

#62

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## Page 1: Personal Details

## Q1

Your name

James Walker

## Q2

Your organisation (leave blank if not applicable)

La Trobe Univesrity

## Q3

Are you making this submission on behalf of your organisation?

**This submission reflects my personal views and not those of my organisation**

## Q4

Email address

j.walker2@latrobe.edu.au

## Q5

What best describes your interest in making a submission?

**I am a researcher at an Australian university**

## Q6

Submissions may be made public unless you request otherwise.

**Respondent skipped this question**

## Q7

What form of submission do you wish to make?

**Provide my responses through the online survey**

## Page 2: Upload Response

**Q8**

**Respondent skipped this question**

Please upload your submission.

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Page 3: ERA and/or EI choice

**Q9**

**I want to answer questions on both ERA and EI**

Please indicate whether you wish to answer questions on ERA and/or EI.

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Page 4: ERA Policy /1

**Q10**

To what extent is ERA meeting its objectives to:

Continue to develop and maintain an evaluation framework that gives government, industry, business and the wider community assurance of the excellence of research conducted in Australian higher education institutions.

Comment:

Provide a national stocktake of discipline level areas of research strength and areas where there is opportunity for development in Australian higher education institutions.

Comment:

Identify excellence across the full spectrum of research performance.

Comment:

Identify emerging research areas and opportunities for further development.

Comment:

Allow for comparisons of research in Australia, nationally and internationally, for all discipline areas.

Comment:

**Not at all**

The only bodies I can see who value the ERA are the ARC and universities, where decisions about continuing programmes are often made on the basis of ERA scores. Based on my experience, most people outside of the tertiary academic sector are unaware of the ERA and don't understand what it is supposed to be measuring.

**A small amount**

The ERA provides some feedback on research strengths but it's not clear to me that this information could not already be collected in a less time-consuming way - for example, a national database of publications by Australian researchers.

**A small amount**

The ERA is very selective in what it considers for inclusion in the exercise and does not take into consideration outputs that may be less prestigious but are nevertheless important for Australia's research culture, both nationally and internationally.

**Not at all**

The ERA is based on past performance and does not necessarily indicate why some areas at some universities are not ranked highly.

**A small amount**

There would be some value in comparison nationally, although it may be the case that universities have learned how to 'game' the system. Internationally, each country uses different metrics (or does not engage in such an exercise), so international comparison is difficult.

**Q11**

The ERA objectives are appropriate for meeting the future needs of its stakeholders.

**Disagree,**

If you disagreed with the above statement, please explain your answer.:

The ERA rewards areas of universities that are already doing well in those areas, and indirectly penalises areas that are not doing well. What university would want to invest in an area of their institution that was not ranked highly? Government does not use the ERA as a basis for allocating funding, and industry looks at practical relationships rather than academic rankings.

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Page 5: ERA Policy /2**Q12**

What impact has ERA had on:

the Australian university research sector as a whole

**It has resulted in universities gaming the system so that they can achieve higher rankings**

individual universities

**It has given universities grounds for discontinuing or increasing funding to areas of the university depending on their rankings.**

researchers

**It has meant extra paperwork for researches.**

Other?

**It has increased the amount of administrative time and effort by professional university staff**

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**Q13**

How do you, or your organisation use ERA outcomes?

ERA outcomes are primarily used as arguments for or against closing units of the university.

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**Q14**

ERA outcomes are valuable to you or your organisation.

**Agree,**

Do you have any suggestions for enhancing ERA's value to you/your organisation?:

A more nuanced evaluation of the outputs would be helpful - for example, if an area does not score highly, is this the fault of the researchers or is it because there is insufficient support at the university.

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**Q15**

How else could ERA outcomes be used?

ERA rankings could be used for the ARC to approach areas in particular universities about building on their ranking through Centres of Excellence and other initiative.

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Page 6: ERA Methodology /1**Q16**

The current methodology meets the objectives of ERA.

**Disagree,**

Please explain your answer.:

There is some lack of clarify about the decision for which outputs to include and how much they should be valued.

**Q17**

What are the strengths and/or weaknesses of the overall ERA methodology?

Strengths

**Decisions about which areas to evaluate allows universities to be strategic about putting forward areas for evaluation**

Weaknesses

**Any system of evaluation that is used for allocating resources will eventually become played for that purpose - introduction of the ERA adds yet another ranking that universities feel they have to pursue**

**Q18**

Does the discipline-specific approach for evaluating research quality (citation analysis or peer review for specific disciplines) continue to enable robust and comparable evaluation across all disciplines?

It doesn't work well for or encourage interdisciplinary work. FoR codes will sometimes 'fight' over outputs within a university to bolster their numbers

**Q19**

The citation analysis methodology for evaluating the quality of research is appropriate.

**Neither agree nor disagree,**

Please explain your answer.:

For some disciplines it is appropriate, but not all disciplines judge research quality on the number of refereed journal publications.

**Q20**

What are the strengths and/or weaknesses of the citation analysis methodology?

Strengths

**Good for those disciplines that are journal-based**

Weaknesses

**Bad for those disciplines that are not journal-based**

**Q21**

Can the citation analysis methodology be modified to improve the evaluation process while still adhering to the ERA Indicator Principles?

**No**

**Q22**

The peer review methodology for evaluating the quality of research is appropriate.

**Disagree,**

Please explain your answer.:

It seems to be a duplication of effort to have staff review work that has already undergone peer review.

**Q23**

What are the strengths and/or weaknesses of the peer review methodology?

Strengths

**I suppose it provides a qualitative dimension to the quantitative evaluation**

Weaknesses

**Duplication of effort - the work has already undergone peer review**

**Q24**

**No**

Can the peer review methodology be modified to improve the evaluation process while still adhering to the ERA Indicator Principles?

Page 7: ERA Methodology /2

**Q25**

The volume and activity indicators are still relevant to ERA.

**Neither agree nor disagree,**

Please explain your answer.:

These indicators are relevant for some disciplines but not others. Taking a one-size-fits-all approach means that disciplines will be inherently (dis)advantaged depending on the research culture of their field.

**Q26**

**Disagree**

The publishing profile indicator is still relevant to ERA.

**Q27**

The research income indicators are still relevant to ERA.

**Disagree,**

Please explain your answer.:

Research income is not necessarily an indicator of research excellence - there are many disciplines that require little or no income but still affect a university's reputation.

**Q28**

The applied measures are still relevant to ERA.

Patents

**Disagree**

Research commercialisation income

**Disagree**

Registered designs

**Disagree**

Plant breeder's rights

**Disagree**

NHMRC endorsed guidelines

**Disagree**

Page 8: ERA Methodology /3

**Q29**

The five-band ERA rating scale is suitable for assessing research excellence.

**Disagree,**

Please explain your answer.:

Reducing the entirety of a discipline's research output to a value on a scale of 5 reduces the nuance of the rating. Rather than a single score, it would be more informative to provide ratings across multiple dimensions.

**Q30**

Noting that 90% of units of evaluation assessed in ERA 2018 are now at or above world standard, does the rating scale need to be modified to identify research excellence?

**No,**

If you answered 'Yes', please explain how the rating scale can be modified to identify research excellence.:

This result just shows that universities have become good at gaming the system. If you adjust the rating scale, eventually you will get the same effect in future ERAs.

**Q31**

The ERA low volume threshold is appropriate.

**Neither agree nor disagree****Q32**

Are there ways in which the low volume threshold could be modified to improve the evaluation process?

**Respondent skipped this question****Q33**

What is the more appropriate method for universities to claim research outputs—staff census date or by-line?

**Census date,**

Please explain your answer.:

The census date represents the university's current capacity for research, although essentially it is claiming work that might have been supported or funded by another institution.

**Q34**

What are the limitations of a census date approach?

The census date represents the university's current capacity for research, although essentially it is claiming work that might have been supported or funded by another institution.

**Q35**

Would a by-line approach address these limitations?

**No,**

Please explain your answer.:

No, because given the lag that sometimes occurs between research production and publication, the university might not get credit for its current research capacity

**Q36**

What are the limitations of a by-line approach?

Given the lag that sometimes occurs between research production and publication, the university might not get credit for its current research capacity

**Q37**

ERA adequately captures and evaluates interdisciplinary research.

**Disagree,**

Please explain your answer.:

Interdisciplinary research by its nature does not fit into pre-existing categories. Doing so discourages this type of research, and may lead to FoRs at the same university arguing over research outputs.

**Q38**

If you disagreed with the previous statement, how could interdisciplinary research best be accommodated?

Perhaps interdisciplinary research could be evaluated under multiple FoRs

## Page 9: ERA Methodology /4

**Q39**

My institution would meet ERA low volume threshold in Indigenous studies at:

**Respondent skipped this question**

**Q40**

In ERA, the best approach for evaluating Indigenous Studies is (choose one):

Other (please describe).:

Perhaps consulting with Indigenous organisations about the best way of evaluating this research?

**Q41**

What would be the advantages and/or disadvantages of your preferred approach for evaluating Indigenous studies in ERA?

**Respondent skipped this question**

## Page 10: ERA Process /1

**Q42**

ERA should move to an annual collection of data from universities.

**Strongly disagree,**

Please explain your answer.:

The data collection procedure is already incredibly time-consuming.

**Q43**

What would be the advantages and/or disadvantages of an annual data collection.

Advantages

**It might obviate the need to do it every time there is an ERA**

Disadvantages

**It just adds a further burden of administrative work and time**



**Q44**

In future ERA rounds, should the volume of outputs submitted for each unit of evaluation be published?

**Yes,**

Please explain your answer.:

ERA rankings without any context do not distinguish between universities that have similar rankings but different levels of staffing and support

**Q45**

In future ERA rounds, research outputs should be published with their assignment to specific disciplines following completion of the round.

**Disagree,**

Please explain your answer.:

This would further discourage interdisciplinary research

**Q46**

What would be the advantages and/or disadvantages of publishing research outputs with their assignment to specific disciplines?

Advantages

**Would give a more detailed picture of the research ranking**

Disadvantages

**Would further discourage interdisciplinary research**

**Q47**

What other data do you think the ARC should publish following an ERA round? (Note - in ERA 2018 metadata included: Research output title, Research output type, reference year, outlet, publisher, ISBN, ERA round, and Institution)

**Respondent skipped this question**

**Q48**

Considering that EI is a new assessment, to what extent is EI meeting its objectives to:

encourage greater collaboration between universities and research end-users, such as industry, by assessing engagement and impact?

Comment:

**Not at all**

The EI is very unclear as to who its stakeholders are or how this information is supposed to inform them.

provide clarity to the Government and the Australian public about how their investments in university research translate into tangible benefits beyond academia?

Comment:

**Not at all**

As with the ERA, it's not clear that stakeholders outside of academia are aware of the exercise

identify institutional processes and infrastructure that enable research engagement?

Comment:

**Not at all**

Measurement of engagement and impact are very unclear and differ across disciplines

promote greater support for the translation of research impact within institutions for the benefit of Australia beyond academia?

Comment:

**Not at all**

Academics are being pulled in two directions by ERA and EI - on the one hand, producing more, highly ranked academic outputs and on the other, to engage with and impact stakeholders outside of academia. Yet there are no guidelines or incentives for the latter.

identify the ways in which institutions currently translate research into impact?

Comment:

**A moderate amount**

This might have some value in informing future EI as to exactly what they are looking for, and how researchers and universities could engage in (and value) this work.

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Page 12: EI Policy /2

**Q49**

The EI objectives are appropriate for the future needs of its stakeholders.

**Disagree,**

Please explain your answer.:

It's not clear how the process aligns with the objectives.

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## Q50

What impact has EI had on:

the Australian university research sector as a whole

**Depending on how it is implemented, EI could give Australian university research incentive for more engagement and impact**

Individual Universities

**It adds yet more administrative time and effort and another set of rankings for universities to pursue**

Researchers

**Unclear - researchers don't know what they should be doing to be evaluated by EI**

Other sectors outside of academia?

**As with the ERA, it's not clear that sectors outside of academia are aware of EI**

## Q51

How do you, or your organisation, use EI outcomes?

They have not yet been used because nobody really understands what they are measuring or what they should be used for

## Q52

The EI outcomes are valuable to you or your organisation.

**Neither agree nor disagree,**

Please explain your answer.:

Again, they could be valuable if there were a clearer relationship between the process and the objectives.

## Q53

How else could EI outcomes be used?

They could be used as examples for other universities or other research areas within the same university to follow

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Page 13: EI Policy /3

## Q54

The current Engagement definition is appropriate.

**Disagree,**

If you don't agree, what are your suggested amendments to the Engagement definition?:

"Engagement" is going to be very different depending on the discipline

## Q55

The current Impact definition is appropriate.

**Disagree,**

If you don't agree, what are your suggested amendments to the Impact definition?:

"Impact" Is going to be very different depending on the discipline

**Q56**

The current end-user definition is appropriate.

**Disagree,**

If you don't agree, what are your suggested amendments to the end-user definition?:

"End-user" is going to be very different depending on the discipline

**Q57**

Are there any end-user categories excluded in the current definition of research end-user that you think should be included? Please explain your answer.

Much research in humanities and social sciences works with marginalised communities, sometimes overseas, where engagement or impact is intangible and/or difficult to measure.

**Q58**

Are there other key terms that need to be formally defined?

**Respondent skipped this question**

Page 14: EI Methodology /1

**Q59**

Are the two-digit Field of Research codes the most appropriate method to define units of assessment for Engagement and Impact?

**No,**

Please explain your answer.:

Interdisciplinary research tends to have higher degrees of engagement and impact and yet it is disadvantaged by the research code system.

**Q60**

Are there other ways to classify units of assessment in EI, for example SEO codes?

**Yes,**

Please explain your answer.:

Academic output doesn't line up neatly with forms of engagement and impact - the same researcher might be judged under different codes in each exercise

**Q61**

Should there be more or fewer units of assessment per university?

**More units of assessment****Q62**

The EI low-volume threshold should continue to be based on the number of research outputs submitted for ERA.

**Disagree****Q63**

If you disagree, how should eligibility for assessment in EI be determined?

On the basis of evidence for EI

**Q64****Neither agree nor disagree**

The low-volume threshold is set at the appropriate level.

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Page 15: EI Methodology /2

**Q65****Neither agree or disagree,**

Overall, the engagement indicator suite for the assessment of research engagement is suitable.

Please explain your answer.:

Suitable for some disciplines, not suitable for others.

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**Q66****Disagree,**

The cash support from research end-users using HERDC data is appropriate for the assessment of research engagement.

Please explain your answer.:

Not all end-users have financial resources available to support research

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**Q67****Disagree,**

The research commercialisation income is appropriate for the assessment of research engagement.

Please explain your answer.:

Not all research engagement and impact involves commercialisation

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**Q68****No,**

Are there additional metrics that would be appropriate across many or all disciplines?

If you answered 'Yes', please outline the metrics. If you answered 'No', please explain your answer.:

It's virtually impossible to develop a metric that would be appropriate across all disciplines because the types of research are so different.

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**Q69****No**

Are there alternative metrics that would be appropriate across many or all disciplines?

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**Q70****Yes,**

Should any of the current engagement metrics be redesigned?

If you answered 'Yes', which ones and how?:

Rather than metrics, qualitative assessment might be more appropriate.

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**Q71****Disagree,**

The co-supervision of HDR students should be made an engagement indicator in future rounds of EI.

Please explain your answer.:

Supervision of HDR students would indicate academic merit rather than engagement and impact

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**Q72**

In your opinion, are any of the ERA applied measures appropriate indicators of research engagement in EI?

|                                   |           |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|
| Patents                           | <b>No</b> |
| Research commercialisation income | <b>No</b> |
| Registered designs                | <b>No</b> |
| Plant breeder's rights            | <b>No</b> |
| NHMRC endorsed guidelines         | <b>No</b> |

## Page 16: EI Methodology /3

**Q73**

The narrative approach is suitable for describing and assessing research engagement with end-users.

**Agree,**

Please explain your answer.:

The narrative approach is better than a single-digit ranking, but it's not clear who reads the narrative outside of academia.

**Q74**

If you disagree with the narrative approach, what alternative approach could be used to replace the narrative? If you are suggesting indicators, please be specific.

**Respondent skipped this question**

**Q75**

One engagement submission per broad discipline is sufficient for capturing the research engagement within that discipline.

**Disagree,**

Please explain your answer.:

There are disciplines that are highly engaged in engagement and impact which are disadvantaged by having only one submission per discipline.

**Q76**

The engagement narrative needs to be longer.

**Disagree,**

Please explain your answer.:

A longer narrative would decrease the likelihood that end-users would read it.

**Q77**

Additional evidence is needed within the narrative.

**Disagree**

## Page 17: EI Methodology /4

**Q78**

The narrative approach is suitable for describing and assessing Impact.

**Agree,**

Please explain your answer.:

A narrative approach is better than a single-digit ranking

**Q79****Respondent skipped this question**

If you disagree with the narrative approach, what alternative approach could be used to replace the narrative? Please explain your answer. If you are suggesting indicators, please be specific.

**Q80**

One impact study per broad discipline is sufficient for capturing the research impact within that discipline.

**Disagree,**

Please explain your answer.:

Some disciplines have more areas of impact by others and are disadvantaged by having only one submission per discipline

**Q81**

The impact narrative needs to be longer.

**Disagree****Q82**

There is need for additional evidence to be provided within the impact narrative.

**Disagree****Q83**

In your opinion, are there quantitative indicators that could be used to the measure the impact of research outside of academia?

**No****Q84**

If you answered 'yes' to the previous question, please name and describe the quantitative indicator/s, and the disciplines for which they are relevant.

**Respondent skipped this question**

Page 18: EI Methodology /5

**Q85**

The narrative approach is suitable for describing and assessing approach to impact.

**Agree****Q86**

If you disagree with the narrative approach, what alternative approach could be used to replace the narrative? Please explain your answer. If you are suggesting indicators, please be specific.

**Respondent skipped this question****Q87**

One approach to impact narrative per broad discipline is sufficient for capturing the activities within that discipline.

**Respondent skipped this question**

**Q88****Respondent skipped this question**

The approach to impact narrative needs to be longer.

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**Q89****Respondent skipped this question**

There is a need for additional evidence to be provided.

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**Q90****Respondent skipped this question**

Would there be benefit in combining engagement and approach to impact?

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Page 19: EI Methodology /6

**Q91**

The engagement rating scale is suitable for assessing research engagement.

**Disagree,**

Please explain your answer.:

Reducing engagement to a single dimension eliminates a lot of the nuance and intra-disciplinary variability.

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**Q92****Disagree**

The descriptors for the engagement rating scale are suitable.

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**Q93****Disagree**

The impact rating scale is suitable for assessing impact.

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**Q94****Disagree**

The descriptors for the impact rating scale are suitable.

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**Q95****Disagree**

The approach to impact rating scale is suitable for assessing approach to impact.

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**Q96****Disagree**

The descriptions for the approach to impact rating scale are suitable.

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Page 20: EI Methodology /7

**Q97****Yes**

Should EI continue to include an interdisciplinary impact study in addition to the two-digit Field of Research impact studies?

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**Q98****Yes**

Should the EI low volume threshold be applied to the unit of assessment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research in EI 2024 with the option to opt in if threshold is not met?

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**Q99****Yes**

Should the unit of assessment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research include engagement in the next round of EI?

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## Page 21: Overarching Issues Common to ERA and EI

**Q100**

Other (please specify and explain your answer):

How often should ERA occur?

Never

**Q101**

What impact would a longer assessment cycle (i.e. greater than three years) have on the value of ERA results, particularly in the intervening years?

A longer cycle would provide a better indication of research activity

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## Page 22: Overarching Issues Common to ERA and EI

**Q102**

Other (please specify and explain your answer):

How often should the EI assessment occur?

Frequency should depend on how many submissions are made - perhaps universities should be given the opportunity to make an EI submission each year, rather than at arbitrarily chosen intervals

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**Q103****Respondent skipped this question**

What impact would a longer assessment cycle (i.e. greater than three years) have on the value of EI results, particularly in the intervening years?

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## Page 23: Overarching Issues Common to both ERA and EI

**Q104****Disagree,**

ERA and EI should be combined into the one assessment.

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Please explain your answer.:

They are measuring different things

### Q105

What would be the advantages and/or disadvantages of ERA and EI being combined into the one assessment.

Advantages

**Simplifying administrative work and confining it to the same period**

Disadvantages

**Confusion about what each is measuring**

### Q106

Are there other ways to streamline the processes to reduce the cost to universities of participating in ERA and EI?

**Yes,**

Please explain your answer.:

Rather than having university research offices collect and collate the information, it could be done centrally. Of course the easiest way to reduce the costs to universities would be not to do it, or to have the ARC do it independently.

## Page 24: Overarching Issues Common to Both ERA and EI

### Q107

In your view, what data sources could ERA utilise?

Publicly available databases of publications.

### Q108

In your view, what are the most time consuming elements of the ERA submission?

The paperwork and collecting (and correcting) information.

### Q109

Are there efficiencies that could be introduced?

**Yes,**

Please describe.:

Ideally, eliminate the entire exercise, or make it a centrally administered exercise rather than something that every university has to do (duplicating the work across multiple institutions).

## Page 25: Overarching Issues Common to Both ERA and EI

### Q110

In your view, what are the most time consuming elements of the EI submission?

Lack of clarity around what counts as evidence.

### Q111

Are there efficiencies that could be introduced?

**Yes,**

Please describe.:

Central administration through the ARC rather than each university compiling the submission

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Page 26: Overarching Issues Common to Both ERA and EI

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Q112</b>  | <b>Agree</b>  |
| ORCID iDs should be mandatory for ERA.                               |   |
| <b>Q113</b>  |   |
| What are the advantages and/or disadvantages of mandatory ORCID iDs? |   |
| Advantages   | <b>Centralisation of data collection</b>  |
| Disadvantages  | <b>Not all researchers use ORCID - it's not clear whether they can be forced to do so</b> |

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|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Q114</b>   | <b>Agree</b>   |
| The automatic harvesting of output data using ORCID iDs would streamline a university's submission process. |  |
| <b>Q115</b>   |  |
| What are the advantages and/or disadvantages of automatic harvesting of output data using ORCID iDs?        |  |
| Advantages  | <b>More efficient data collection</b>                      |
| Disadvantages   | <b>It would miss researchers who don't have ORCID id's</b> |

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|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Q116</b>   | <b>Agree</b>                             |
| DOIs should be mandatory for ERA.                               |  |
| <b>Q117</b>   |  |
| What are the advantages and/or disadvantages of mandatory DOIs? |  |
| Advantages  | <b>Centralisation of data collection</b> |
| Disadvantages   | <b>Not all outputs have DOIs</b>         |

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Page 27: Overarching Issues Common to Both ERA and EI

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Q118</b>  | <b>Yes,</b>   |
| Are there other ways to collect data to reduce the cost and burden to universities of participating in ERA and EI whilst maintaining the robustness of the ERA and EI process? |   |
|  | Please explain your answer.:<br>Centralised collection of data at the ARC - it's amazing that for all these different assessment exercises - ERA, EI, DP, LP, DECRA, etc - the same information has to be entered separately. |

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**Q119**

What are the advantages and/or disadvantages?

Advantages

**More efficient data collection**

Disadvantages

**Information would have to be checked for accuracy**

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Page 28: Additional Comments

**Q120**

Please provide any additional comments:

Measurement of research productivity and engagement/impact could be valuable exercises for Australian universities but the way the processes are currently implemented simply imposes an administrative burden on universities and researchers which are already having to do more with less. Furthermore, the application of a one-size-fits-all process across all disciplines detracts from the nuance in evaluating Australia's university research. I've worked in other countries where similar exercises are or aren't done and I'm not convinced that these exercises actually achieve their objectives.

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