Australian Research Council
Draft ERA 2015 Submission Documentation – Public Consultation

Note: All feedback should use this template and be emailed to era@arc.gov.au with "ERA 2015 Submission Consultation" in the subject heading.

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*Anonymous feedback will not be considered. Institutions/organisations should include **all feedback in a single consolidated** written response.

1. Draft ERA Submission Guidelines

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on the Draft ERA 2015 Submission Guidelines. The Australian Academy of the Humanities has canvassed its Fellowship and offers feedback on specific issues as follows:

1. Nomination of Research Outputs for Peer Review (section 3.5):

The Academy welcomes the ARC's clarification of the requirements for the selection of samples of research output types for peer review, which provide for a more representative range of research outputs to be included in the process.

In canvassing its Fellowship for this consultation the Academy has received additional feedback on the peer review process, and we take this opportunity to briefly note one particular issue: the need for a better mechanism for appointing and monitoring peer reviewers. As the peer assessment process is so integral to the Humanities and Creative Arts (HCA) panel it is vital that the peer reviewers are selected to ensure a high quality and consistent level of assessment. In the past assessors were largely recruited by way of self-nomination; it is generally much more effective to have assessments done by research leaders who are reliable assessors and who can provide succinct, productive and authoritative assessments. Drawing on senior colleagues who have had experience at the

ARC in some capacity (sitting on ERA panels or College of Experts or known reliable assessors) is one of the obvious approaches.

The Academy is aware that work has been done on improving feedback institutions receive on peer review and welcome these developments. We can provide further feedback on aspects of the peer review process and would be happy to work with the ARC on this issue.

2. Outcome Reporting (section 4.2.3)

The Academy is supportive of the publication of output volume information for all assessed Units of Evaluation (UoEs). Having said that, we would observe that counts of research outputs are crude measures that do not always reflect quality; nor does the volume of publications produced in a given institution necessarily reflect that institution's commitment to research.

For instance, while the ERA National Report is a very useful resource, the Academy believes that volume information could be better contextualised in ERA reporting to avoid distorting the picture due to differences in publication practice by disciplines. As it currently stands, regardless of the type of research output – book, journal article or conference paper – they are each ascribed the same value for this purpose as they are all counted as '1' output. Books are only weighted for determining low-volume threshold. The effect of this is evident in the ERA National Report where calculations are made about a discipline's share of national research output, which can under-state the real effort in disciplines such as History in which 10% of its research outputs are books.

While noting that there are sensitivities about releasing some data publicly, we would point out that volume data is only part of the picture – research income data and staff (FTE) data disaggregated by UoE would give a more accurate indication of institutional investment/resourcing of research.

3. Publication Association for Staff Employed at Less Than 0.4 FTE (section 5.3.1.1)

The question of researcher eligibility and eligible research outputs were the two issues on which we have received the most feedback from our Fellowship. There are two principal concerns: the perception that in past ERA exercises institutions 'gamed' the process by counting outputs of staff with only marginal connection with the institution, and the appointment of research staff on the eve of the census date. Such practices have the potential to undermine the credentials of the ERA as a measure of institutional research strength.

Within the Academy we have been canvassing alternative models and acknowledge the complexities involved. Fellows have debated the best means to address these two issues: some proposing that outputs be restricted only to staff employed in the 04-1.0 FTE category (with a provision for emerti – we would not want to discount genuine contribution to the research life of the university); another proposal was to move away from the definition of eligible researcher altogether and rather focus on eligible publication, although we acknowledge there can be practical difficulties in establishing a connection of a researcher to an institution, especially if it is to be based on attributions on the publication itself.

While the Academy can not comment on the extent of these practices, we believe there needs to be more consultation on ways the eligibility criteria might be tightened, and further attention to the allocation of outputs to authors from different institutions, in terms of apportioning percentage contribution but also avoiding a problem where the same work is counted more than once (i.e. submitted by several institutions where co-authors have different affiliations).

4. Gender Data (section 5.3.2.2)

The Academy is supportive of this change.

5. New Category of Non-Traditional Research Outputs (section 5.4.9)

We see no problem with peer assessment of the new category of non-traditional output, Research Report for an External Body, as long as care is taken in the selection of assessors to ensure that there is appropriate expertise, as per our comments above on peer review above.

2. Draft ERA–SEER 2015 Business Rules and Verification

Please indicate any feedback you have on the ***Draft ERA–SEER 2015 Business Rules and Verification***. Please provide clear reference to relevant business rule numbers in your feedback.

Response

No response.

3. Draft ERA–SEER 2015 Technical Specifications

Please indicate any feedback you have on the ***Draft ERA-SEER 2015 Technical Specifications.***

Response

No response.

4. Draft ERA 2015 Discipline Matrix

Please indicate any feedback you have on the ***Draft ERA 2015 Discipline Matrix*** (the ARC is seeking feedback about any changes to the nominated indicators for each discipline cluster for ERA 2015).

Response

No response.

5. Draft ERA–SEER 2015 Technology Pack

Please indicate any feedback you have on the ***Draft ERA–SEER 2015 Technology Pack***.

Response

No response.

General comments

The Academy's Fellows have continued to raise concerns about the difficultly in including for peer review items written in a language other than English. We have received feedback that some institutions insisted that all such publications be provided in full translation (including monographs) for inclusion. While there is not such formal requirement on the part of the ARC, it is sometimes assumed to be – by local university administrators charged with managing ERA. Such misconceptions have the potential to be highly damaging to our multilingual capacity. The Academy asks that the ARC make it absolutely clear in its submission guidelines for 2015 that this level of translation is not a requirement under ERA.

To date, the ARC has demonstrated that it is very mindful of disciplinary differences in publishing practice. The Academy would alert the ARC to a potential problem with the criteria regarding eligible books and eligible book chapters, which has been raised by our Archaeology Section.

- The Submission Guidelines note that "Eligible books must, among other criteria, be entirely written by a single author, or by joint authors who share responsibility for the whole book". In the case of Archaeology many books have at least one chapter (or Appendix) written by someone other than the author(s). These "typically include specialist contributions on human bone, animal bone, palaeobotanical remains, radiometric dating, geomorphology etc". Under this clause, there is a potential that research offices will exclude such books (see section 5.4.8.1).
- The second issue is in relation to the provision that appendices are unlikely to be classed as eligible research output (see section 5.4.8.3); we would alert the ARC to the fact that in Archaeology appendices can be the specialist contribution reported above (equivalent to book chapters), and therefore not appropriate to be considered a non-traditional research output.