



**DASSH Conference - ADR Network Meeting**  
**Wednesday September 23, 2015**  
**Meeting Notes**

The ADR Network continues to function as an important forum for discussion and exchange of information amongst Associate Deans (Research) in HASS disciplines across the sector.

In 2015 the network held one meeting, immediately prior to the DASSH conference. There were 33 attendees from universities in Australia and New Zealand.

This event focused on three main agenda items:

**1. Institutional KPIs for research performance.**

**Open Discussion**

Many institutions across the sector have introduced or are in the process of introducing research performance targets related to income, publications and HDR completions – at institution, faculty, school and department level, as well as for individual staff.

Discussion focused on a range of issues including:

- The merits or otherwise of ranked journal lists and other criteria for assessing quality of research outputs. A number of universities have introduced ranked lists for journals and some have introduced venue lists for NTROs. While there was some support for this practice within the group, some network members expressed concern about it.
- Tensions between quantity and quality drivers, specifically HERDC and ERA.
- The importance of differentiating between research performance norms and expectations in STEM and HASS disciplines and among HASS disciplines. Concern was expressed by some ADRs about the imposition in some universities of STEM-based university-wide research performance expectations.
- The merits or otherwise of the increasing use of citation metrics as a proxy for quality, including within HASS disciplines.
- The role of international rankings in driving the development of institutional KPIs.
- How impact might be measured and the importance of establishing impact measures, such as case studies, that highlight the diverse societal impacts of HASS research.
- Differences amongst universities in the way in which research is or is not incorporated into workload models.

The network agreed to establish two working parties, which will report back by the

end of the year.

One working party will develop a position statement on criteria for high quality publication outputs, and characteristics of low quality publication outputs, including journal articles, books and book chapters. Members of the working party: Rachel Ankeny (Adelaide), Gerry Docherty (Griffith), Susan Martin (LaTrobe), Alan McKee (UTS), Allan McConnell (U. Sydney).

The other working party will gather information about the way in which research is incorporated into workload models across the sector. Members of the working party: Jakob Hohwy (Monash), Andrew May (Melbourne), Jack Reynolds (Deakin).

## **2. Current Directions in Research Funding Policy**

**Speaker: Virginia Hart, Head of Research Review Secretariat, Department of Education and Training**

Ms. Hart's presentation addressed four main issues:

1. The objectives behind the development of the Science and Research Priorities; the capability mapping exercise currently underway in the Department of Industry, Innovation and Science to identify areas of strength, weakness and gaps in research capability related to these priorities; and the rolling 2 year review of the priorities and associated practical challenges. Ms. Hart emphasised that the framing of the practical challenges was intended to include HASS disciplines and that clever HASS researchers would find ways to link their research to the priorities. In subsequent discussion, network members expressed concern that the priorities and practical challenges are STEM-driven rather than HASS-driven and emphasised the importance for our disciplines of working collectively with DASSH and the AAH to push back against the narrow focus of the priorities.

2. The Chief Scientist's analysis of the deficiencies of Australia's STEM performance at all levels from primary education upwards, as well as the lack of a national research and research infrastructure strategy. This analysis resulted in the development of the consultation paper, *Vision for a science nation*. In this context, Ms. Hart spoke about the current government focus on reviewing the adequacy of HDR training arrangements.

3. Three reviews relevant to the future of research policy:

- The Research Infrastructure Review, which was proposed by the 2014 National Commission of Audit. The report by the independent review panel provides recommendations for a more integrated, whole of Government approach to investment in research infrastructure. The Government's response to the review is currently being developed.
- ACOLA Review of Australia's research training system, which is considering a range of issues including:
  - New research training models (e.g. whether a 2 year research masters should be a prerequisite for PhD entry)
  - The structure of PhD programs (e.g. whether PhD training should include training in a range of generic skills)
  - Ways to enhance quality, industry engagement and mobility (e.g.

- cadetships, exchanges, placements)
  - Alternative entry pathways for students from non-traditional backgrounds
  - Whether current financing arrangements (e.g. through RBG and APA scholarship) are working optimally to support PhD training
- Consultations on the discussion paper will take place in October and November 2015, with the report to the Minister of Education due in March 2016.
- Review of Research Funding and Policy Arrangements. Ms. Hart is currently working on this review with Allan Watt. The Terms of Reference for the review are to:
    - Reform the Research Block Grant Funding Arrangements – stakeholder feedback to date indicates agreement on the need for reform of the broad architecture of the RBG, including simplifying the architecture and consolidating funding schemes (e.g. RIBG, SRE)
    - Provide incentives for engagement and collaboration between the research and industry sectors and other end users – stakeholder feedback to date indicates incentives across the research funding system might be useful; third stream innovation funding as introduced in the UK and elsewhere is another possible option being canvassed
    - Encourage research commercialisation and knowledge transfer – stakeholder feedback to date indicates the need for significant cultural change both within industry and in the research sector, as well as regulatory mechanisms to improve the interface between university researchers and industry
    - Ensure competitive grants processes recognise the quality of proposals and, where appropriate, opportunities for commercialisation and industry collaboration
    - Develop measures/ metrics of research-industry engagement and collaboration – stakeholder feedback to date indicates the need for a balanced range of measures (quantitative and qualitative) for knowledge transfer and engagement

4. Rankings, metrics and impact. The strengths and weaknesses of international rankings measures are currently under discussion by the government. Identified weaknesses include lack of measures for innovation and engagement. Times Higher Education rankings are currently working on a set of indicators for innovation, but the data to date suggests that these indicators may not be useful. A question that has been on the government agenda is whether there would be any utility in developing Australian rankings that include measures of teaching quality, engagement and innovation. A number of Australian university groups (e.g. ATN, Go8, IRU), as well as the Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering (ATSE) are also assessing metrics for impact.\*

\*Note: There was a presentation of the ATSE proposal at the DASSH main conference. The slides for the presentation are available on the DASSH website. In my view, the proposal raises some significant concerns for HASS disciplines, so I have provided a summary of the presentation at the end of this report.

### **3. ERA 2015 debrief Open Discussion**

Discussion focused on a range of issues, including:

- Inadequacies of FoR codes in some fields. E.g. Breadth and diversity of 1904, and the lack of a code for music education; lack of codes for Asian Studies and Indigenous Studies; lack of a code for scholarship of teaching and the conflicting drivers within universities related to this kind of scholarship (encouragement to publish scholarship of teaching often in conflict with quality assessment in ERA). The difficulties involved in amending the FoR codes were also discussed.
- The merits or otherwise of the peer review process and whether or not a citation-based assessment process across the board in ERA (using discipline specific relative citation indices) would benefit or disadvantage HASS disciplines or lead to the same outcomes.
- Concern was expressed that the ARC seemed to have had trouble recruiting peer reviewers as some were appointed very late in the process and some appear to be quite junior. The importance of encouraging senior staff to participate as peer reviewers, as well as the need for better incentives from the ARC and recognition from institutions for undertaking peer review was also raised. ERA assessment dates need to be better coordinated with ARC grant assessment timelines and end of semester marking and other deadlines. Other issues discussed included lack of clarity in the guidelines for peer reviewers and the inadequacy of the 4 category quality scale.

#### **Future Agenda Items**

Linda Barwick (Sydney Conservatorium of Music) will liaise with DASSH and the Deans of Creative Arts to follow up on the development of sector wide quality indicators for creative outputs. This was one of the main topics of last year's network meeting.

Science and Priority Areas – ADR Network wants to liaise with DASSH and the Academy of Humanities in lobbying for a broader approach to national research priorities, including broader definitions of innovation, industry and research infrastructure.

Impact – discussion of a pluralistic approach to impact, with the aim of informing and shaping any possible impact assessment

Updates on the ACOLA review, review of Research Funding and Policy Arrangements

Mid-career researchers – discussion of strategies and support mechanisms

Thanks to the network members who volunteered to act as network convenor for the September 2016 DASSH meeting while I am overseas on study leave. Eva Kemps from Flinders will be Acting Network Convenor in 2016. Network members who expressed a willingness to take on this role may want to provide Eva with assistance in planning the April/May satellite event (location yet to be determined) or the

September meeting at UTas.

### **Addendum**

#### Summary of Presentation to DASSH conference by ATSE President Dr Alan Finkel of ATSE proposal for Research Metrics for Engagement

The concern of ATSE is that ERA measures research quality but not engagement with industry and the community. The context for this concern is that Australia is the worst performer in the OECD for collaboration between universities and industry.

In response to this concern ATSE has proposed to government the introduction of the REA (Research Engagement for Australia) assessment process that would take place alongside ERA and use reported data collected for HERDC and ERA.

REA would be metric based and use income (Category 2, 3 & 4, plus partner organisation cash component of Linkage grant income) as a proxy for engagement.

REA metrics would be at the 2 –digit code level and would measure:

- i. Engagement per FTE
- ii. Share of national engagement income for the discipline at each institution
- iii. Engagement intensiveness of the institution

A pilot based on the proposal has already been undertaken with universities in South Australia and Queensland.

Recommendations from the pilot are:

- Incorporate additional financial inputs such as Rural Research and Development Corporation income
- Include explanatory vignettes to assist in interpreting outcomes of REA

The stated purpose of the REA is to institutionalize drivers for behavior modification, thereby improving rates of university engagement with industry.

The proposal is to introduce REA for ERA 2018. Currently 5% of RBG funding is fine-tuned based on ERA data. The proposal would be to have a further percentage of RBG funding fine-tuned based on REA data.

In question time Dr. Finkel strongly resisted the suggestion that REA should include a case study component, on the grounds that it would be too expensive and the government would not support it. While acknowledging that many HASS forms of engagement would not be captured by the metric based approach his position seemed to be that this approach is non-negotiable. Clearly ATSE has been undertaking significant lobbying for its proposal with the Departments of Education and Industry, Innovation and Science.

The Australian Academy of Humanities has put in a submission raising concerns about the ATSE proposal. I will follow up with the AAH concerning their submission.

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