

9<sup>th</sup> October 2020

Professor Sue Thomas  
Chief Executive Officer  
Australian Research Council (ARC)

Deputy Vice-Chancellor  
(Research and Innovation)  
Professor Bronwyn Harch

Dear Professor Thomas,

The University of Queensland (UQ) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the ERA EI Review Consultation Paper 2020. UQ commends the ARC initiative to simplify and streamline the programs. It will be vital to ensure the programs continue to reflect world's best practice and respond to the ongoing needs of the university sector, government and the public for a robust evaluation of Australian university research quality, impact and engagement. We are pleased that the [Australian Government Funding Arrangements for non-NHMRC Research report](#) produced as part of the [Inquiry into Funding Australia's Research by the Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training](#) recognises the significant administrative burden placed on universities by the Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) and Engagement and Impact Assessment (EI) programs.

UQ is a research-intensive university with strengths across all disciplines, consistently ranking in the top-50 global universities year-on-year. The 2018 Excellence in Research for Australia report rated 100% of UQ's research as at or above world standard. The Engagement and Impact 2018 results rated 100% of UQ's impact case studies (covering 'impact' and 'approach to impact') as high or medium. UQ is the leading Australian university in the commercialisation of research. From this position as a leading Australian research institution, we offer the following comments in supplement to our online survey submission.

#### *Frequency of ERA and EI (Q5.1 - Q5.4)*

Due to the significant administrative burden required for the submission process to be completed, a minimum of 5 years between submission cycles is recommended. A period of less than 5 years between submissions would be unlikely to show large changes at the 2 digit Field of Research (FoR) level. Similarly, given the length of time required for research impact to occur, increasing the frequency of EI assessments would likely not provide further meaningful information.

#### *Streamlining and simplifying ERA and EI (Q5.4 - Q5.9)*

In support of Recommendation 13 from the [Australian Government Funding Arrangements for non-NHMRC Research report](#), the combination of both the ERA and EI assessments into a single comprehensive submission process could lead to a significant reduction in administrative burden.

#### *ORCIDs should be mandatory for ERA (Q5.10)*

As an institution we do not tend to mandate our staff use a third party system such as ORCID, because this would require them to accept the third party terms and conditions. Some publishers may choose to require an ORCID be mandatory in order for researchers to be published in their publication, however in such instances, the onus still remains with the researchers rather than their employer or affiliated institution.

#### *Automatic harvesting of output data using ORCID would streamline a university's submission process (Q5.11)*

Similar to the previous point, we would tend not to mandate the use of a third party system such as ORCID. This suggestion would of course streamline certain parts of the submission process. However, institutions may not be in a position to supply ORCIDs (or other researcher IDs) for all relevant staff.

### *ERA Outcomes (Q3.4 – Q3.6)*

ERA outcomes have limited value to institutions outside of marketing, benchmarking activities and grant applications. The policy intent of ERA would ideally be carefully examined and communicated to institutions. Clarification around the purpose of the ERA submission would benefit institutions to help understand how assessments are used in Government decision making. If the intent of ERA is to promote certain researcher behaviours, other policy tools could be considered that more directly engage researchers.

### *ERA staff census data (Q3.27 – Q3.30)*

As it stands, the data required for ERA is a snapshot which is representative of past performance but has limited value in planning for future endeavours, where oftentimes more recent or deeper data analysis is possible. As such, the datasets included in the ERA submission have limited use or value internally regarding planning or decision making processes.

### *Collection of ERA data (Q3.35 – Q3.36)*

Without automatic harvesting (see Q5.10 – Q5.11 responses), the annual collection of data would increase the administrative burden on universities. It is worth exploring how data submitted for other government exercises, especially for research income and expenditure such as HERDC income and Australian Bureau of Statistics expenditure could be more efficiently used and repurposed for more regular demonstration of certain ERA criteria.

### *EI Outcomes (Q4.5 – Q4.6)*

Given the specificity and narrow relevance of case studies submissions EI outcomes have less value to institutions than ERA outcomes. The EI process has helped to increase awareness and understanding of “research impact”, but clear information on the purpose of the EI submission process would greatly benefit institutions to help understand why the measurement of research impact is relevant and what the outcomes of the assessment are. If the intent of EI is to promote research investment benefits to the public through sourcing examples of research impact, perhaps this could be done more explicitly and in an ongoing way rather than via an “assessment” process.

### *EI Unit of assessment (Q4.11 – Q4.12)*

Research impact is difficult to map to FoR codes. SEO codes may be more easily mapped. However, due to the recent feedback from the Australian Bureau of Statistics that universities are not required to report data by SEO code for Higher Education Research and Development reports, perhaps SEO codes aren’t a viable alternative to FoR codes. Weighting in favour of the [Science and Research Priorities](#) issued by the Australian Government or [Sustainable Development Goals](#) produced by the United Nations is a consideration to draw attention to meaningful areas for impact.

### *Impact Narrative (Q4.28 – Q4.32) and Approach to impact Narrative (Q4.33 – Q4.37)*

Research impact is difficult to map to FoR codes. In order to measure and evaluate impact effectively and to include interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary research, a well-considered broader approach beyond single two-digit FoR codes could be considered. The case study approach can be beneficial to sufficiently encompass impact and approach to impact for each specific example. However, allocating impact case studies to only one FoR code may misrepresent other areas of research and the overall institutional impact in that field. The reliability and depth of impact for the nominated FoR code across an entire institution is questionable when based on a single impact case study.

### *EI rating scales (Q4.38 – Q4.43)*

The three-point rating scale (high, medium, low) is limiting as a single classification. In the current form, single band ratings do not effectively represent engagement and impact activities across an entire institution for each two-digit FoR code. If this rating scale was to be retained, elaboration of the descriptor criteria and detailed feedback for the assessment and rating process would be beneficial to clarify how the evidence has been assessed and assist in preparation and planning for future research pathways.

*EI interdisciplinary research (Q4.44)*

As suggested in our response to *EI Unit of assessment (Q4.11 – Q4.12)*, most impact case studies could be classified as interdisciplinary due to the size of the impact reach and engagement. Therefore, the inclusion of an additional 'interdisciplinary' impact study is superfluous in addition to the two-digit Fields of Research impact studies.

The Australian Research Council is in a unique position to reshape and revitalise the current Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) and Engagement and Impact Assessment (EI) programs to better identify and promote research excellence, engage with research end-users and endorse the translation of research by Australian Higher Education Institutions into economic, social, environmental, cultural and other impacts. We see this as critical for building public trust in the value and benefits Australian higher-education institutions deliver through their world class research outputs, outcomes and impacts.

We wish to continue our strong collaborative relationship with the Australian Research Council in the partnership approach to research excellence, engagement and impact and look forward to the recommendations resulting from in the *ERA EI Review and Public Consultation*.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have questions on our attached submission, or would like more information from my colleagues.

Yours sincerely,



Professor Bronwyn Harch  
**Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation)**