

DASSH response to the Call for Comment on Combining Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) and the Higher Education Research Data Collection (HERDC)

The Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (DASSH) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission in response to the Department of Education and the Australian Research Council's (ARC) call for comment on the preferred model for a single collection of data for the Higher Education Research Data Collection (HERDC) and Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA).

1. *Please indicate which option your institution would prefer for a single research data collection and why.*

DASSH welcomes the Australian Government's acceptance of the recommendation to create a single higher education research data collection system contained in the PhillipsKPA "Review of the Reporting Requirements for Universities". We fully support their initiative to reduce the reporting burden on universities by eliminating duplication. The proposed combination of the research data and research income collections presents a more streamlined, inclusive and time-saving approach than the existing system.

DASSH also agrees with the focus on the ERA data collection and its inclusion in all options presented in the Consultation Paper. Of the two systems under discussion in the Consultation Paper, the ERA collection is the more comprehensive and inclusive, particularly for the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (ASSH) disciplines.

DASSH is strongly supportive of Option 1, as it would significantly lessen the administrative burden upon universities in regard to submitting data. Option 1 provides the most accurate reflection of a university's research outputs, especially creative and performing arts outputs, which are not currently eligible in HERDC, and the submission and collection processes do not change.

Though not listed as an option, DASSH would welcome an **amendment to the data collection period under Option 1**, whereby universities only had to submit data **once every five years**. Not only is the preparation and submission of the ERA data an extremely time consuming administrative exercise, but the rigorous peer review processes within the ASSH disciplines results in research material taking longer to be published. By extending the reporting time frame, universities would be more accurately able to assess research performance in these disciplines.

2. *What are the anticipated transitional activities, costs and savings for your institution through the creation of a single higher education research data collection?*

On the whole, there should be no additional expenses for institutions in a transition to a single higher education research data collection. In fact, it is likely to result in savings as reporting moves from annual (HERDC) and triennial (ERA) approaches, to solely triennial with Option 1.

An obvious area for consolidation between HERDC and ERA data collections are **Non-Traditional Research Outputs (NTRO)**, particularly those within the creative and performing arts disciplines. While NTROs are given equal recognition in the ERA data collection, they continue to be excluded from the HERDC data collection. Aligning HERDC with ERA in this respect would be particularly helpful. While this change would have some impact on the distribution of Research Block Grant (RBG) funding to institutions, it would not increase the administrative cost to institutions (because NTROs must be reported for ERA), nor the overall RBG funding. Instead it would treat more consistently reporting and distribution of funding for research outputs across disciplinary areas.

DASSH highlights the need for consistency and clarity in how **NTROs** are handled. There is also need to address issues of the quality and equivalence of NTROs compared to traditional outputs.

DASSH would be keen to assist the Department and the ARC in the development of a standardized set of robust criteria to evaluate and categorise NTROs, which we believe would be widely welcomed by the sector.

Professor John Germov

President

Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (DASSH)

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About DASSH

The Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (DASSH) is the authoritative agency on research, teaching and learning for the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (ASSH) in Australian and New Zealand universities.

DASSH supports those within these institutions who have responsibility for the governance and management of research and teaching and learning in their universities. DASSH also supports those who aspire to these positions through a Network of Associate Deans (Learning and Teaching) and a Network of Associate Deans (Research).