

ERA 2010

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a “Unit of Evaluation”?

The Unit of Evaluation (UoE) is a measurement used in the Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) initiative to describe a discipline for a specific institution. For ERA, disciplines were determined according to four-digit and two-digit Fields of Research codes, as prescribed by the Australian and New Zealand Standard Research Classification (ANZSRC). Some examples of four-digit disciplines are:

- 0104 – Statistics, which sits under the two-digit division 01 – Mathematical Sciences
- 1605 – Policy and Administration, which sits under the two-digit division 16 – Studies in Human Society
- 2201 – Applied Ethics, which sits under the two-digit division 22 – Philosophy and Religious Studies
- 1110 – Nursing, which sits under the two-digit division 11 – Medical and Health Sciences

Data was collected only at the four-digit level from institutions, and evaluated at both the four- and two-digit level, regardless of the volume of research activity at that level in each institution.

How do I find out what rating a Department or School got?

ERA is an evaluation of disciplines (‘discipline’ as defined by the ANZSRC Fields of Research), and not an evaluation of an institution’s individual departments or schools. Using the example of Statistics (0101) – many departments within an institution might have a statistics element in their research: Department of History, Department of Mathematics, the Faculty of Social Sciences. The ERA initiative provides us with an overview of discipline quality at a national level and the ability to examine how a discipline is performing overall within and across institutions.

What did you use to define ‘world standard’?

The term 'world standard' used in the ERA 2010 rating scale refers to a quality standard, not to the nature or geographical scope of particular disciplines. A discipline that was rated ‘3’ in ERA was considered to perform at world standard. Performance at world standard means performance which is commensurate with the average performance in the world in that discipline. For example, world average performance was readily demonstrated in disciplines using citation analysis by reference to an average citation profile as measured against world citation metrics. In disciplines using peer review, world performance was identified by the use of peer review to compare the quality represented in a unit of evaluation against average world quality for that discipline.

A discipline that performed ‘above world standard’ (a ‘4’ on the ERA Rating Scale) is characterised by evidence, presented by the suite of indicators used for evaluation, of performance above world standard. Similarly, performance of ‘well above world standard’ (a

'5' on the ERA Rating Scale) is characterised by evidence of outstanding performance, as presented by the suite of indicators used for evaluation, well above world standard.

How do I tell if one university is better than another?

ERA was not devised as a tool for ranking Australian universities. ERA reports on the performance of disciplines within institutions. It is not possible to add up or average scores to reach an overall ranking for an institution. For example, an institution getting five '4s' and three '5s' is neither better nor worse than an institution with four '4s' and five '5s'.