DASSH ADRs network
12 September 2018

Discussion session 1: Engagement and Impact
The ADRs discussed Helen Groth's notes about a possible DASSH ADR Network submission to the ARC providing feedback on the 2018 Engagement and Impact Assessment exercise.

Overview
- There was disagreement in the room about the rationale behind the Engagement and Impact exercise.
- On the one hand some voices saw a value in being involved in a benchmarking process, and saw it as supporting the "social license" of universities by explaining to the public the rationale behind university funding. Similarly others saw the value in pushing universities to make themselves more relevant.
- On the other hand, other voices in the room questioned the exercise and suggested we should ask for more information about what this exercise is for – a cost benefit analysis, particularly given that no income is attached to results.
- There was a suggestion that we need a HASS specific definition of engagement and impact – as per ANU definitions proposed by Michael Wesley.

Timing
- There was consensus in the room that the assessment should not run every three years – particularly given that impact takes a long time to achieve, so if we report every three years we'll be reporting the same case studies for several rounds.
- There was general support for running the E and I exercise with every second ERA – ie, every six years.
- There was no support for running E and I at a different time from ERA

Remove quantitative indicators
- There was strong consensus in the room for retaining quantitative indicators for engagement in HASS peer review disciplines. To remove them would send a signal that the value of HASS is ineffable. A mixed model is best.

Expanding case studies
- There was strong consensus in the room against having more case studies. Working at a 4 digit level would be problematic as there probably wouldn't be enough HASS case studies across the country for all 4 digit codes.

Review of FoR codes
- Most voices in the room supported the review of FoR codes (see below).

Acknowledging in-kind
- Strong consensus supporting this. Linkage projects show there are already ways of measuring and recording this.

Clearer guidelines
- Agreement that we need clearer guidelines – for example, about whether we will be allowed to resubmit case studies in multiple rounds? How much do they have to change between rounds?

Extra stuff
- The exclusion of impact within the higher education sector is problematic for research in education, HR, etc.

Quick chat: What changes do we want to see to the FoRs in the recently-announced review?

- URL - https://www.arc.gov.au/news-publications/media/media-releases/review-robust-anzsrc-research-classification
- There was agreement in the room that the current FoR system is unworkable and should be redesigned from scratch.
- A new system should start by asking what purposes the FoR taxonomy needs to serve.
- This is particularly the case given that new digital methods of data management and searching mean that it is possible to, for example, use keywords and word maps to assign projects to assessors with more precision than is allowed by disciplinary codes.
- These new methods of navigating data also allow for interdisciplinary projects to be managed with ease.
- A taxonomy could be organised around research areas or topics rather than disciplines.
- It was proposed that if we do retain some form of disciplinary taxonomy, working only at the 2 digit level might be preferable.
- It is important that the FoR review process is guided by, and primarily seeks input from, researchers.

Discussion Session 2: Responding to the way key decision-makers judge the quality of NTROs as academic research

- There was a general level of concern in the room about what the survey revealed about how experts assess the quality of NTROs at a national level; and also about the potential of the survey itself to damage the HASS sector.
- There was also a methodological critique of the survey – particularly whether the "It depends" category renders the quantitative data meaningless.
- There was consensus that the data suggests that NTRO producers should get strong support in writing their 250-word research narratives.
- The group noted that none of the consensus criteria in the sector are about the NTRO itself – rather they are about the research statement.
- There was concern that the experts at a national level don't refer to criteria that some ADRs thought important – venue/outlet, and a clear research question.
- Not all creative practice is academic research. Some work currently submitted as research – particularly in the creative arts - might be better submitted as impact and engagement to avoid "retrofitting". Practitioners could work with academic researchers to produce engagement around their research.
- How can universities value creative practice for, eg, promotion, outside of a research framework? Can universities award workload for practice – particularly in Schools of Creative Arts?
- The group discussed why scores are falling in FoR 19 in each round. Suggestions included: 1904 is such a hybrid code that it is unlikely that any one university will excel in all the areas, including Creative Writing, Music and Theatre; because the

assessors are becoming more confident in judging research and spotting NTROs that aren't really research; because universities are submitting more stuff as NTROs because of the pressure to increase research outputs; or because universities don't have the confidence to say what counts as a high quality academic NTRO and are submitting work that is aesthetically strong but research weak.

- Can we get more information from the ARC about how the ERA panels are actually making decisions about the quality of academic research? Could the three relevant organisations of Deans, and the Learned academies work together to lobby the ARC to release this information? Currently the panel members have to sign confidentiality agreements that make it difficult for the sector to understand how decisions are being made.

Future directions

Ideas for next meeting:

- Panel on increasing Indigenous research capacity in universities
- Alternative funding sources for HASS research
- Examples of how universities are preparing for the next Engagement and Impact exercise
- Guest speaker from the ARC