

30 September 2015

IRU Media Release 12/2015

When you can't get enough define out the opposition

The argument from the Group of 8 (Go8) universities that research funding should only go to areas within universities that have been rated at world class or better in Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) is a simplistic and self-serving argument to protect its members from competition.

Under the guise of targeting funding, the Go8 proposal directly targets the opposition. Ironically with the Go8 proposal, research which is not of world standard would still take place as long as it is nestled within areas where a university has an overarching high ERA rating. It would just prevent world class research developing in other, mostly younger, universities in areas in which they currently do not have a high ERA rating. This is because the ERA rating is the retrospective reflection of all the research in a field in that university: the good and not so good.

Research is a broad based investment to strengthen capability for research and innovation so it permeates across Australia. It is not an academic Olympics to find the best few researchers only, and ignore the larger group with research capacity or potential for excellence.

Australia needs to develop people and ideas for 2025 and beyond. To bind ourselves to what we were good at in 2005 (the starting date for the ERA exercise) would sell everyone short.

We need to stimulate better use of research by industry and other end users. This will not be done by using an ERA measurement of fundamental research that ignores whether any of it is ever used.

The change in ERA Ratings between the 2010 assessment and the 2012 demonstrates the developing strength of universities. We need to encourage this, not prevent it.

The reality is that universities target their efforts at what they are currently good at and the few new areas in which they want to grow. All universities need and deserve that support for growth. Government funding and the recognition systems ensure this.

The majority of research funding is allocated competitively through the Australian Research Council and the National Health and Medical Research Council. Do we ban researchers who are not surrounded by others of similar esteem from grant applications? It would increase success rates for those remaining eligible. Research block grants are performance driven.

We need to improve the system to underpin university research supporting both fundamental research and that supporting industry and other end user needs. That is, we look to the future, not shackle ourselves to the past. For constructive options to do this, see the IRU submission [here](#).

For a Group that loudly proclaims its faith in university autonomy, the Go8 could show some belief in its fellow universities' decisions and not beg for further Government regulation. What are they afraid of?

END

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