ERA - Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) is a federal government initiative, developed by the ARC in cooperation with the NHMRC, to evaluate research quality within Australia's higher education institutions. It replaces the previous Research Quality Framework (RQF). The 2010 Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) results were released on 31 January 2011.

The University of Sydney was rated at or above world standard in all 24 of the broad discipline areas in which it was rated in the 2010 Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) evaluation program including Physical Sciences.

The ERA results are of great importance to the University and the School because they will provide valuable institutional information to inform strategic planning and as such it is important that they are understood and correctly interpreted.

The ERA rating scale was as follows:

- 5 - Outstanding performance well above world standard
- 4 - Performance above world standard
- 3 - Average performance at world standard
- 2 - Performance below world standard
- 1 - Performance well below world standard
- N/A - Not assessed due to low volume

The overall ERA rating for Physical Sciences was a 5 meaning outstanding performance well above world standard. The ratings of other sub-disciplines of Physical Sciences are given below.

Physical Sciences - 5; Astronomical and Space Sciences - 4; Atomic, Molecular, Nuclear, Particle and Plasma Physics - 4; Classical Physics - Not Assessed; Condensed Matter Physics - 4; Optical Physics - 5; Quantum Physics - 5; Other Physical Sciences - 3.

These results for the School indicate that our research during the survey period was excellent and should act as encouragement for all.


ARC Grants - Academic staff intending to submit ARC grant applications should contact Professor Geraint Lewis, as Associate Head- Research in the first instance for clarification regarding specific ARC issues.

General Staff Review - The School of Physics has been going through a period of significant change and growth. This is going to continue to have a major impact on how we manage our resources, both financial and human. As Head of School I have requested an inclusive review of all general staff positions across the School: technical, IT, outreach, foundation and administrative. The aim of such a comprehensive review is to ensure the School has in place a structure and the appropriate roles, to operate at maximum efficiency in such a climate of transformation and expansion, providing the best possible opportunity to capitalize on our successes and move forward into the future.

In due course general staff will be invited to meet with the review committee. Academic staff are encouraged to provide input to the review via a survey form.

Mechanical Workshop - The viability of the current School of Physics mechanical workshop is also currently being reviewed. The long term vision is to take the opportunity that will come with the new Physics-AIN building to establish a workshop facility that will be equipped to address the needs of a state-of-the-art experimental school of physics and staffed appropriately for its size, capacity and user requirements.
Building Projects - Progress continues on the new Physics-AIN building project with Expressions of Interest (EoI) for architects, mechanical/electrical engineers, structural/hydraulic engineers, fire services having now been received and currently being assessed. We are also in receipt of the draft functional brief from the design consultants, DEGW.

The brief, which will be used to inform the selected architects once they have been appointed, is currently being reviewed by the School's Research and Teaching Working Groups before further consideration by the Project User Group. A School meeting is being planned to brief the School further regarding this matter. The School has now been informed formally that additional space will be made available at 21 Ross Street to cope with current and immediate growth and to assist in the decanting of A29 before it is demolished. The business case for the full decanting of A29 is currently being developed with CIS and further details will be available in the near future. Work has begun to convert tutorial room 320/21 into offices for incoming staff and students, as well as converting rooms 212, 211 & 210 into a new and expanded Student Services office. Building work continues on the lift (completion date July) and toilets on levels 2 & 3 (completion early April). Conversion of the two level 6 eastern tower rooms into offices is imminent.

Science Foundation for Physics and International Science School - The Science Foundation for Physics held a strategic Planning half-day on 25 February 2011. All aspects of the Foundation and its operation were discussed in the context of the new University rules for Foundations which are expected to be passed by senate on 21 March 2010. The Science Foundation was founded in 1954 by Emeritus Professor Harry Messel. Originally named the Nuclear Research Foundation, it was set up to further support for teaching and research in the School of Physics. These days the main activity that the Science Foundation for Physics supports is the International Science School or ISS which is held every 2 years. This year the ISS will be held in the School of Physics from 3-16 July, and will have the theme of light and matter. 150 ISS scholars will be attending from over all Australia, China, Japan, India, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore, Thailand, UK and the USA.

Physics Decadal Plan - The Australian Academy of Science is overseeing the development of a new Decadal Plan for Physics. The Australian Institute of Physics has been charged with the responsibility of running the process of developing the plan. A similar process was last undertaken in 1993 which produced "Physics: A vision for the future". The Australian Research Council has granted funds to support the development of the new plan. The Decadal Plan consists of two broad components. The first is an inward looking component which will consist of a survey of Physics in Australia today to show how the discipline has evolved since 1993 and identify the significant areas of activity and expertise. The second is a forward looking component that aims to identify emerging opportunities that can be highlighted and developed. The Plan aims to have a broad audience and will serve to make the excitement and potential of Physics in the 21st Century accessible to a wide audience. Individuals from the School are encouraged to provide submissions to the Physics Decadal Plan. Further details may be found at:

http://www.physicsdecadalplan.org.au/home

Women in Science and Engineering (WiSE) Summit 2011 - The National Commissions in Australia for UNESCO and UN Women Australia are working with FASTS - the Federation of Australian Scientific and Technological Societies - on a summit to be held in Parliament House in Canberra on 11 April 2011. The summit will explore what Australia can, and should, do to improve the status of women in science and engineering - in particular to encourage young women to stay in science past PhD into career positions. Science in Public is assisting with the management of the forum. For further information email Niall Byrne on niall@scienceinpublic.com.au.

Prizes

2011 International Union of Pure and Applied Physics Young Scientist Prize in Computational Physics - The Commission on Computational Physics (C20) of IUPAP seeks nominations for its 2011 Young Scientist Prize. Nominees should have a maximum of 8 years of research experience following their PhD and should be the principal performer of original work of outstanding scientific quality in Computational Physics. The prize consists of 1000 Euros, a medal, and a certificate. The awards will be made at the Commission's next Conference on Computational Physics (CCP2011) to be held in Gatlinburg, Tennessee,
USA, 30 October 30 - 3 November, 2011. The winner will also be invited to present a paper at this meeting. Procedures for making a nomination are at http://phycomp.technion.ac.il/~C20/prizes.html. Nominations should be emailed to J. E. Gubernatis (jg@lanl.gov) by 11 March 2011.

The Prime Minister's Prizes for Science - The Australian Government awards five prizes annually for outstanding scientific achievements and excellence in science teaching. These awards are the most prestigious and significant of their kind in Australia. The awards are:
- The Prime Minister's Prize for Science
- The Malcolm McIntosh Prize for Physical Scientist of the Year
- The Science Minister's Prize for Life Scientist of the Year
- The Prime Minister's Prize for Excellence in Science Teaching in Primary Schools
- The Prime Minister's Prize for Excellence in Science Teaching in Secondary Schools.
Nominations close Friday 13 May 2011 at 17:00 AEST. More information and online nomination at https://grants.innovation.gov.au/SciencePrize/Pages/Home.aspx.

2011 Australian Museum Eureka Prizes - The Eureka Prizes reward excellence in the fields of scientific research & innovation, science leadership, school science and science journalism & communication. There are 24 prizes covering:
- research & innovation
- science leadership
- school science
- science journalism & communication.
Entries close midnight Friday 6 May 2011, and the winners will be announced at a gala award dinner on Tuesday 6 September. More information at http://eureka.australianmuseum.net.au/.

Fresh Science 2011 - Fresh Science is a national competition that identifies new and interesting research being done by early-career scientists around the country and releases their stories to the media. This year Fresh Science will be held in the last week of May or the first week of June. The event serves as a communication boot camp for early-career researchers - getting their stories out to local, national and international media, and teaching them essential communication skills. And this year, we are also offering a special opportunity for early-career scientists. AMP invites those who are students (honours, masters, PhD) to nominate for Tech on Tap - with a $5,000 prize for the winning entry. For more information and to nominate visit www.freshscience.org.au. Nominations close at 5pm on Wednesday 30 March.

World Metrology Day Awards - In recognition of World Metrology Day, which occurs on 20 May each year, Australia's National Measurement Institute (NMI) is presenting two awards for outstanding achievement in measurement. The Barry Inglis Medal will be awarded for major contributions to measurement science and technology through leadership or outstanding innovation. The NMI Prize will be awarded to young Australians who have shown originality or excellence in the application of measurement techniques. NMI is responsible for Australia's national infrastructure in physical, chemical, biological and legal measurements. NMI establishes, maintains and realises Australia's units and standards of measurement, thereby allowing Australian industry to operate competitively in a global environment. The recipients of the awards will be announced on World Metrology Day 2011, with the awards ceremony held in the second half of 2011. Closing date for applications is 31 March 2011.

For information, contact communications@measurement.gov.au. Intending applicants should refer to the information package available from NMI's website at www.measurement.gov.au/worldmetrologyday.