

#186

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## Page 1: Personal Details

## Q1

Your name

Bree Nicholas

## Q2

Your organisation (leave blank if not applicable)

Victoria University

## Q3

Are you making this submission on behalf of your organisation?

Yes, I am making this submission on behalf of my organisation

## Q4

Email address

bree.nicholas@vu.edu.au

## Q5

What best describes your interest in making a submission?

I work 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

<b>Q8</b>	<b>Respondent skipped this question</b>
Please upload your submission.	

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Page 3: ERA and/or EI choice

<b>Q9</b>	<b>I want to answer questions on both ERA and EI</b>
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:

**A large amount**

While ERA provides an evaluation framework that gives assurance to various stakeholder groups of the excellence of research conducted in Australian higher education institutions, there is arguably more developmental opportunities available. To this end, this consultation is timely.

**A large amount**

ERA has provided a useful national stocktake on discipline level areas of research strength, however, the significantly uneven growth in quality across citation-based versus peer-reviewed disciplines begs the need for further interrogation and potentially a change to the methodological approach to evaluating these respective sets of disciplines.

**A moderate amount**

Victoria University (VU) believes a strong tension often sits between the more pure basic end of research and the experimental or applied end. This tension, which can exist within Divisions and across Groups of research, increases the complexity to ensuring consistently fair and equitable approaches to evaluation. While the introduction of an Impact assessment might lend to rebalancing and redressing this tension, all care must be taken to limit the potential for conceptual decoupling of 'quality' from 'impact'.

**A moderate amount**

Given the lagging of ERA, its potential to prospectively identify emerging research areas and opportunities for further development is potentially challenged. VU believes there may be opportunity to more actively exploit the growing availability of comprehensive big datasets and bibliometric tools for a more responsive process of identification.

**A moderate amount**

While ERA provides opportunity to benchmark nationally, it provides limited opportunity to allow for comparisons of research internationally as the evaluation framework, including the rating system, is particular to the national context.

**Q11**

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

**Agree,**

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

The ERA objectives remain appropriate as the strength of Australia's productivity continues to rely on the innovation ecosystem to which Australia's higher education institutions are a vital contributor. However, also essential to success therein is the ability to engage effectively towards realising impactful and beneficial outcomes beyond academia. There is a risk to conceptually decoupling 'quality' from 'impact'.

**Q12**

What impact has ERA had on:

the Australian university research sector as a whole

ERA has provided a framework against which the sector might benchmark itself and offered the capability to benchmark researcher performance. In doing so, it has contributed to the growth of research excellence in Australia. On the negative side however, ERA has also resulted in gaming practice through which smaller institutions are naturally disadvantaged.

individual universities

VU has consistently improved its performance across successive ERA exercises and so the exercise has contributed to lifting the quality of its research. On the negative side however, the cost in both time and resources to administer the process towards submission is significant. The continuing value of this effort must be carefully considered, particularly when ERA has been so successful in lifting quality to the point where 90% of all units of evaluation are now at or above world standard. The strain this exercise puts on university resources should be carefully considered, particularly at this current time of COVID-19 and its impact upon the financial health of the sector.

researchers

ERA has offered the potential to benchmark researcher performance at a discipline level and so has enabled the development of relevant target setting to support researcher development. How universities use and engage with this data responsibly in this effort however, is a matter for collective consideration and dialogue. VU believes there is room for a more coordinated national dialogue on this issue. Researchers are also an essential resource supporting institutional development of ERA submissions. Again, the cost of the effort required to support the current framework is not trivial, particularly in current times. Should there be opportunity to more effectively streamline or automate data collection processes, then these ought to be seriously considered in close consultation with the sector.

**Q13**

How do you, or your organisation use ERA outcomes?

VU uses ERA outcomes to benchmark institutionally and individually.

**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?:

ERA outcomes benefit VU in terms of the benchmarking capability it provides, particularly for discipline areas where bibliometric tools currently provide poor coverage.

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**Q15**

How else could ERA outcomes be used?

VU would welcome exploration of opportunities to limit the cost burden the ERA exercise presents for all institutions, to ensure beneficial outcomes are sustained. Also, inconsistencies across ERA outcomes that are methodology dependent (citation-based vs peer-reviewed) need to be reviewed and redressed to maintain the confidence of all stakeholders.

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Page 6: ERA Methodology /1

**Q16**

The current methodology meets the objectives of ERA.

**Disagree,**

Please explain your answer.:

Victoria University (VU) believes there is latitude to improve current ERA methodology to better meet its objectives. The inconsistent growth in quality across citation-based versus peer-reviewed disciplines since the beginning of ERA suggests inequity across current methodological approaches. Where possible, the use of citation analysis methodology across disciplines should be expanded.

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**Q17**

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

Strengths

Citation analysis provides greatest opportunity to actively monitor and track research performance between ERA cycles given its dependence upon and the ready availability of bibliometric data. This methodological approach also limits the opportunity for subjective evaluation prone to the influence of conscious or unconscious bias.

## Weaknesses

Weaknesses of the overall ERA methodology include:

1. Resource intensive – The resourcing required to support ERA submission development is significant, yet the capacity of institutions to devote resourcing is highly variable. If the methodology could be supported by with more automation, equity could potentially be improved. Any defined approach to support this however, would need to be subject to further consultation with the sector. 2. Opportunity for bias – inequity appears to exist across the evaluation methodologies adopted. Table 1 below reports selected statistics on the distribution of ERA 2018 outcomes, distinguishing citation- and peer-assessed disciplines (rows 1 and 2), and then detailing the three four-digit FoR codes within economics (rows 3-5).

Table 1: Selected Summary Results from ERA 2018 share (%) ranked ERA 1- 5 Average 1 2 3 4 5 score 1. All "Citation Analysis" 0.9 2.0 11.2 27.4 58.5 4.4 2. All "Peer Reviewed" 0.5 14.1 40.1 30.8 14.5 3.4 3. FoR 1401 - Economic Theory 0.0 0.0 0.0 33.3 66.7 4.7 4. FoR 1402 - Applied Economics 0.0 33.3 40.0 16.7 10.0 3.0 5. FoR 1403 - Econometrics 0.0 0.0 0.0 25.0 75.0 4.8 Data compiled from ERA 2018 Outcomes for all 4-digit FoR codes for which 3 or more Australian universities made a submission, available from

<https://dataportal.arc.gov.au/ERA/Web/Outcomes#/for/01>

01 The average ERA score for citation-assessed disciplines in ERA 2018 was 4.4 (row 1), while that for peer-reviewed disciplines was 3.4 (row 2). Being citation assessed appears to confer a full 1 “point” benefit. VU does not believe it to be plausible that the Australian research community is differentiated in its quality across citation and peer assessed disciplines by a full “ERA point”. Given this disconnect between the scores under the two assessment methods, we strongly suggest that citation analysis, where possible, be expanded to cover more Fields of Research. Another example of bias inherent in “peer review” is evident in rows 3-5 in Table 1, which show that within economics, being theoretical rather than applied appears to confer nearly a two-point benefit. The disconnect between the scores for theoretical vs applied economics is concerning and should be something that the ARC is curious to examine. The proposition that the relative scores appear to support – that Australia’s economists are much better at theory than practice – is dubious to say the least. The more likely proposition is that the peer-review process is placing a heavy premium on abstraction and theoretical novelty, or equivalently, a heavy penalty on relevance and practicality.



**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?

The robustness of evaluations is highly dependent upon the methodology adopted, not on the discipline-specific approach.

**Q19**

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

**Agree,**

Please explain your answer.:

Citation analysis is less prone to subjectivity and the risk of conscious or unconscious bias.

**Q20**

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

Strengths

**Uses independent and objective measures and as such, limits opportunity for bias to infiltrate the evaluation process.**

Weaknesses

**Uses independent and objective measures and as such, limits opportunity for bias to infiltrate the evaluation process.**

**Q21**

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

**Respondent skipped this question**

**Q22**

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

**Disagree,**

Please explain your answer.:

While peer-review is an important tool to support researcher development and quality in research outputs, the use of this methodology within the national assessment framework is fraught (as the response to Q3.9 suggests). VU however, acknowledges the difficulty to applying citations analysis to all disciplines, but believes peer review should be limited as much as possible or supported by objective measures. Further to this, there is currently limited transparency around peer review processes and this ought to be addressed to increase confidence broadly.

**Q23**

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

Strengths

**Peer review offers opportunity to assess outputs within disciplines with poor coverage in bibliometric databases, most obviously the creative arts.**

## Weaknesses

Peer review methodology is a highly subjective process prone to conscious or unconscious bias. Statistical analysis conducted by VU, through its Centre of Policy Studies, post ERA-2018 suggests that bias informed ERA outcomes in the review of 1402 Applied Economics specifically. The analysis used data from two sources: (i) the InCites Dataset; and (ii) the ABDC Journal Quality List. The 2017 ABDC Journal Quality List ranked 2,777 journals relevant to the discipline areas of the ABDC (management, accounting, economics, information systems, business and taxation law) and classified journals into four categories: • A\* 6.9% • A 21.2% • B 29.0% • C 42.9% Journal information from the ABDC Journal Quality List was combined with output from the InCites Dataset to rank all journal outputs over 2011-2016 in FoR 1402 for those Australian universities that were ranked in ERA 2018. This report was crossed with the ABDC Journal Quality List to find the share of each university's FoR 1402 output in A\*, A, B and C journals, presented in Table 2: Table 2 ERA 2018 # of outputs A\* & A A\* A B C N/R All Australia 7523 53.5 17.3 36.2 21.7 4.5 20.3 RMIT 3 217 68.2 13.4 54.8 24.9 1.8 5.1 VU 2 69 66.7 8.7 58.0 18.8 4.3 10.1 UTS 4 283 65.4 31.1 34.3 22.3 3.2 9.2 Deakin 3 318 64.2 16.4 47.8 17.6 1.6 16.7 Swinburne 3 37 62.2 10.8 51.4 21.6 8.1 8.1 New England 2 62 61.3 6.5 54.8 14.5 6.5 17.7 Macquarie 3 165 60.6 16.4 44.2 22.4 4.2 12.7 Monash 5 733 59.2 22.2 37.0 24.3 2.7 13.8 UWA 3 268 57.8 11.2 46.6 11.9 7.1 23.1 Griffith 3 300 56.3 11.3 45.0 28.3 3.3 12.0 Curtin 3 244 56.1 10.7 45.5 17.2 4.1 22.5 CSU 2 29 55.2 27.6 27.6 13.8 10.3 20.7 Melbourne 5 626 55.1 27.8 27.3 20.9 5.1 18.8 ANU 4 637 54.6 18.2 36.4 23.5 6.8 15.1 Uni Queensland 4 544 54.6 20.6 34.0 14.5 2.8 28.1 WSU 2 156 53.8 12.8 41.0 30.1 0.0 16.0 Uni NSW 5 663 52.0 22.5 29.6 24.6 5.3 18.1 QUT 3 175 52.0 16.0 36.0 22.9 4.6 20.6 Uni SA 3 135 51.1 8.1 43.0 17.8 5.2 25.9 Woollongong 3 151 50.3 17.2 33.1 22.5 4.0 23.2 Uni Sydney 4 596 49.0 15.9 33.1 19.3 5.9 25.8 USQ 2 27 44.4 7.4 37.0 29.6 14.8 11.1 LTU 3 209 44.0 8.6 35.4 15.8 1.9 38.3 Adelaide 4 228 41.2 15.8 25.4 14.9 8.3 35.5 Uni Tasmania 3 145 39.3 8.3 31.0 31.0 6.2 23.4 Newcastle 2 161 36.6 8.1 28.6 29.2 6.2 28.0 JCU 2 75 36.0 2.7 33.3 12.0 5.3 46.7 Flinders 2 143 35.0 6.3 28.7 21.0 4.9 39.2 CQU 2 31 32.3 0.0 32.3 19.4 12.9 35.5 Uni Canberra 2 96 22.9 5.2 17.7 57.3 2.1 17.7

Filter Summary: Dataset: InCites Dataset Organization Type: [Academic] Schema: Australia FOR Level 2 Time Period: [2011, 2016] Organization Name: NOT [Australian Catholic University] Research Area: [1402 APPLIED ECONOMICS] Location: [AUSTRALIA] Exported date 2019-08-07. InCites dataset updated 2019-07-31. Includes Web of Science content indexed through 2019-06-28. Table 2 also reports the ERA2018 ranking for each University that was evaluated for FoR 1402

(column 2) and the number of outputs returned by the InCites Dataset for Research Area 1402 “Applied Economics” over the time period 2011-2016 for each University (column 3). This allowed consideration of the following question: Can the share of a university’s FoR 1402 output in A\* and A journals be used to inform ERA 2018 ranking? If the peer-reviewed 2018 ERA results for FoR 1402 were unbiased, it would be expected the share of a University’s FoR 1402 output in A\* and A-ranked journals (ie: those journals ranked in the top 28%) would explain a considerable proportion of the variation in ERA scores across Universities. Table 3 details estimated factors for the 2018 ERA ranking of each institution in FoR 1402 Applied Economics. These estimates were obtained from ordered logistic regressions – a technique designed for studying the factors for ordered categorical outcomes. The outcomes are ‘ordered’ in the sense that it is known how the outcomes are ranked (5 is better than 4 and so on) and the estimation imposes this ordering. The data are from the InCites database reported in Table 2. There is one observation for each of the 30 institutions with an ERA rank in FoR 1402 Applied Economics. Table 3: Factors for 2018 ERA ranking in 1402 Applied Economics. Column (1) of Table 3 seeks to explain the rankings using only the proportion of published papers that are in journals rated A or A\* by the Australian Business Deans Council (ABDC) for FoR 1402, which comprises the top 28% of journals. The proportion of A or A\* journals is a positive factor for the ERA ranking. However, the pseudo  $R^2$  is only 0.109, which means that it explains only 10.9% of the variation in the ERA rankings. The second column in Table 3 instead uses the proportion of publications in A\* journals (ie: those journals ranked in the top 6.9%). This explains much more of the variation in the ERA rankings, with the pseudo  $R^2$  increasing to 30.5%. The third column adds the total number of articles published by the institution in FoR 1402 as a potential factor. This doubles the explanatory power of the estimates, with the pseudo  $R^2$  increasing to 62.4%, suggesting that larger departments are systematically ranked higher. The fourth column adds the log of the Times Higher Education world ranking, as a rough indication of each university’s prestige. The pseudo  $R^2$  increases to 70.6% and the coefficient on the ranking is negative, indicating a higher ranking for more prestigious institutions. The fifth column adds a number of other variables, including proportions of publications in journals rated A, B, or C by the ABDC, the age of the university, and a binary variable for Group of Eight status. These variables are generally less significant than the variables displayed in Table 3 and in combination add only marginally to the pseudo  $R^2$ .

Thus we regard the specification in column 4 of Table 3 to be a parsimonious representation of the factors that determine the ERA rankings. That is, the ERA rankings are heavily influenced by the proportion of A\* publications, the number of articles published, and the Times Higher Education ranking of the university. These factors together explain 70.6% of the variation in the ERA rankings. In other words, the exercise of compiling the ERA rankings appears to do little more than reproduce an assessment that could be calculated as a simple function of a university's number of publications, the proportion of those publications that are in A\* journals, and publicly available university rankings. This raises at least two important questions about the ERA process: 1. Though the ERA process should be neutral to the size of the department (since each University supplies the same share of its submission for Peer Review regardless of size), the number of publications determines the ERA ranking to a large degree – indeed it explains around half of the variation in the ERA rankings. This reinforces the argument that the peer review methodology is biased against smaller institutions. 2. Publications in journals outside of the very top tier – i.e. those in journals ranked A, B, or C – count for nothing or are even a negative factor for the ERA ranking, which likely discourages researchers from publishing in these outlets. As all Australian economics journals are ranked A or lower, this may guide the attention of researchers in Australia away from studying local economic issues. We suspect that a similar finding would hold for other public policy and social science disciplines. If so, it should be of great concern to Australian taxpayers that the ERA process is directing the attention of researchers away from Australian issues.

## Q24

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

Yes,

If you answer 'Yes', please describe how the peer review methodology could be improved.:

There should be a guiding framework supported by evidence to enable a preliminary score similar to citation analysis. Citations could be used to inform scores and to eliminate bias from the assessment. Assessment should also be blind to ensure bias to or against any institutions are removed and that assessments are more likely based on academic merit. The peer-review process needs to be made transparent with proceedings minuted and made available so that any conceived conflict of interest or procedural bias might be more readily visible and contested.

**Q25**

Respondent skipped this question

The volume and activity indicators are still relevant to ERA.

**Q26**

Respondent skipped this question

The publishing profile indicator is still relevant to ERA.

**Q27**

The research income indicators are still relevant to ERA.

**Disagree,**

Please explain your answer.:

It seems that research income was never regarded as an input into any result or rankings produced by the ERA exercise. In a letter from the ARC to our Acting DVC-Academic, Prof. Vasso Apostolopoulos dated 9 May 2019, Professor Sue Thomas, then Chief Executive Officer, wrote: "Research income informs ratings only in exceptional circumstances". It would seem that the ARC itself never considered research income to be relevant to the ERA exercise.

**Q28**

The applied measures are still relevant to ERA.

Patents

Comment:

**Disagree**

It could be argued generally that the applied measures are now more relevant to the EI exercise, although the relevance of these for this purpose also need to be directly tested. For example, patent indicators are not representative of engagement as defined by the ARC as an interaction undertaken in a context of partnership and reciprocity is not a necessary precursor to the lodging of a patent.

Research commercialisation income

**Disagree**

Registered designs

**Disagree**

Plant breeder's rights

**Disagree**

NHMRC endorsed guidelines

**Disagree**

Page 8: ERA Methodology /3

**Q29**

Respondent skipped this question

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

**Q30****Respondent skipped this question**

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?

**Q31****Respondent skipped this question**

The ERA low volume threshold is appropriate.

**Q32****Respondent skipped this question**

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

**Q33**

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

**By-line,**

Please explain your answer.:

Both census date and by-line approaches have their pros and cons, however, by-line is the preferred option for the following reasons:

- Better aligns cohorts across the two major national data collection exercises, ERA and HERDC
- Bibliographic databases rely on byline to determine institutional affiliation.

**Q34**

What are the limitations of a census date approach?

The census date approach is a contributor to gaming behaviour in the sector, and poaching behaviour in particular. In addition, this approach requires a heavy workload in assuring that all publications of more recent hires, relevant to the ERA reference period, are collected and verified.

**Q35****Yes**

Would a by-line approach address these limitations?

**Q36**

What are the limitations of a by-line approach?

A by-line approach potentially adds to the laginess of ERA outcomes, measuring past staff profile performance rather than capacity of a more recent staff profile.

**Q37**

ERA adequately captures and evaluates interdisciplinary research.

**Disagree,**

Please explain your answer.:

While recognition of interdisciplinarity is enabled and occurs at the point of data capture (or FOR assignment), there is no strong evidence that evaluation processes considers interdisciplinarity. The impact assessment goes part way to redressing this by offering specific evaluation of interdisciplinary research.

**Q38**

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

The impact assessment goes part way to redressing this by offering specific evaluation of interdisciplinary research.

Page 9: ERA Methodology /4

**Q39**

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

Two-digit  
Comment:

**Yes**  
45 Indigenous Studies

Four-digit  
Comment:

**No response**  
VU has not yet modelled this, however, based on our institutional approach to the ERA 2018 exercise where our Indigenous research was predominantly collected under and assigned to FOR 1699 Other Studies in Human Society, any possibility of meeting threshold under ANZSRC 2020 would likely be in alignment with FOR 4501 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, language and history.

**Q40**

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

**Using established ERA methodology – low volume threshold applied to all broad and specific disciplines for Indigenous Studies**

**Q41**

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

Advantages  
Disadvantages

**Consistent application of methodology**  
**While uncertain at this stage if this would provide the opportunity to showcase and profile Indigenous research to engender effective reporting on research capability and gaps that might influence funding practices, the general principle should be that Indigenous research gains profile through ERA and to support this, opportunities to opt-in should be enabled.**

Page 10: ERA Process /1



**Q42**

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

**Neither agree nor disagree,**

Please explain your answer.:

Should ERA move to annual collection of data then opportunity for minimal curation of data for an ERA submission should still be provided. The form and content of annual collections should be the subject of consultation.

**Q43**

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

Advantages

**Annual collection of data would help spread the workload for ERA submissions across multiple years.**

Disadvantages

**The shift to a different approach for data collection will inevitably create some disruption, may heighten the risk of error, and will potentially limit the opportunity for valid and effective curation of data for evaluation purposes.**

**Q44**

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

**No,**

Please explain your answer.:

The ERA quality rating ought to be agnostic to volume and not inadvertently prejudice smaller over larger institutions. VU interrogation of ERA 2018 outcomes already suggests that volume may contribute to pre-judgement, particularly in peer-reviewed disciplines.

**Q45**

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

**Neither agree nor disagree**

**Q46**

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

**Respondent skipped this question**

**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:

**A small amount**

A continually declining government funding base for research and development and growing dependence on alternative funding sources have provided a greater impetus towards industry and end-user engagement than has the EI assessment. The impact agenda has gained increasing traction globally and that also is contributing to sector change. Ex-post assessments of impact, however, are not a necessary response to these changing conditions; rather, they are an extremely administratively burdensome and costly response. Canada provides an alternative example; it has a thriving knowledge translation expertise base, networks and fora, relevant certified training, an expectation from relevant funding schemes (across government and industry) for impact plans and evidence of impact track record, and still no ex-post assessment framework in place.

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

Comment:

**A small amount**

The Engagement exercise is critically underdeveloped, potentially misrepresentative, and for these reasons provides little value and clarity for any audience. The Impact case studies, however, may provide some clarity on how investments translate into tangible benefits by bringing some exposure to this, although the outreach and influence of the EI assessment exercise alone is likely limited to that end. It needs also to be stated that funding schemes and organisations seeking such tangible benefit from investment into research need to also critically think about how to actively support, monitor, and report such outcomes; it is not the responsibility of universities alone.

identify institutional processes and infrastructure that enable research engagement?

Comment:

**A small amount**

As stated above, the Engagement exercise contribution to learning is limited. At this stage, the growing academic and professional discourse around knowledge translation provides greater insight into 'what works'.

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

Comment:

#### **A moderate amount**

Firstly, it should be noted the phrasing adopted in this statement is incorrect; you do not translate research impact, rather research knowledge is translated into impact. The Impact assessment has definitely raised the profile of research/knowledge translation in the Australian research ecosystem, which is important to prompt more academic, institutional and research community (all stakeholders) consideration of how research translation works and might be supported. Victoria University, however, is cautious about the intentions behind this statement as currently worded, and in particular, given the methodology currently adopted. Caution needs to be applied in how impact is assessed and in particular how institutional approach to impact is assessed, if at all. As analysis of REF submissions demonstrated, there is no simple and replicable model to achieving or realising impact. What was conversely found through the REF was with almost 7,000 impact studies submitted, more than 3,000 of these demonstrated unique pathways to impact. Pathways to impact might result out of creative approaches to engagement and knowledge sharing in the absence of access to strategic funding, and these instances deserve as much praise as those cases that have benefitted from large amounts of resourcing.

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

Comment:

#### **A moderate amount**

By making favourably rated impact studies publicly available, the opportunity to identify ways institutions are currently translating research into impact is provided. However, the current methodological approach to limit case studies to one per institution limits the learning opportunity. Unlike the UK REF experience, which publishes all case studies regardless of rating, there is no opportunity afforded to learn what does not work.

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Page 12: EI Policy /2

#### **Q49**

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

#### **Neither agree nor disagree,**

Please explain your answer.:

It is difficult to divorce this question about objectives from methodology, as these should be supportive of each other. Given VU has misgivings about current methodological approaches to EI assessment, we can neither agree nor disagree with this statement.

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**Q50**

What impact has EI had on:

the Australian university research sector as a whole

**EI has raised the profile of research impact as an expected outcome of research investment. However, it has also imposed a high and costly reporting burden.**

Individual Universities

**EI has similarly raised the profile of research impact for individual universities, influenced research strategy and performance management.**

Researchers

**The Impact assessment has increased discussion of and reflection upon knowledge translation in some cohort of researchers, and as impact objectives have been intentionally picked up and reflected more prominently in research strategy, this discourse is broadening. The Engagement assessment has had minimal, if any, impact.**

**Q51**

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

Impact outcomes are being used to set institutional benchmarks in connection with strategy, however, the THE Impact ranking is of greater import given Victoria University's recent adoption of a whole-of-University Planetary Health agenda to influence positive contributions towards Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). VU has serious misgivings about the Engagement assessment, and for this reason, Engagement outcomes have no influence on our organisation.

**Q52**

The EI outcomes are valuable to you or your organisation.

**Disagree,**

Please explain your answer.:

As stated above, VU has recently aligned itself with the UN SDGs and the THE Impact ranking. These provide a more meaningful reference for Impact at our university. Moreover, at VU, engagement is viewed as an integral part of impact and is not conceptually separated from it, as is the case in the EI assessment. VU does not find value in either the Engagement assessment exercise, nor its outcomes.

**Q53**

How else could EI outcomes be used?

**Respondent skipped this question**

**Q54**

The current Engagement definition is appropriate.

**Neither agree nor disagree,**

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

The current definition provides opportunity to focus on one central piece of engagement necessary for impact; there must be engagement with an entity willing to co-produce and/or take up research knowledge and implement it in order to realise benefit. However, impact is often dependent and more effectively serviced through multiple stakeholder engagement, and critically, not only those (end-users) who will take up and implement research knowledge, but also those who will directly benefit, as well as those who might have vested interest to oppose change.

**Q55**

The current Impact definition is appropriate.

**Agree****Q56**

The current end-user definition is appropriate.

**Neither agree nor disagree****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.

**Respondent skipped this question****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?

**Yes,**

Please explain your answer.:

Impact (beyond academia) will not be a natural outcome of all research projects but may feature across research programs. For this reason, and for smaller institutions in particular, EI should not be conducted at any more granular level as it would be increasingly difficult to find examples across assessment cycles.

**Q60**

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

**Respondent skipped this question**

**Q61****The same number as in EI 2018**

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

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**Q62****Neither agree or disagree**

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

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**Q63**

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

The low-volume threshold needs some kind of volume measure; it seems appropriate given its concordance with ERA methodology, that this be based on number of research outputs. An alternative measure could be that which is used in the UK REF assessment; a threshold volume based on researcher numbers.

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

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

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**Q65**

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

**Strongly agree,**

Please explain your answer.:

Victoria University's primary position is that the Engagement exercise should be discontinued altogether. As a necessary feature for impact, engagement should more appropriately be described within context and through impact studies to support improved learnings on how engagement might be successfully forged. However, on the question of the current indicator suite specifically, the suite is entirely focussed on income-related data. Engagement with end-users also occurs through third-party funding and may not include the exchange of money at all. There should be a range of other measures that acknowledge that not all is reducible to a dollar value.

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**Q66**

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

**Neither agree nor disagree,**

Please explain your answer.:

While providing an easier data collection reference point, the reduction of engagement measures to ones of monetary value is perverse. Moreover, from VU's analysis on engagement outcomes, it would appear that Category 1 income data provides favourable consideration vis a vis the alternative measures available.

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**Q67**

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

**Neither agree nor disagree,**

Please explain your answer.:

This is quite a discipline specific measure and not broadly applicable.

**Q68**

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

**Yes,**

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

VU believes in-kind support is an important and relevant measure of engagement; of partners working with a shared commitment to realise impact. In-kind support is recognised in other spheres, such as community development and corporate citizenship, as a key input to the goal of creating social change. This similarly applies in the research sector. In-kind support from end user partners is an important indicator of a willingness to collaborate for change, whether economic, environmental, social change, or a combination of these. The relevance of this measure has already been recognised in both scholarship and best practice on engagement in the United States of America (US). For example, the National Collaborative for the Study of University Engagement (refer to <http://ncsue.msu.edu/>) at Michigan State University includes in-kind contributions as a key data field in the Outreach and Engagement Measurement Instrument it developed to capture institutional engagement activities; a tool that is used by a number of US institutions.

**Q69**

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

**Respondent skipped this question****Q70**

Should any of the current engagement metrics be redesigned?

**Respondent skipped this question****Q71**

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

**Disagree,**

Please explain your answer.:

The HDR co-supervision indicator is not representative. Universities traditionally have strict eligibility rules that generally exclude recognition of industry mentors to HDR students as formal 'supervisors'. Industry mentors would be a more appropriate indicator.

**Q72**

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

Patents

Comment:

**No**

The patent indicators are not representative of engagement as defined by the ARC, which refers to an 'interaction' undertaken in "a context of partnership and reciprocity". Such an interaction is not necessarily present when lodging a patent, nor when patents cite traditional research outputs. Furthermore, these indicators would appear more relevant to an impact story. With the arbitrary separation of engagement and impact in this assessment exercise, the value of this indicator is lost.

Research commercialisation income

Comment:

**No**

Could be used as an additional metric but not part of a standard suite as the measure is not broadly relevant across disciplines.

Registered designs

Comment:

**No**

Could be used as an additional metric but not part of a standard suite as the measure is not broadly relevant across disciplines.

Plant breeder's rights

Comment:

**No**

Could be used as an additional metric but not part of a standard suite as the measure is not broadly relevant across disciplines.

NHMRC endorsed guidelines

Comment:

**No**

Could be used as an additional metric but not part of a standard suite as the measure is not broadly relevant across disciplines.

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**Q73**

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

**Agree,**

Please explain your answer.:

A narrative approach is critical in the current Engagement methodology as it offers a point of redress to the limited dataset. Victoria University believes, however, the Engagement exercise should be abolished entirely. As a necessary feature for impact, engagement should more appropriately be described within the context and through impact case studies to support improved learnings on how engagement might be successfully forged.

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

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

**Q76****Neither agree nor disagree**

The engagement narrative needs to be longer.

**Q77**

Additional evidence is needed within the narrative.

**Strongly agree,**

If you agree, what evidence should be provided?:  
Given the highly limited dataset currently used for Engagement, the provision of additional evidence MUST be allowed within the narrative. This could include, in-kind contributions, industry mentors to HDR students, patent citations, any applied measure currently used in ERA; whatever might be relevant to the discipline under consideration. The opportunity to provide additional evidence could also provide a point of reference and evidence-base for the ARC to understand relevant metrics to this exercise and to, overtime, influence a more nuanced and appropriate dataset relevant to and representative of different discipline areas.

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**Q78****Agree**

The narrative approach is suitable for describing and assessing Impact.

**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.

**Strong disagree,**

Please explain your answer.:  
There should be a volume determinant on the number of case studies required from an institution within a unit of evaluation. Larger universities will have greater volumes of research within their programs to choose case studies from; this approach provides them with a distinct advantage and could contribute to bias in results.

**Q81**

The impact narrative needs to be longer.

**Neither agree nor disagree,**

Please explain your answer.:

While often difficult to explain impact effectively within the limitations provided, the approach does require a discipline for brevity and clarity of message, which are important skills for science communication.

**Q82**

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

**Agree,**

If you answered 'Yes', what evidence should be provided?:  
The opportunity to provide additional evidence as might be deemed relevant to the impact study at hand, should continue to be provided.

**Q83**

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

**Yes,**

Please explain your answer.:

Quantitative indicators for impact would be case dependent. The exercise cannot be reduced to a standard set of quantitative indicators as the variability in both pathways to and types of impact is extremely high.

**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.

**Neither agree nor disagree,**

Please explain your answer.:

The narrative approach is highly appropriate and this context is critical to understanding how impact may have been realised and if its realisation was purposefully supported. This consultation question, however, also references the suitability for assessing approach to impact. It is highly inappropriate that approach to impact is assessed in its own right. The capability across institutions to support approaches to impact in any systemic fashion is highly variable and largely dependent upon the resource base of the institution for its research endeavour. That is not to say that impact cannot still be supported both creatively (in low-cost approaches) and in a more localised fashion. Including an assessment of 'institutional' approach to impact sets up a potentially biased assessment approach.

**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.

**Strongly disagree,**

Please explain your answer.:

There should be a volume determinant on the number of impact studies (inclusive of approach to impact and impact narratives) required from an institution within a unit of evaluation. Larger universities will have greater volumes of research within their programs to choose studies from; the current one study per institution approach provides them with a distinct advantage and could contribute to bias in results

**Q88**

The approach to impact narrative needs to be longer.

**Neither agree nor disagree,**

Please explain your answer.:

While often difficult to explain impact effectively within the limitations provided, the approach does however necessitate brevity and clarity of message, which are important skills for science communication.

**Q89**

There is a need for additional evidence to be provided.

**Agree,**

Please explain your answer.:

The opportunity to provide additional evidence as might be deemed relevant to the impact study at hand, should continue to be provided

**Q90**

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

**Yes,**

Please explain your answer.:

Only in the sense that the Engagement exercise ought to be abolished entirely as this should be captured and contextualised in the impact study under the approach to impact section.

Page 19: EI Methodology /6

**Q91**

The engagement rating scale is suitable for assessing research engagement.

**Strongly disagree,**

Please explain your answer.:

Victoria University believes the Engagement assessment provides limited value and should be abolished altogether. Engagement should instead be profiled within approach to impact sections of case studie, as a necessary precursor to realising impactful outcomes.

**Q92****Neither agree nor disagree**

The descriptors for the engagement rating scale are suitable.

**Q93**

The impact rating scale is suitable for assessing impact.

**Agree,**

Please explain your answer.:

The current scale adopted and associated descriptors are reasonable and fair. As research engagement and impact are areas of increasing rather than established scholarship, VU believes this less loaded (to those adopted in the 2017 pilot exercise) and non-discriminatory rating system is appropriate.

**Q94****Agree**

The descriptors for the impact rating scale are suitable.

**Q95**

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

**Strongly disagree,**

Please explain your answer.:

Approach to impact should not form a separate assessment. The only assessment should be on impact; approach to impact merely helps contextualise that impact and should not be subject to a separate rating.

**Q96****Neither agree nor disagree**

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

Page 20: EI Methodology /7

**Q97**

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

**Yes,**

Please explain your answer.:

Opportunity to showcase interdisciplinary research should continue, particularly given the necessity of such approaches to effectively address complex and multi-faceted problems.

**Q98**

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?

**Yes,**

Please explain your answer.:

This approach is vital to supporting the objective to increase the profile of Indigenous research.

**Q99**

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

**No,**

Please explain your answer.:

Engagement should be profiled through impact studies, not as a separate exercise.

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Page 21: Overarching Issues Common to ERA and EI
**Q100****Every five years**

How often should ERA occur?

**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 five year cycle better aligns with university strategy cycles and also provides an increased period between cycles to reflect on results, consult on approaching rounds, and provide advance visibility of guidance documentation.

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Page 22: Overarching Issues Common to ERA and EI
**Q102****Every five years**

How often should the EI assessment occur?

**Q103**

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?

In addition to those reasons provided for ERA, the longer period between cycles is more appropriate and reasonable, for smaller institutions in particular, to have prospective and new impactful research upon which to report. Impact requires significant lead time, and in the case of medical disciplines in particular, can exceed 15 years.

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Page 23: Overarching Issues Common to both ERA and EI
**Q104**

ERA and EI should be combined into the one assessment.

**Agree,**

Please explain your answer.:

Victoria University agrees with this proposition conceptually in order to combat a potential duality and disaggregation that might result from the separation of 'quality' and 'impact'.

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**Q105**

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

Advantages

**Protects against a conceptual disaggregation of 'quality' and 'impact'.**

Disadvantages

**This presents a significant workload requiring intensive resourcing over an extended period.**

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**Q106****Respondent skipped this question**

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

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Page 24: Overarching Issues Common to Both ERA and EI

**Q107****Respondent skipped this question**

In your view, what data sources could ERA utilise?

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**Q108****Respondent skipped this question**

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

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**Q109**

Are there efficiencies that could be introduced?

**Yes,**

Please describe.:

There are potential for efficiencies to be introduced through the increased use of citations analysis for evaluation, supported through some automation provided by the annual collection of data.

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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?

Investigations to support development of impact study narratives given this information has not been readily collected in the past.

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**Q111**

Are there efficiencies that could be introduced?

**No,**

Please describe.:

Efficiencies are more likely to result from practice and the embedding of responses within institutional settings to support the planning for and monitoring of impact.

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Page 26: Overarching Issues Common to Both ERA and EI

**Q112**

ORCID iDs should be mandatory for ERA.

**Agree,**

Please explain your answer.:

ORCIDs should be made mandatory in the medium term, if not sooner, but perhaps introduced as an option in the first instance.

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**Q113**

What are the advantages and/or disadvantages of mandatory ORCID iDs?

Advantages

**The introduction of ORCID iDs will streamline the collection of publication data, associated with prior Institution affiliation. It will also provide a consistent or persistent Identifier against all researchers which will enable greater, if not, total automation for future assessments.**

Disadvantages

**Individual ORCID accounts require active management by researchers**

**Q114**

The automatic harvesting of output data using ORCID iDs would streamline a university's submission process.

**Strongly agree,**

Please explain your answer.:

Well maintained ORCID iDs would provide persistent Identifiers enabling accurate and comprehensive indexing through SCOPUS and Clarivate etc. This would streamline the data capture process and enable a more complete and comprehensive dataset.

**Q115**

What are the advantages and/or disadvantages of automatic harvesting of output data using ORCID iDs?

**Respondent skipped this question**

**Q116**

DOIs should be mandatory for ERA.

**Agree,**

Please explain your answer.:

Services such as unpaywall etc utilise DOI's which will further enhance the metadata capture of datasets (Open Access) and providing persistent identifiers to outputs. This will further enable a transition to further or complete automation.

**Q117**

What are the advantages and/or disadvantages of mandatory DOIs?

**Respondent skipped this question**

Page 27: Overarching Issues Common to Both ERA and EI

**Q118**

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?

**Yes,**

Please explain your answer.:

The SEER platform could be utilised to transfer data between institutions when appropriate (Staff transfers). Data that is initially captured, validated and verified by an institution should not need to be subjected to the same process again should it be transferred to another institution.

**Q119**

**Respondent skipped this question**

What are the advantages and/or disadvantages?

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Page 28: Additional Comments

**Q120**

**Respondent skipped this question**

Please provide any additional comments:

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