UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY: RESPONSE TO ERA 2012 REVIEW QUESTIONS

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23 April 2013

1. Was the documentation sufficient to complete this phase? If not, what would you suggest?

All documentation provided was sufficient to complete the preparation for submission.

2. Were there any issues in obtaining an EID from Scopus for each journal article?

The process of obtaining EIDs from Scopus was clear and there were no issues in providing the data to Scopus. However, Scopus did not index a small percentage of items even though earlier and later issues had been indexed. Journals that had changed their name or been subsumed by other publishing houses had the most frequently missing EIDs.

3. Did you experience any issues adding resource outputs to your institutional repository?

All of the University of Sydney outputs were able to be added without any difficulty to our repository. The most difficult part of this exercise is ensuring that quality scans of the outputs are obtained.

4. Would you consider the use of unique researcher IDs as part of future ERA submissions?

The University of Sydney would consider the use of unique researcher IDs. Unique researcher IDs would help with the identification of outputs more generally of researchers moving between institutions. The potential problems that will need addressing are the managing of the unique IDs and the processes of maintaining and supporting the master resource list. The University of Sydney would be pleased to be involved in any discussions or planning on this topic.

5. Was the documentation sufficient to complete this stage? If not, what would you suggest?

The documentation supplied was quite clear on how to complete this submission stage.

6. Did you have any issues with connecting your institutional repository to SEER?

The University of Sydney had no issues with connecting to the SEER repository.

7. Did you have any technical issues in uploading data to SEER?

The University of Sydney had no technical issues in uploading data to SEER. The university did find that the time between submission and the generation of the UoEs varied and in peak upload periods was quite lengthy.

8. Did you have access to sufficient support if you had questions or needed assistance?

Throughout the whole ERA process the University of Sydney found that we had support and assistance when required.

9. Is the process used to nominate items for peer review appropriate? i.e. should institutions nominate these after UoE screens have been generated, or before?
Responses to ARC feedback questions

During the ERA process it was difficult to easily assess the ERA points in any given FoR. The ERA points dictated the proportional number of items that would be required for peer review. It would be easier to finalise peer review selections once the UoE screens are generated. This would minimise resubmissions.

10. Did you understand the process and explanation for any errors detected manually during stage 2?

The University of Sydney understood all warning and error messages that were generated during any stage of the submission.

11. Did you receive sufficient guidance and support on how to correct your submission?

When required the University of Sydney received appropriate information on how to correct errors or warnings.

12. Did you feel the “case manager” approach was useful?

The support process worked well and a “case manager” ensured that all issues were followed through to a resolution.

13. Do you have any suggestions on other ways in which the ERA process could further improve the quality of submitted data and information?

The ERA rules are quite detailed on the data and information required and further refinements would lead to further system changes and costs. Considering the costs to date to run an ERA submission, the university would prefer to minimise any further ERA required system changes.

14. The ARC is considering moving only to electronic verification. Do you agree with this, or do you have any concerns?

The University of Sydney would support electronic verification and would be pleased to be involved with the methodology development and testing.

15. Should the ARC investigate extending citation analysis to any disciplines that currently have peer review? If so, should this be instead of, or in addition to peer review?

Researchers in areas predominantly assessed by peer-review in the 2012 ERA expressed reservations about the completeness and consistency of citation analysis as a replacement for peer-review. For example, citation analysis will not adequately capture books which are significant and highly regarded in the Humanities and Social Science areas.

Our Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences strongly argued against extending citation analysis to 14, 16, 19, 20, 21 and 22, saying citation analysis will not offer a complete assessment process, and that a mixed assessment (citations in parallel with peer review) would put a disproportionate emphasis on inconsistent information.

Sydney would, however, support a trial of citation analysis in parallel with peer-review in a small number of other FoRs carefully selected to ensure available citation data makes citation analysis possible. As the coverage of Scopus/WoS is likely to be inadequate for peer-reviewed areas the ARC should consider GoogleAnalytics, and emerging tools such as Altmetrics, to supplement citation analysis.

Ideally assessment would move increasingly to methodologies such as citation analysis that reduce the reliance on labour intensive and potentially inconsistent peer-review. However, any change from peer-review should be made only when the alternatives are thoroughly tested and proven for each FoR to be transitioned.

16. Should the ARC investigate extending peer review to any disciplines currently using citation analysis? If so, should this be instead of or in addition to citation analysis?

The University of Sydney does not support extending peer review.

17. What other changes would you recommend to the indicators used for each FoR in ERA 2012?
The University of Sydney would encourage the ARC to consult with disciplinary and professional peak bodies about the appropriateness of conference publications for their members’ areas and on appropriate criteria for the ERA guidelines.

- Humanities and Social Sciences based researchers recommend the removal of conference publications from the ERA. They argue that for these disciplines conference publications are considered a forum for “work in progress”. If conference publications are to be reported for these disciplines, they should be excluded from the sample for assessment.
- IT researchers confirm the importance of conference publications in their discipline.

While supporting the inclusion of quality Gold Open Access publishers, such as STM (Scientific, Technical and Medical) journals, the university is concerned by the inclusion of less reputable pay-for-publication journals and “vanity” books in submissions by other institutions. We believe they should not be included in the ERA submission.

18. Were you notified of any data potentially not meeting submission guidelines after the final certification of your submission?
   If yes:
   a. Were you happy with the process followed for resolving whether data was, in fact, in breach of submission guidelines, and the determination of appropriate remedial action?
   b. Do you have any suggestions on how the situation leading to any identified non-compliance of data with submission guidelines after certification could have been avoided?

We were not notified of any non-compliant data.

19. Was the fractional appointment for staff (<0.4 FTE) appropriate?

Yes, >=0.4 is appropriate.

20. Were the requirements around fractional appointments and adjunct staff clear in the submission guidelines?

The University of Sydney found the guidelines surrounding fractional and adjunct staff were appropriate.

21. Would you be prepared to provide the gender of your researchers to the ARC as part of future ERA submissions, if it were to be solely for statistical analysis and not for any part of the evaluation process?

The University of Sydney would be prepared to provide gender data.

22. Did you find the 2012 guidelines in coding outputs appropriate?

The coding guidelines were appropriate.

23. Do you find the significant content of 66% appropriate?

The 66% content rule improved the coding of our submission and was appropriate. A 75% level would be acceptable.

24. Did the rules of the reassignment exception enable a more accurate submission?

Yes. Particularly useful for accurately reporting interdisciplinary work coded into journals with designated codes that do not accurately reflect the multi-disciplinary content of articles.

25. Were the guidelines around selecting a “representative spread” for the sample of research outputs in peer review disciplines clear?

The guidelines originally presented were not clear, and during the submission period the ARC provided additional clarifying guidelines on the requirements of a “representative spread”. The additional advice resulted in last minute revision of peer reviewed selections, imposing significant additional workloads on large and productive institutions like Sydney.
26. Would you have any concerns with volume information about each unit of evaluation being presented for the 2012 ERA Evaluation?
   - If you do, please indicate clearly why you think this information should not be made public

The University of Sydney has no concerns about presenting volume information and it would be informative to have other institutions’ volume information as context for interpreting our own performances.

27. What additional information would assist universities to understand their ERA results?

Refinements to SEER to enable drill-down on journal data (e.g., authors alphabetically and RCI numerically) and to allow for copy/export for further analysis.

Information explaining disparities in FoR scores from different panels for UoEs that are performing at similar levels according to the performance statistics. For example 0503 and 0403

28. Would you have an objection if all the submission data to the 2015 ERA exercise were, subsequent to the completion of the evaluation process made publicly available?
   - If not, what are the issues that would prevent this?

The University of Sydney has no objection.

29. Would you have any concerns with a similar undertaking for your ERA 2012 submission?

The University of Sydney has no objection.

30. Do you agree or disagree with expanding the option of submitting ‘non-traditional outputs’ such as policy documents or commissioned research to all disciplines (this was trialled in ERA 2012)?

The University of Sydney agrees in principle to the expanding of non-traditional research outputs within specific disciplines.

However, we note that small numbers of non-traditional outputs were reported in the codes selected for the trial in the 2012 ERA, particularly in FoR 14 and 16. So, the outcomes are inconclusive.

We have identified issues surrounding policy documents and commissioned reports regarding intellectual freedom and the relative lack of independence of research directives these contain. How will the originality of the research in these outputs be monitored?

If non-traditional outputs are adopted for the 2015 ERA, more specific guidelines about the criteria by which such policy documents will qualify as research must be provided, along with further criteria related to how quality will be identified and assessed. Universities will need to know what can be submitted and how the submission should be put together. Portfolios work well in the creative arts, and this would need to be considered for policy documents and commissioned research.

We would encourage ARC to consult with disciplinary and professional peak bodies about the appropriateness of non-traditional output for their members’ areas and on appropriate criteria for the ERA guidelines.

31. Are the current low volume thresholds for both four-digit and two-digit units of evaluation in ERA appropriate? If not, what changes would you recommend?

The University of Sydney believes that an evaluation at the 2 digit level is not appropriate due to the generic nature of the discipline coverage. If two digit levels are to be continued as an evaluation group, then the volume cut-offs for two digit codes should be increased significantly to 500. The low volume thresholds for 4 digit codes are appropriate and we would not object if they were to be increased.

We found that a number of 4 digit codes were still too broad and some evaluations need to occur at the 6 digit level, at a minimum, specifically the 1103 range. The varied discipline groupings in 1103 make this code too broad for any research strength information and comparisons.
32. **Were there any difficulties in obtaining or collating the data required for your ERA submission (e.g. income measures)?**

The collection of income data presented no problems for Sydney.

33. **Do you have any other issues regarding the ERA 2012 process that you wish to raise with the ARC?**

The ERA 2010 journal ranking lists can be viewed from the ARC website. As these journal lists are no longer being updated the list should be removed from the ARC website to avoid any incorrect use or attributions.

Evaluation guidelines for Foreign Language publications to include further details on the peer review assessment process.

The University of Sydney is prepared to share the ERA data for use in RTS funding calculations, should ERA results be an input to any revised RTS calculations.