AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

Australian Catholic University (ACU) submission to the ARC consultation on engagement and impact assessment

June 2016

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Australian Catholic University (ACU) welcomes the ARC's efforts to assess research impact and engagement and appreciates the opportunity to provide a submission.

ACU supports a diversified research landscape in Australia in which universities are funded and encouraged to undertake quality research and play to their research strengths. In that context, ACU acknowledges and supports the policy goal of incentivising greater collaboration between universities, industry and other end-users of research.

As a University with a unique specialisation and core strengths in education and health, ACU's key industry partners are the public sector and education and health services providers. From this perspective, achieving impact and engagement through research may not necessarily involve generating ideas to design products that create large profits in the commercial private sector. Rather, it may more significantly involve generating research findings that create service delivery efficiencies, more effective interventions and treatments and other research outcomes that can save government and industry money, whether in the immediate or longer term, or improve productivity.

ACU supports an approach to the assessment of impact and engagement that as far as possible uses existing data collections, supplemented by well-defined and outcomes-focussed case studies to provide an accurate picture of impact and engagement. To enable the assessment of multi- and inter-disciplinary research, ACU recommends that assessments be undertaken at the two digit field of research code level, proportional to the four digit codes being assessed for each higher education provider.

AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

Definition

1. What definition of 'engagement' should be used for the purpose of assessment?

ACU supports the views on engagement expressed in the ATSE report on Research Engagement for Australia that engagement is the interaction between researchers and end-users for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge[1].

2. What definition of 'impact' should be used for the purpose of assessment?

ACU endorses the ARC (2012) definition of impact.

Scope of Assessment

3. How should the scope of the assessment be defined?

As far as possible, assessments should utilise data that universities already collect. As discussed below and as recognised in the consultation paper, the use of metrics alone can be limited, and research would be better placed in an informative context using a range of data sources, including case studies where appropriate.

4. Would a selective approach using case studies or exemplars to assess impact provide benefits and incentives to universities?

The use of case studies and exemplars would enable a more accurate assessment of impact and engagement than the use of metrics alone. Case studies, suitably defined by guidelines, could be limited to a maximum of two pages each.

5. If case studies or exemplars are used, should they focus on the outcomes of research or the steps taken by the institution to facilitate the outcomes?

The focus of the exercise should be on the outcomes of research.

6. What data is available to universities that could contribute to the engagement and impact assessment?

i. *Should the destination of Higher Degree Research students be included in the scope of the assessment?*

ii. *Should other types of students be included or excluded from the scope of assessment (e.g. professional Masters level programmes, undergraduate students)?*

Higher Degree by Research (HDR) students are not currently included in ERA and in the absence of a comprehensive and accurate data set on the destination of HDR students, they should not be

[1] The Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering, *Research Engagement for Australia* (March 2015)

included in assessments of impact and engagement. The inclusion of professional Masters students and undergraduate students would not provide any significant benefit.

Key Issues

7. What are the key challenges for assessing engagement and impact and how can these be addressed?

The consultation paper touches on the key challenges. Metrics alone are insufficient to assess impact and engagement and are not sufficiently sensitive to disciplinary differences. Metrics should be used in conjunction with case studies. For some disciplines, for example theology, case studies may be more relevant than some metrics such as commercialisation, patents and even competitive and other sources of funding.

As is the case with the UK's Research Excellence Framework, researchers should be able to take their attributions with them when moving between institutions. This would enable recognition of former research impact and engagement and acknowledge how current activities build on previous research. Attribution could be identified through published works or other indicators such as grants.

8. Is it worthwhile to seek to attribute specific impacts to specific research and, if so, how should impact be attributed (especially in regard to a possible methodology that uses case studies or exemplars)?

As stated above, impact of research should be linked to readily available data such as outputs and patents and informed by case studies.

9. To what level of granularity and classification (e.g. ANZSRC Fields of Research) should measures be aggregated?

Impact and engagement should be assessed at the two-digit level, proportional to the number of four-digit codes being assessed for each higher education provider (with the ratio to be determined by the ARC). This approach would avoid unnecessary administrative burden for both universities and ARC assessors and better enable assessment of multi- and inter-disciplinary research.

10. What timeframes should be considered for the engagement activities under assessment?

The recommended timeframe for engagement is the current ERA period to enable synchronous reporting commensurate with the activity being assessed.

11. What timeframes should be considered for the impact activities under assessment?

To avoid perverse unintended consequences, ACU recommends an impact timeframe of 15 to17 years. Research should be encouraged to achieve long term benefits, not only interactions that result in short term impacts.

12. How can the assessment balance the need to minimise reporting burden with robust requirements for data collection and verification?

Existing data collections from institutional and government sources should be utilised (including ABS returns, co-authors, partnerships, and commercialisation return) and linked to new information collected as part of the ERA 2018.

Data collections should be adjusted to ensure no disciplines are disadvantaged by the assessment. For example, assessments in social science disciplines may rely more heavily on case studies, whilst a science discipline assessment may place a greater weight on metrics.

A mechanism should be provided to articulate impact and engagement of research outcomes through case studies with a well-defined structure.

13. What approaches or measures can be used to manage the disciplinary differences in research engagement and impact? and 14. What measures or approaches to evaluation used for the assessment can appropriately account for interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary engagement and impacts?

ACU is very aware of disciplinary differences and the stark contrast in research funding and industry engagement between humanities, arts and social sciences (in particular, philosophy and theology) and the STEM disciplines. Some metrics (e.g. patents and commercialisation data) may be more relevant to the STEM disciplines than the humanities, arts and social sciences (HASS). ARC Linkage grants are one way to gauge end-user engagement with the humanities disciplines and ACU would endorse using such a metric. Data from the ARC itself have shown strong correlations between ERA scores and Linkage success. As described above, ACU endorses the uses of case studies.

Types of engagement and impact indicators

15. What types of engagement indicators should be used?

ARC Linkage grants, government funding (Commonwealth and State), research contracts, research consultancies, reports to Commonwealth and State governments, and reports to statutory authorities should be used as engagement indicators.

16. What types of impact indicators should be used?

The consultation paper draws attention to disciplinary differences and acknowledges that some data and metrics may be more useful for STEM than HASS, whilst also accepting that end-users tend to find person-to-person contact more rewarding. This supports ACU's view that case studies are likely to account best for disciplinary differences and are a useful tool to gauge impact. Case studies are able to place the societal benefits of research into their full context. Case studies give researchers an opportunity to explain to an audience of experts the manner in which their research has benefited end-users and communities. It is not always possible to make such inferences from metrics alone.

AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY PROFILE

Australian Catholic University (ACU) is a publicly funded Catholic university, open to people of all faiths and of none and with teaching, learning and research inspired by 2,000 years of Catholic intellectual tradition. ACU operates as a multi-jurisdictional university with seven campuses across four states and one territory. ACU campuses are located in North Sydney (NSW), Strathfield (NSW), Canberra (ACT), Melbourne (Victoria), Ballarat (Victoria), Brisbane (QLD) and Adelaide (SA).

ACU is the largest Catholic university in the English speaking world. Today, ACU has over 30,000 students and 2,000 staff.[2]

ACU graduates demonstrate high standards of professional excellence and are also socially responsible, highly employable and committed to active and responsive learning. ACU graduates are highly sought after by employers, with a 93 per cent employment rate.[3]

ACU has built its reputation in the areas of Health and Education and is a major producer of nursing and teaching graduates in Australia. ACU educates the largest number of undergraduate nursing and teaching students in Australia,[4] serving to meet significant workforce needs in these areas. Under the demand driven system, ACU has sought to focus and build on these strengths.

Since 2014 ACU has had four faculties: Health Services; Education and Arts; Law and Business; and Theology and Philosophy. The consolidation of the previous six faculties has created a more efficient and competitive structure focused on the needs of industry and employment partners. ACU is also moving towards the adoption of a shared services model where suitable, to improve efficiencies, internal processes and better allocate resources.

ACU is committed to targeted and quality research. ACU's strategic plan focuses on areas that align with ACU's mission and reflect most of its learning and teaching: Education; Health and Wellbeing; Theology and Philosophy; and Social Justice and the Common Good. To underpin its plan for research intensification, ACU has appointed high profile leaders to assume the directorships, and work with high calibre members, in seven research institutes.[5]

In the last three years the quality of ACU's research has improved dramatically. In the 2015 Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) assessment ACU received high scores in the fields of research identified as strategic priorities and in which it has concentrated investment in order to achieve the highest levels of excellence. These include selected areas of Health, as well as Education, Psychology, Theology, and Philosophy.

---

[2] As at April 2016. Student numbers refer to headcount figures while staff numbers refer to full-time equivalent (FTE).

[3] Based on those available for full-time employment, results from the *Graduate Destination Survey (GDS) 2015.*

[4] Department of Education and Training, *2014 Higher Education Data Collection – Students, Special Courses* (31 July 2015) <https://docs.education.gov.au/node/38139>.

[5] Australian Catholic University, *ACU Research* <http://www.acu.edu.au/research/research_institutes_and_programs >.

ACU’s research is rated 5, the top category, in the ERA as (well above world standard) in Psychology and Cognitive Sciences (17), Psychology (1701), Human Movement and Sports Science (1106), Nursing (1110), and Public Health and Health Services (1117).

ACU’s research is rated at 4 in the ERA (above world standard) in Medical and Health Sciences (11), Philosophy and Religious Studies (22), Specialist Studies in Education (1303), Philosophy (2203), and Religion and Religious Studies (2204).

ACU’s research is rated at 3 (world standard) in Education (13), Law and Legal Studies (18), History and Archaeology (21) Education Systems (1301), Curriculum and Pedagogy (1302), Business and Management (1503), Political Science (1606), Sociology (1608), Law (1801), Historical Studies (2103), and Applied Ethics (2203).