

1. Introduction

The University of Divinity welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the ERA / EI Review Consultation and thanks the ARC for it.

The University of Divinity is a specialised university that produces humanities and social sciences research in the discipline of Philosophy and Religious Studies (50), with majority research outputs in Religious Studies (5004) and Theology (5005). In previous ERA and EI rounds it has been assessed solely under 2204. Assessment has been by peer review of 30% sample outputs. The University is collegiate, comprised of 10 Colleges, each with their own academic staff.

2. General feedback

The University welcomes the introduction of the more expansive 50 ANZSRC codes and new 45 (Indigenous Studies) codes. It points out that as a result, the next audit will significantly change reporting at some 4-digit-level codes, resulting in non-comparability with previous audit rounds.

There is a deficiency in the assumptions that underlie ERA/EI: *that benefit to Australian taxpayers requires direct benefit to Australian society and economy*. The University argues that Australian research that empowers and builds the economies and societies of Australia's regional neighbours is of direct benefit to Australian taxpayers. The same is the case for Australian research that empowers and builds the economies and societies of majority world countries that are the source of Australian migration. Australia is regionally and globally connected. We argue that, when recognised in the audit process, those activities expand the purpose of the audit and change the measures of quality.

There is also one omission: *failure to include the outputs of taxpayer-funded HDR research in the audit*. The omission is significant, if the audit is intended to produce a snapshot of research productivity and quality in Australia relative to taxpayer investment. It begs the question whether universities are focused adequately on training of the next generation of Australian researchers in the production of quality research outputs additional to the doctoral or masters dissertation.

3. Research excellence beyond ERA and EI

The University argues strongly that the current structure and rationale omit a third area of research activity of national interest that is indicative of research excellence, is qualitatively different from ERA and EI, and complements these two existing areas. The third area is: *evidence of active mentoring of and engagement with indigenous and local researchers in regional and majority world countries*. Future inclusion of this element into routine audit of research excellence in Australia acknowledges the duty of Australian researchers to engage in research communication and research mentoring activities that privilege all societies and economies equally. Currently, there is nowhere for this activity to be valued and acknowledged in ERA/EI. It could, in fact, be argued that current ERA/EI metrics, albeit unintentionally, actively discourage it.

Inclusion of majority-world research engagement and mentoring as a metric requires a reassessment of how regional, local, and local-language journals and presses, and publication of outputs in them, are viewed as a measure of quality, a topic discussed below.

4. Frequency

The University of Divinity is not in favour of annual data collection, except in the case of ERA, and then only if the data can be harvested in its entirety using big data capabilities. Ensuring that all relevant outputs of all academic staff are present in the relevant data systems is complex for a small collegiate university with few dedicated research administration staff. This is a matter of economic inequity further addressed below.

A 3-year cycle is too short for assessing effective EI. A 4- or 5-year cycle is preferred. A more frequent audit disadvantages small universities with low research administration infrastructure. It is also the case that there is a significant time lag in the measure of impact in humanities research (often decades). This is a particular characteristic of pure basic research in both the humanities and social sciences.

5. Methodology and Unintended Consequences

An economic issue exists in regard to equitable resourcing for ERA/EI reporting. Dedicated staff at large and well-resourced universities focus on building the best possible ERA/EI case. Small universities do not have this capability. They are disadvantaged in regard to the production of EI narratives. This raises the question whether the methodology unintentionally produces a measure of university research infrastructure investment.

5.1 *Assessment by staff vs byline*

Audit by staff produces a snapshot of Australian research that does not assess return for investment of Australian taxpayer money in that research. It produces behaviours that may adversely affect long-term sustainable research capacity and quality – e.g. attraction and hiring of high-performing researchers for short-term contracts in the year prior to audit, fly-in fly-out senior researchers from other countries. There exists one current inconsistency: *requirement of university byline for honorary researchers (not required for salaried academic staff)*. The inconsistency challenges rigorous and robust applicability of the methodology.

5.2 *Citation + peer review*

Current ERA methodology does not serve all disciplines equally. It creates a two-tiered system of research behaviours (striving for maximum citation vs striving to publish in approved presses). The rise in citation-based factors over time for Australian STEM research, it could be argued, is not a signal of higher research quality relative to international benchmarks, but a symptom of researchers turning to greater production of the types of research outputs that attract higher rates of citation in journals that participate in citation indices (citation produces citation). It can also be symptomatic of a turn towards the production of research outputs in 'more popular' disciplines. Disciplines that are assessed by peer review as opposed to citation, additionally, are subject to peer review as a methodology not because research outputs are not widely cited, but because it is difficult to quantify citation rates within those disciplines easily (a limitation of the methodology). Citations in the humanities tend to occur not in journals, but in books and book chapters, which take more time to accrue citations. In addition, these are published in multiple languages and countries, and are frequently omitted from this metric since current online search engines (big data harvesters) are biased towards English-language publication.

Peer review has its own unintended consequences. It fosters the development of lists of desirable or approved presses and journals that privilege academic and university publishers that are first

world and that have international distribution due to first world economies. The presumption is that these presses have rigorous peer review processes and that location of publication and breadth of distribution are indicators of research quality. In both citation indices and peer review methodologies regional or local distribution is, often unfairly, equated with lower research quality.

The University of Divinity argues strongly that the current methodology produces research behaviours that self-reinforce first world colonial privilege and networks. The methodology does not acknowledge the service Australian researchers provide when they mentor emerging researchers in regional and majority world countries, where that mentoring is facilitated by publication in regional journals and presses in local languages. It also fails to acknowledge the strategic purpose of publication of research outputs in presses that are accessible to economically disadvantaged scholars. The low status accorded research outputs of this kind by both citation and peer review actively discourages investment by Australian researchers in the empowerment and growth of those countries' academies, societies and economies. Australian indigenous research, when it concerns history, religion or culture, falls into this same category.

Examples specific to 5004/5005

Australian theological publications (esp. journal articles) are disadvantaged and require higher weighting in evaluating ERA, especially if it is important for theological scholars to be writing for/to/about/within an Australian theological context. Theological research in Australia, though 'world leading' from the perspective of methodological development and innovative answers, has a particular range of interests (contextual theologies, effects of settler culture, etc) that the 'top' journals overseas regard as servicing a 'limited' market.

Citation analysis is likely inappropriate for theological disciplines for a variety of reasons: theology's relatively small footprint among other Australian universities; difficulty measuring levels of citation by others as theological scholars are often 'cited' in various media where tracking a citation would be next to impossible (e.g., sermons, lectures); an international reach into smaller communities and non-indexed journals (e.g., communities through Asia, Melanesia, and Polynesia).

Research undertaken specifically for the Australian context (including its history, settler culture, Aboriginal theologies, etc) fails to carry the economic weight to attract publishers outside of Australia.

Such privileging drives research behaviour, directing researchers to publish on topics that dominate 'high-ranking' journals in the field, and to entertain questions dominant in North America and the EU but which neglect the interests of Australia (for example, secularisation theories, none of which address how these processes differ in settler cultures and in relation to indigenous religions).

The positive suggestion would be to identify and acknowledge privileging in its various forms and develop a weighting mechanism which allows a 'world' standard to be a 'world' standard and not a 'first world' standard.

6. EI methodology

For the humanities, in positive terms EI creates a driver for working in interdisciplinary spaces (fostering cross-disciplinary collaboration) and connecting pure basic research to Australian society.

6.1 Impact measure concerns

EI methodology presumes that impact is always measured in the positive (e.g. number of clicks on a video, number of visitors to an art exhibition, use of technology in applications). Humanities research may, in special cases, demonstrate impact by producing a new generation of scholarship nationally or internationally that ceases to cite that research. In this instance impact would be

demonstrated by lack of citation (erasure of western scholarship from citation over time). This is the case with Australian research that seeks to decolonise and empower indigenous and local ways of knowing in Australia and in majority world countries with which Australia engages. It is of special relevance to the aspect identified as missing from current Australian research excellence audits.

The standards which categorise what is measurable as impact are value laden. For instance, a standard of 'feeling bad about white privilege' on viewing a particular video might not be an indicator of positive impact (racial empathy). It might be the exact opposite: an expression of white privilege (we have the latitude to feel bad). Impact presumes benefit. Impact measures for humanities disciplines, in particular, are imprecise. Impact measures used to illustrate impact in EI narratives may unconsciously exaggerate or misrepresent actual benefit to Australian taxpayers.

The presumptions that undergird EI are selective and disadvantage humanities disciplines. The criteria require both greater definition and flexibility to serve as a meaningful metric in, for instance, religious and theological research. A model which accords with the values of arts/humanities to Australian taxpayers needs to be applied to EI.

Theological research is often, by its nature, 'interdisciplinary,' but usually not recognized as such (e.g., New Testament social history interfaces with a number of other disciplines in the Arts and Social Sciences). However, such interdisciplinary relationships should not preclude a range of methodological considerations, including a focus on 'pure' theological research.

The University argues that current EI metrics handicap 'pure' religious/theological (humanities, more largely) research – research that impacts and engages with other researchers (only). This should factor into EI.

The 'cash support from research end-users indicator' is especially problematic for religious studies and theology, where the primary end-users include churches, religious communities, and religious charitable organisations in Australia and in majority world countries that are cash-poor. The same observation applies to 'industry partners'. Introduction of a pro-rata measure of cash support 'relative to opportunity' would help to redress this inequity.

Finally, the use of 'stakeholders' in EI documentation appears limited in scope.

- Negatively stated, the question of religion informs questions of (inter)religious violence, migration, social and cultural effects of secularisation, healthcare, spiritual care for the ageing, morals and ethics in business (e.g. the banking commission and its economic and social effects), but is not often referenced by the Australian governance structures as speaking to these issues. Religious questions remain fundamental for a just secular society – for the public good.
- Positively stated, religious communities are significant stakeholders in theology and religion. This occurs by making themselves available to be researched, giving direct support through funding and institutional structures (libraries, archives, accommodation, higher education, health services), and results in significant impact across these communities.

Professor Wendy Mayer, Dean of Research Strategy
on behalf of the UD ERA EI Consultation Working Group
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