread among 9 or more 4 digit fields of research, not all of which fields met the threshold required for assessment.

A secondary issue is for the ARC to ensure that the work load of panels is reasonable to ensure the optimum level of considered assessment. We are concerned that some panels were too stretched to give due consideration to the data provided.

3. Low Volume Threshold

A. Output types for inclusion in the low-volume threshold calculation

Please indicate which option(s) you believe most appropriate for the output types to be used in the low-volume threshold calculation:

- a. No change – calculation based on indexed journal articles for citation analysis disciplines, and all weighted outputs for peer review disciplines;
- b. Include the sum of conference publications and indexed journal articles in the threshold calculation for specified information and computer science disciplines;
- c. Exclude conference publications from the threshold calculation for specified social sciences and humanities disciplines.

Note: options (b) and (c) may both be selected.

Response and additional comments

B. Four-digit units of evaluation

Subject to your response to the outputs for inclusion at (A) above, please indicate which option you believe most appropriate for the low-volume threshold for ERA 2012 four-digit units of evaluation:



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- a. No change – threshold remains at 50 apportioned indexed journal articles for disciplines using citation analysis, and 30 apportioned weighted outputs (including 5:1 weighting for books) for disciplines using peer review;
- b. Raise threshold for peer review disciplines to 50 apportioned weighted outputs (including 5:1 weighting for books), to align with the threshold for disciplines using citation analysis.

Response and additional comments

The purpose of ERA is to provide a picture of the quality of research across Australia's universities, to understand the strengths and weaknesses but also the spread of research activity of international quality. Hence while raising the threshold for assessment could serve to reduce the work required for the ARC and potentially for institutions it remains central to the intent of ERA that small groupings of research outputs be considered. The IRU therefore considers that the thresholds should remain driven by the quantum needed to permit a valid rating and not by efficiency considerations or worse by assumptions that research mass is a requirement for research quality.

C. Two-digit units of evaluation

Subject to your response to the outputs for inclusion at (A) above, please indicate which option you believe most appropriate for the low-volume threshold for ERA 2012 two-digit units of evaluation:

- a. No change – threshold remains at 50 apportioned indexed journal articles for disciplines using citation analysis, and 30 apportioned weighted outputs (including 5:1 weighting for books) for disciplines using peer review;
- b. Raise threshold for peer review disciplines to 50 apportioned weighted outputs (including 5:1 weighting for books), to align with the threshold for disciplines using citation analysis;
- c. Proportionately raise threshold (with respect to the four-digit threshold) for peer review disciplines to 100 apportioned weighted outputs (including 5:1 weighting for books), and 100 indexed journal articles for disciplines using citation analysis;
- d. Do not evaluate at the two-digit level.

Response and additional comments

4. Researcher Eligibility

Please indicate which option you believe most appropriate for fractional full-time equivalent staff to be eligible for submission to ERA 2012:

- a. No change – definition remains as in ERA 2010;
- b. Restrict definition by including a by-line requirement for fractional full-time equivalent staff similar to the existing casual staff by-line requirement;
- c. Restrict definition by including a minimum 50% fractional appointment for fractional full-time equivalent staff to be included in ERA submission;



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- d. Restrict definition by including a requirement that fractional full-time equivalent staff need to have been employed for a period of 12 months or more at the ERA 2012 census date to be included in ERA submission.

Response and additional comments

The IRU supports the need to ensure that research outputs considered are from researchers with a clear research association with the university that is claiming the output. Option c if set at a level more commensurate to common part time employment arrangements (eg 40% reflecting a two day a week appointment) could be a viable way to achieve the desired outcome.

5. Reference Period for income, applied and esteem measures

Please indicate which option you believe most appropriate for the reference period for income, applied and esteem measures in ERA 2012:

- a. No change – reference period remains three years, being the final three years of the six-year outputs reference period;
- b. Expand reference period to six years, consistent with the outputs reference period.

Response and additional comments

6. Patents, plant breeder's rights and registered designs

Please indicate which option you believe most appropriate for the eligibility requirements for patents, plant breeder's rights and registered designs:

- a. No change – these measures must have been granted within the reference period to the submitting institution, an institution-owned subsidiary and/or a spin-off company that is associated with the institution;
- b. Expand eligibility to allow for the submission of measures granted within the reference period to eligible researchers submitted by the institution;
- c. Expand eligibility to allow for the submission of measures not yet granted but applied for within the reference period.

Note: options (b) and (c) may both be selected.

Response and additional comments



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7. Publication of data

Please indicate which option you believe most appropriate for the publication of data from the ERA process:

- a. No change – the ARC continues to publish national- and discipline-level data but no institution-level information other than final ratings. Institutions can continue to choose whether to share their data with others;
- b. Expand reporting to include institutional and/or unit of evaluation level data.

Response and additional comments

The IRU supports expansion of the information published as part of ERA. With each institution being given a public rating for all fields that meet the thresholds it is reasonable that the more of the data underpinning those assessments also be available while not revealing details on any individual.

8. General comments

Please indicate here any other recommendations for the future development of ERA.

Align the distribution of FTE to FoR

Alignment of FTE to FoRs would simplify the process, reduce the level of gaming and remove the need for personal FoR codes. The negative impact is that researchers who have only produced a limited number of publications will have their whole FTE captured in a FoR in which they contribute relatively little. This would have the greatest impact when non-research staff are captured on a single paper. Some IRU members applied a close alignment in some FoRs, with the final numbers quite representative of the overall effort.

Overall the simplicity and honesty created by this process (a level playing field for all) would outweigh the negatives.