

Australian Research Council

Excellence in Research for Australia

Submission Contact Details (required)*

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1. ERA 2010 Discipline Matrix

This submission is made by the Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (DASSH), and therefore responses are based on the impact of ERA in these particular disciplines.

DASSH Response and recommendations for changes to the indicated set

- 1.1 Only conference papers that are fully written, refereed and published in conference proceedings should be included as outputs. Such papers may not be otherwise assessed, whereas the quality of other conference papers is more difficult to assess, or may be double counted if published subsequently in a journal or book chapter.
- 1.2 Publishers for book chapters and books should be ranked. This would allow these research outputs to be more comparable to outputs in ranked journals and would counterbalance some of the subjective elements of peer review. This is not a recommendation to dismiss peer review completely.
- 1.3 Panels should be expected to provide an account (at a 2 or 4 digit FOR level) how indicators are used in that panel. It would be expected that whatever indicators are provided to panels should be used explicitly in assessing the quality of research.
- 1.4 DASSH recommends considering the volume of research outputs by ranked journals and books relative to a discipline. In some disciplines, a small number of A and A* journals disproportionately publish a high volume of the total research published in those disciplines. PCE publications tend to be shorter and published in journals that are published more frequently than HCA and SBE. In HCA and some SBE disciplines, publications tend to be longer and journals published less frequently. It is important to consider *what proportion* of the research outputs are in A and A* journals by a discipline and not just *what the proportion of journals in a discipline* are ranked A or A*.

2. Cluster Structure

DASSH Response

The Fields of Research in the SBE and HCA clusters cover research undertaken by approximately 43% of the FTE academics reported in ERA and approximately 40% of the weighted research outputs. The Fields of research in SBE and HCA map much more loosely to disciplinary practice and institutional structures than those in Biology, Chemical Sciences and Earth Sciences. PCE and BB share an overarching positivist, empirical method, while research within SBE and HCA include debate about the nature of the field of inquiry, approaches to fundamental questions and methods, as well as distributing different topics of research focus. The Fields of Research were not designed to capture these nuances.

As a result, the Fields of Research map poorly onto current research practice and activity. One clear example of this is in FOR1904 Performing Arts and Creative Writing -- which is a very broad field of research that mixes the medium of the research outcome, the scope of the research field, the methods and disciplinary grounding.

Similarly the Fields of Research and methods of ERA tend to discount cutting-edge research that links different disciplinary bases. The point here is not that ERA can't recognise high quality research that draws on disciplinary expertise in interdisciplinary research (although that argument could well be made) but rather that ERA is, inevitably, conservative in its assessment of quality and that highly ranked research journals in one discipline are unlikely to rapidly publish research that pushes the accepted frontiers of that discipline. This is even more problematic when the novel area of research challenges disciplinary boundaries.

Recognising that it is unlikely that there will be a complete revisiting of the FOR in the near future, DASSH argues that for each FOR, there should be a careful review of the appropriate indicators for that FOR. Adjustments to indicators should not necessarily occur at the Cluster level, but at the 2 and 4 digit FOR.

3. Low Volume Threshold

A. Output types for inclusion in the low-volume threshold calculation

DASSH Response and additional comments

In relation to (c) we recommend that only conference papers that are fully written, refereed and published in conference proceedings should be included as outputs, because they would not otherwise be assessed. This guards against non refereed and abstract based selected papers being included and double counted if published subsequently in a journal or book chapter.

B. Four-digit units of evaluation

DASSH Response and additional comments

DASSH prefers option (b). It is very likely that a threshold of 50 weighted research outputs (including 5:1 weighting for books) in all HCA and SBE FOR would reduce the number of 4 digit FOR rated at 1 or 2 as these areas would only be reported at the 2 digit FOR, if there were research activity in the other 4 digit FOR in that discipline. This would allow for a more accurate comparison between disciplines and clusters.

The low threshold calculation should weight books at 5 and not include conference publications.

C. Two-digit units of evaluation

DASSH Response and additional comments

Raising the threshold of outputs for 2 digit FOR to 100 is likely to mean that high quality research by academics working in small universities will not be assessed in ERA at all. This may lead to a false understanding of some areas of research excellence that depend more heavily on sole researchers. It is reasonable, nonetheless, to modestly raise the 2 digit FOR outputs threshold to 75, which, consistent with our response to 3A would reduce the number of low-rating low-threshold UoE's but would not lead to conflating number of researchers (or outputs) with quality of research.

We prefer a modified option (b).

4. Researcher Eligibility

DASSH Response and additional comments

Options (c) & (d).

DASSH believes that there are within the ERA 2010 report a number of people whose research is counted in more than one institution, due to plural (or multiple) status as conjoint or honorary research associates. A 50% FTE requirement would reduce the distortion (double counting) that may occur, while also acknowledging that a number of excellent researchers may be in fractional roles due to familial, health or other equity concerns. The requirement of 12 months employment will reduce the perverse effects of staff being signed on to institutions not as part of an existing academic strategy, but simply to pad out the research profile of an institution.

5. Reference Period for income, applied and esteem measures

DASSH Response and additional comments

It is clear that in SBE and HCA, a longer citation period is normal (than for PCE), and that citations continue to accrue to significant research a decade or more post-publication. Extending the citation period to reflect the outputs reference period will not substantively redress this issue. Rather the citation period could extend from the start of the last ERA outputs reference period— ie including citation of the publications collected for the 2010 ranking.

6. Patents, plant breeder's rights and registered designs

DASSH Response and additional comments

N/A

7. Publication of data

DASSH Response and additional comments

We prefer Option (b). ERA 2010 has provided researchers, institutions and disciplines with a vast amount of data, however many important questions can not be readily addressed without access to unit of evaluation data. As a result, a number of myths about ERA will emerge without foundation in fact and those developing research strategies to enhance Australia's research performance will be hampered by the failure to publish the full data.

Further ERA data is a rich resource for SBE researchers and was publicly funded. Given the expectations on researchers that data from public funding will normally be available in an accessible repository, it is consistent with DIISR policy that the ERA data be publicly available.

8. General comments

DASSH Response

8.1 With respect to research performance and allocation of research resources between clusters, the SBE and HCA clusters (which include architecture, business, economics, education and psychology) comprise 17,095 FTE staff, which is 43% of FTE academics reported in the ERA 2010 Report. These disciplines received 14.5% of the research income reported in the ERA (\$1,094,956,000 out of \$7,510,386,182).

According to the ERA 2010 report, the amount of research money available per FTE academic in HCA is \$46,701, and for SBE \$74,702 (average \$190,769 for all clusters). HCA and SBE have the lowest \$/research output cost. We note that ERA reports about 40,000 total FTE Research or Teaching and Research academics and Universities Australia reports 107,000 in Australian Universities. HCA produced 60,027 weighted outputs: an average of \$5061.90 per research output and 9.22 outputs per FTE academic. SBE produced 77.478 outputs at \$10,210.67 per output and 7.3 outputs per FTE. (BCH has the highest cost per research output \$456,057; EE has the highest output per FTE 12.97)

According to Universities Australia, Education, Management and Commerce, Studies of Society and Culture and Creative Arts comprise 62.1% of EFT load. This indicates that the majority of HCA and SBE researchers are in Teaching and Research positions and are teaching the bulk of Australian University students. They have received a small proportion of research funding and are still able to produce high quality research across the country.

In order to accurately reflect research capacity, DASSH recommends reporting on research staffing and research funding at both the level of broad fields of research, and at the institutional level. Specifically DASSH recommends the following:

- (i) Separately assess the number of full time researchers (or research intensive academics with 60% or more time available for research) from those that are research and teaching academics (up to 80% teaching)
- (ii) Report on the amount of average research funding (excluding salaries) per research output by Field of Research.

8.2 The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) at the University of Western Australia has argued in a Universities Australia presentation on ERA, that the high rankings of Group

of Eight Universities is hardly surprising given the collaboration amongst Go8 researchers in their publications and the fact that ERA allows the same research output to be assessed as an output from each author's institution. As a result, a publication with eight authors, each from a different Go8 university that is assessed as a 5, will be assessed as an outcome ranked 5 at each institution. This has two effects.

- a) In those disciplines where there are normally one or only a small number of authors, each output effectively counts less (for example, an important *Nature* article with 20 authors is counted 20 times if the authors are in 20 institutions, and important article with one author in an A* History journal is counted once). The repeated evaluation of the same publications really only rates an authors collaborators, not the research output.
- b) It is unclear whether the total research outputs by FOR reflects the total number of research outputs (unique articles) or the aggregate number of research outputs for each institution in each FOR (repeat counting of outputs by each author's institution). If the total research outputs includes outputs that are multiply counted, then the relative research output by discipline is significantly distorted. In this case weighting of outputs (dividing output by number of authors as well as weighting books as 5) would provide a more accurate accounting of research productivity and reduce distortions in evaluation of relative quality.

Professor Jennifer Radbourne
President of DASSH