



UniSA response to Draft ERA Submission Guidelines

Timelines

The release of the Draft Guidelines has allowed us to evaluate the size of the task outlined for the University ERA submission and it is clear that this is substantial, particularly for the HCA cluster.

One of the key issues is that it is necessary to assign a 4 digit FoR code (or codes) to the majority of academic staff in the institution. Given that staff who contribute to Cluster 1 may also contribute to Cluster 3 and given that staff who contribute to Cluster 2 may also contribute to Cluster 4, this requires work across at least 4 clusters to determine the appropriate assignment of staff. This is a major task, and we do not yet have an understanding of which research output types will be collected for either Cluster 3 or 4.

The preparatory work outlined in the draft guidelines for the HCA cluster (the capture of each creative research output in a text based statement and the associated requirement for lodging the evidence within the institutional repository) is one which cannot be done well or in some cases at all in the timelines outlined in the Guidelines document.

We also note the comments of the Australian Deans of Built Environment and Design below which suggest there is additional work to be done in the area of built environment and design in relation to the full capture of conference publications in the relevant disciplines. It is to be expected that there will be key omissions for discipline areas which will be picked up on review of draft guidelines, but in turn, any such delay contributes to an unworkable timeline.

We propose that the timelines for the first 2 clusters be revised to take account of the workload imposed through the ERA requirements. We also propose that there should be a longer consultation phase for the sector review of the draft guidelines for clusters 3 and 4 than has occurred for clusters 1 and 2.

Threshold number of indexed journals for citation analysis

We appreciate that bibliometric analysis requires a threshold number of publications to be available for citation analysis. We are concerned, however, about consequences of the use of this threshold in the following instances:

- 1) *Excellence vs Scale*: There can be excellent, but small research groups publishing in A* journals with high citation rates. We would propose that for those clusters in which bibliometric analysis is used, it should be possible for a University to flag no more than two 4 digit FoR codes in any one cluster where it wishes the expert panel to carry out a *peer review* of the research outputs, where the numbers of those outputs fall below the bibliometric threshold. This would avoid the exclusion of some of the pockets of disciplinary excellence on the grounds of scale alone.
- 2) *Discipline coverage*: There are some disciplines e.g. Marketing for which ISI has very limited coverage, and SCOPUS has omissions of key journals and for which neither of these web based tools adequately captures the ERA list. For such disciplines, at this stage in the development of the publication and citation practice, it would be appropriate to use peer review, rather than generate an inaccurate view of Australian research in the discipline area. We have noted that this is particularly the case for marketing (and this view can be tested further with the Heads of Schools of Marketing), but there may be other similar instances.
- 3) *Role of conference publications in the determination of a 'threshold number of outputs'*: UniSA notes that the refereed conference publication plays a major role for many disciplines in Clusters 3 and 5 and in these instances it would be more appropriate to include journals **and** conference publications

in any threshold measure for assessment and this may result in expert peer review being required for a number of these disciplines.

- 4) *'Insufficient volume'*: We consider that the term 'not assessed due to *insufficient volume*' may come to be translated nationally and internationally as 'not assessed due to *insufficient quality*' and that this would be to the detriment of the Australia's research reputation. For instance, UniSA has recently established a Law School and recruited new academics to that School. Most of these academics were recruited after the census date and of course any HERDC research income for any of the eligible staff will not be attributed to their current institution. Whilst this can be explained in a context statement, it would not be appropriate to label the research contribution of this new venture with a term that can be misconstrued in the public domain. We appreciate that the ARC will not publish outcomes at a 4 digit FoR code level, but institutions may with the resultant 'league tables' emerging in the public domain. We would propose that it would be more appropriate simply to tag disciplines which have not been assessed for any reason with a '*not assessed*' descriptor alone – this removes the pejorative implication of 'insufficient' in the public domain.

Academic staff completing higher degrees by research

We consider that it is not appropriate to include academic staff who are completing higher degrees by research as part of an institutional ERA submission. Most of these staff are categorised as 'teaching and research' as institutions wish to support their research training activity. These staff are not early career researchers according to any nationally accepted definition and it is not appropriate to expect that their research productivity would be equivalent to their peers.

We propose that:

- Eligible staff who are HDR candidates on the census date should not be included within the ERA submission independently of whether they are categorised as 'teaching and research' or 'research only'
- The outputs of any eligible staff who are HDR candidates can be included and the staff member can be categorised in the 'other' category

Reference Period of ERA Indicators

The current reference periods ('02/'05-2007) and census date (31 Mar 2008) would introduce a very lagged component if they were to be applied to evaluations arising in the later part of the cycle (2011/2012). Whilst we recognise that the ARC has made statements that the reference period 02-07 will apply to all clusters in the first cycle, we would support a process of setting reference periods and dates to a rolling timeframe, to ensure evaluations are reasonably contemporary for all discipline clusters.

Multi-and Interdisciplinary Research

UniSA is concerned that as for other international disciplinary quality assessment exercises that biases may operate on discipline panels, where multi- and inter-disciplinary research will be considered together with 'pure' disciplinary research. UniSA would encourage the ARC to take an international leadership role in setting up a pilot project to compare the outcomes of an assessment of a series of outputs which are classed as 'interdisciplinary' or 'multidisciplinary' by either peer review by a single panel of experts from different disciplines or by peer review by the appropriate separate disciplinary panels in order to determine whether such a bias operates.

Book/book chapter eligibility

The guidelines specifically suggest that 'entries in reference books' are 'unlikely' to be seen as research outputs. UniSA considers that this should be determined by the expert panels on a peer review panel. For example, contributions to Australian Dictionary of Biography may not qualify under the current definition and yet still involve significant creative academic work that should be recognised as research.

Design Outputs and Outlets

We support and endorse the views outlined below from the Australian Deans of Built Environment and Design:

'On Page 29 of the Draft ERA Submission Guidelines under section 5.4.2.1 it states:

"For Original (Creative) Works in the Public Domain, outputs include paintings, designs, compositions, choreography, plays, or pieces of writing that are in the public domain".

However, from the perspective of the Architectural and Product Design disciplines, the restriction of 'public domain' to a definition of exhibitions alone and cited examples of 'kinds' of original creative works to be included under this category are inadequate in terms of catering for Design related creative works except in drawn, diagram or model form. In particular, Architectural or Design Product outputs do not of necessity lend themselves towards any exhibition format of display and represents a very limited mode of outlet for these disciplines. This section seems to be predicated upon visual arts and creative writing outlets and outputs rather than on any specifically adapted to design orientated creative research productivity.'

We support and endorse the view of the Deans that there is an immediate need for ERA to provide a more explicit set of criteria and examples that demonstrate the means by which design creative works (as opposed to visual arts, performance art, or creative writing etc) will be encouraged and in what form of outlet and output they will be assessed. As an initial step UniSA proposes that the following form of words describing such creative works may be a useful starting point for this task:

'realised/constructed/fabricated or unrealised design projects including landscape design, architecture, interior design, industrial design, graphic design (e.g. book jacket design, product label design, web portal design), furniture design, exhibition design, object design'

Role of Conference Publications in Built Environment and Design

Again we note and support the views outlined below from the Australian Deans of Built Environment and Design:

'In the ERA Indicator Descriptors document released 19th December 2008, it states on Page 5: "Conferences are an important venue for releasing and communicating research; however, they only represent the predominant output for publishing research for a small number of disciplines. In conjunction with the relevant disciplines, the ARC has undertaken preliminary work to develop tier descriptors for ranking of refereed conference publications and will continue to work with those disciplines to develop ranked lists." The Built Environment disciplines of Architecture, Planning and Building represent one of those small number of disciplines who also worked to develop a preliminary set of tier descriptors and submitted a ranked list of published conference paper outlets specific to these disciplines in December 2007.

The Built Environment and Design disciplines treat peer-reviewed published conference papers as a high quality research output equal to journal articles, books or book chapters, a position that has been consistently maintained and promoted throughout the early developmental processes of the RQF and ERA and which was accepted under the RQF as a permissible quality measure of output and outlet alongside the disciplines of Engineering and ICT. However, what the Draft ERA Submission Guidelines suggest for the 1201, 1203, 1205 and 1299 FoR group of disciplines on page 57 is that journals are included as a ranked research outlet whilst conferences are excluded as such a ranked measure of research quality in the matrix. Equally, on page 61, Journal articles, books, book chapters and creative works are included as peer reviewed research outputs whilst, again, conference papers are excluded as such a research output within the matrix.

UniSA notes that published conference papers for Architecture, Planning, Building and Design over the six years of the ERA reference period comprise between 40% to 60% of research output and would thus, as a result of their exclusion, seriously and irreparably damage the research profile of these disciplines.

We support and endorse the view of the Deans that for the 1200 FoR group of disciplines, published conference papers as both a ranked outlet and peer reviewed output be included as a primary category of Built Environment and Design research productivity for the Cluster 2 ERA submission.