



Report of DASSH Satellite Event - ADR Network Meeting Swinburne University, May 23rd 2016

The satellite meeting was well attended by around 20 network members. The agenda for the event was quite packed. In addition to discussing the draft report of the working party 'Measuring HASS research quality', there were two sessions dedicated to discussion of two recently released consultation papers, on *Engagement and Impact Assessment* and *Sharper incentives for engagement: New research block grants arrangements for universities*. DASSH had requested the input of the ADR Network into the DASSH submissions in response to both papers. The timing of the satellite meeting, which provided network members with the opportunity to discuss and collate our input, was therefore fortuitous.

Outcomes and discussion of working party report: Measuring HASS Research Quality
Speaker: Prof. Alan McKee, UTS (chair of working party)

At the 2015 DASSH conference, the network established a working party to develop a position statement in response to the introduction of institutional KPI's for research performance. The working party, chaired by Prof. Alan McKee, subsequently gathered data on current research quality assessment practices in the HASS disciplines within universities and drafted a discussion paper documenting its findings together with a set of recommendations for measuring HASS research quality. The paper was circulated to network members prior to the satellite meeting.

Prof. McKee led the discussion of the paper at the satellite meeting, which focused on 2 key issues: (1) epistemological (can we measure research quality?), and (2) practical (how do we measure research quality?). There was general consensus that the hallmarks of research quality are originality, significance and rigour. In addition, the network accepted the pragmatic value of measuring research quality and the need to be responsive to institutional drivers.

In moving forward, the network agreed to explore 2 options for measuring research quality:

1. Produce discipline-specific ranking lists of journals and publishers (for books and book chapters) as has already been done by the Australian Council of Business Deans (ABCD) and the Australian Political Science Association (APSA) – such lists would be developed by the disciplines themselves, and would need to be updated every few years to accommodate the introduction of new and emerging journals
2. A more metric based approach that identifies the top 50 journals from each of 4 or 5 systems (e.g., Google, Scimago, Scopus) and rewards researchers for publishing in one such top journal every 1-2 years

The network agreed that there should be a number of overarching guiding principles, regardless of which option is to be adopted. Specifically, any approach to measuring research quality should be: (a) transparent, (b) provide guidance on best publishing practices, and (c) be clear-cut for at least 90% of publications.

Network members were invited to provide final comments on the draft discussion paper to Prof. McKee by Monday 30 May 2016.

ARC presentation: Issues and trends for HASS disciplines

Speaker: Prof. Dennis Del Favero, Executive Director HCA, ARC

Prof. Dennis Del Favero, Executive Director of HCA, ARC, gave a presentation on ARC updates. He prefaced his presentation by saying that due to the impending election he was constrained by the government being in care-taker mode, and consequently could not discuss matters that are currently in development. Prof. Del Favero's presentation focused on the following key issues:

- **Funding:** In the current climate of contracting funding, the ARC nevertheless wants to maintain success rates which means that most successful grants receive less than the requested funding. Discovery Projects (including DECRAAs) take up the largest part of the budget. DECRAAs are most successful 4-5 years post PhD. Requests not to assess are best limited to 3; requesting 6 means all 6 need to be approved and if 1 of the 6 is not approved the request not to assess is not approved.
- **Interdisciplinary research:** In the current funding round applicants were asked to identify whether their research is interdisciplinary. Interdisciplinary research can be between 2 or more different FOR codes or within one FOR code at the 4-digit or 6-digit level. The ARC is gathering this information with a view to developing a formal policy regarding interdisciplinary research (to be distributed in August). The ARC is keen that their College of Experts have interdisciplinary capacity. Thus, College Experts should be both specialist and generalist. In the current round 60% of Discovery Projects and 54% of DECRAAs were identified as being interdisciplinary. Identification occurred on the basis of: (a) individual researchers, (b) teams of researchers, and (c) translational research. Interdisciplinary research was stronger in the STEM (70%; esp. engineering and biology) than in the HASS (30%; e.g., philosophy, law, cultural studies, built environment and design) disciplines.
- **Continuous Linkage:** From 1st July 2016 submissions for Linkage Projects will be on a continuous basis, with the option of re-submission (albeit conditional). Assessment will be conducted by 3 carriages and applications will be ranked against submissions from the previous round, which will serve as a control group. Funding announcements will be made within 4-6 weeks or 8-12 weeks. These faster turn-around times will fit in better with industry. Continuous funding rounds could be a good model for other schemes that involve translational research or end user uptake, such as LIEF. Nevertheless, continuous funding rounds pose complex logistical challenges for the ARC.
- **Project research environment:** In the current funding round, Research Environment has changed to Project Research Environment. Previously there was too much focus on ERA rankings for the discipline. The focus now has shifted to the project. In particular, applicants should address: (a) the adequacy and opportunities of the research ecosystem in the local context, e.g.,

laboratory, department, school, centre/institute, (b) the existing and developing opportunities of the research ecosystem in the Administering Organisation for knowledge growth, innovation, collaboration, mentoring and student training, and (c) the project alignment with the Administering Organisation's ecosystem plans and strategy. In other words, how does the proposal enhance the ecosystem, rather than how does it fit into the ecosystem.

- Priority research areas: The ARC simply gathers this information in grant applications, but indicating a priority research area has no bearing on the success rate of applications.
- Success rates: In schemes such as the Laureate Fellowships, applications from HASS disciplines generally have lower success rates than those from STEM disciplines. The latter work in more collaborative and strategic ways, and have a clearer narrative.

Engagement and Impact Assessment

Speaker: Prof. Andrew Wells, PVC Research and Planning, University of Tasmania

Prior to his current appointment Prof. Wells spent 4 years at the ARC, as Deputy CEO and Executive Director HCA. He began his talk by outlining some historical background to the current consultation paper and the relationship between ERA and the proposed engagement and impact assessment. The following points noted in his talk and in the discussion are particularly salient for developing DASSH's response to the consultation paper:

- The paper appears to support a scholarly peer-review model of engagement and impact assessment; that is, assessment by an academic panel, rather than an industry panel, as had been advocated by the ATN network when an impact assessment was first discussed in 2010. This is in keeping with the peer-review model of assessment used by ERA, noting that academic peer review panels oversee both citation-based assessments and peer review assessment in ERA. It would be wise for DASSH to emphasise the importance of retaining the scholarly peer review dimensions of ERA for the engagement and impact assessment exercise and to recommend that assessment panels should predominantly be comprised of academics.
- There are nevertheless very real difficulties of measuring both engagement and impact in a methodologically rigorous way, especially for HASS disciplines. These include:
 - The proposal to use Cat. 2-4 income as a proxy for engagement is problematic: i) it conflates input (i.e. income) with engagement; ii) it drastically narrows the meaning of engagement and fails to recognise a wide range of forms of engagement undertaken by HASS disciplines, where the focus is often on cultural transformation and critique, the impacts of which are difficult to measure and may occur over long periods of time; iii) since HASS disciplines rely predominantly on Cat. 1 income (70% according to Mapping Humanities and Social Sciences Report), how will this proxy measure be scaled differently for different disciplines? It is therefore important for DASSH to propose that a broad array of qualitative measures of engagement and impact should be accepted by the ARC.
 - The proposal to use 6 institutional case studies to assess impact raises a

number of concerns: i) If there are only 6 case studies across each institution, on what basis will ratings for impact be made at the 2 digit level? ii) Will there be a requirement that the 6 case studies must be from six different 2 digit FoR codes, or would it be possible for institutions to submit case studies from one or two 2 digit codes? iii) Given the variation in size of universities, is it reasonable that each institution should be asked to provide the same number of case studies? Wouldn't a sliding scale depending on institutional size make more sense? iv) Is it possible to develop a robust methodology for assessment of case studies that would be replicated by differently constituted panels?

- The report notes the time scale difficulties of a retrospective impact assessment. A suggested alternative is that the impact assessment should focus on the processes and procedures a university has in place for translating research into broader impact. It is not clear exactly what this means and how an assessment of such processes would be undertaken. If this proposal is implemented it is likely to spawn a whole industry of consultants advising universities on how to spin this aspect of the assessment.
- There are dangers that focusing institutional efforts too much on engagement and impact may drive behaviours that undermine excellence in research and 'blue sky' research, and lead to expectations that universities should be undertaking R & D for industry. One way to avoid this would be for the impact and engagement assessment to be thoroughly integrated into the ERA assessment.
- Given the challenges of measuring engagement and impact for HASS disciplines, a good approach might be to allow extra space in the 2 digit explanatory statements for an engagement and impact section. Alternatively, a separate statement could be provided for engagement and impact.

Discussion of draft DASSH submission: New Research Block Grant arrangements

Members of the network discussed the draft submission, which had been circulated immediately prior to the meeting. Comments on the draft were collated by Catriona Mackenzie and forwarded to Joanne Scott who is coordinating DASSH's submission.

Wrap up and Agenda Setting

It was agreed that the following issues should be placed on the agenda for the September meeting, which will be held in conjunction with the DASSH meeting in Hobart:

- Outcomes and discussion of working party report: Research activity in staff workload models (speaker: Andrew May, University of Melbourne)
- Discussion of grant and research priority areas – how can HASS disciplines position themselves well?
- Presentation and discussion of the ACOLA review

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