

24 June 2016

## **Go8 response to the Engagement and Impact Assessment Consultation Paper – June 2016**

### **Introduction**

The Group of Eight (Go8) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the joint Australian Research Council and Department of Education and Training consultation on the design of an Engagement and Impact Assessment system for Australian university research.

As the consultation is highly technical in nature the Go8 response will be limited to key points and some contextual observations while individual Go8 institutions may provide specific feedback to the full range of consultation questions.

### **Go8 Key Points**

- 1. Case Studies of impact.** The Go8 supports a light touch approach which involves a small number of impact case studies per institution that provides all disciplines the opportunity to demonstrate the impact of their research.
- 2. Engagement indicators.** The Go8 supports the use of engagement indicators as a key measurable proxy for impact and their capacity to incentivise researcher engagement with industry, government and the community. The Go8 notes that the *ATSE Research Engagement for Australia* metrics, with their focus on commercialisation and research income, are too narrow and are aligned with STEM disciplines. The Go8 strongly endorses the development of an “ATSE plus” set of metrics that capture the bulk of relevant engagement activity across the disciplinary spectrum – particularly in the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences.
- 3. Support for HASS disciplines.** Specific impact and engagement assessment processes must provide the opportunity for HASS disciplines to fairly demonstrate their impact and engagement performance. Subsequent consultation on the assessment model should include the HASS disciplines as a priority.
- 4. A formative approach to impact and engagement assessment.** Impact and engagement assessment is a complex and evolving discipline. Significant work in this space has been undertaken in Australia including the development of the *Research Quality Framework (RQF)* in 2006/7 and the Go8-ATN case study trial *Excellence in Innovation for Australia (EIA)* in 2012. However, the schedule for the implementation of the current model in Australia has not allowed the same degree of underpinning work and certainly not the depth of work as was done before the implementation of the UK REF. To that end, the Go8 believes that is necessary to take a formative approach in refining the process as it is implemented – both in the trial and beyond.

## Contextual Remarks

### ***The Go8 Commitment to Impact and Engagement***

The Go8 members have, as a core part of their mission, the delivery of substantial impact for the Australian public through quality research and teaching.

In terms of research the Go8 invests more than \$6 billion annually in research and development activities, including two-thirds of the industry income earned by Australian universities and over 70% of critical public research income, through the ARC and NHMRC.

As important as these expenditure figures are, the real commitment of the Go8 is in using this investment to contribute demonstrably to social, economic and environmental outcomes.

Truly excellent research will drive the innovation economy and underpin Australia's economic success and standard of living in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The Go8 is the powerhouse of Australia's internationally recognised research capacity.

The Go8 has a long standing commitment to evidencing the engagement of its research effort whether it be with government, the community, Not For Profits, SMEs or large multinational corporations. The Go8 members do this in many ways every day, but we also have a determination to see this happen at a systematic level which can only serve to strategically bolster Australia's research and innovation effort.

In 2012 the Go8, in partnership with the Australian Technology Network (ATN), conducted the *Excellence in Innovation for Australia (EIA)* research impact assessment trial. In this trial over 160 case studies of research impact from across 12 universities were assessed by expert external panels. This proved not only the undeniable impact of quality research from Australian universities but also the capacity of case studies and expert panels to assess the impact of research and the institutional pathways to impact.

In November 2015 the Go8 Vice Chancellors collectively welcomed the Government's innovation agenda. They also backed the Government commitment to assess the impact of research in order that the Australian public have greater transparency in how their tax dollars are spent and a far better understanding of how their lives are enriched every day by funding University research.

### ***Relevant lessons from the Go8-ATN Excellence in Innovation for Australia (EIA) exercise***

The EIA report<sup>1</sup> and follow up analysis conducted by RAND Europe<sup>2</sup> confirmed a number of outcomes from the EIA:

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<sup>1</sup> Excellence in Innovation: Research impacting our nation's future – assessing the benefits. Go8 and ATN. <https://www.go8.edu.au/sites/default/files/docs/atn-go8-report-web-pdf.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Assessing Research Impact. An international review of the Excellence in Innovation for Australia Trial. RAND Europe. [http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research\\_reports/RR200/RR278/RAND\\_RR278.pdf](http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR200/RR278/RAND_RR278.pdf)

1. It is possible to assess research impact across a broad range of disciplines;
2. The case study approach can provide a compelling narrative of the impact of research;
3. Research impact could be assessed against an outcomes based system of classification such as the Socio-Economic Objective (SEO) codes, recognising that there are some limitations to this methodology;
4. Expert panels comprising a majority of end-user stakeholders are able to assess research impact; the panels should also include an appropriate discipline mix covering the breadth of research impacts being considered; and
5. Development of an impact component of any broader research assessment exercise would require further consideration of the number of case studies to be submitted.

In addition, the EIA report noted that

*The standard of case studies – both content and research – also varied greatly and this was reflected in Panel scorings. While some cases were very well written and explained, a number were poorly written and lacked defined verifiable sources to back up claims. Universities need to expand skills to better construct and present case studies for impact assessment.*

The point in evidence being that universities and researchers themselves needed to be able to introduce rigour into the case studies, rather than this necessarily being an essential deficit of the system.

#### **Relevant lessons from the UK Research Excellence Framework (REF) Impact Assessment**

The first REF exercise resulted in the submission of nearly 7,000 case studies. Commentary of this first round of impact assessment concluded:

- Under the REF methodology HASS disciplines were able to evidence excellent impact from their research;
- The tightness of the case study guidelines effected an evidence-based rigour in the case studies;
- Initial evidence suggests that the REF case studies are being used for a multiplicity of purposes covering advocacy, analysis and accountability – as well as in generating industry engagement;
- The median cost of preparing a REF impact case study for an institution was estimated to be around £7,500 (or around \$14,000). The total cost across the entire pool of 6975 case studies was estimated to be £55m<sup>3</sup>. When this is annualised over the expected 6-year life span of the REF this figure becomes **approximately £175 (or around \$330) per research FTE per year**; and
- This is still a significant cost which must be taken in the context of the £214 m of Mainstream QR funding it drove in 2016-17<sup>4</sup>.

Given that at this stage there is no committed funding attached to the Australian Engagement and Impact assessment a much lighter touch exercise is warranted.

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<sup>3</sup> Preparing impact submissions for REF 2014: An evaluation. RAND Europe  
[http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research\\_reports/RR700/RR726/RAND\\_RR726.pdf](http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR700/RR726/RAND_RR726.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Guide to funding 2016-17: How HEFCE allocates its funds  
[http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/HEFCE,2014/Content/Pubs/2016/201607/HEFCE2016\\_07.pdf](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/HEFCE,2014/Content/Pubs/2016/201607/HEFCE2016_07.pdf)

**Engagement Indicators**

As noted in the Go8 key points on engagement indicators there is a need for engagement indicators that capture the bulk of relevant engagement activity across the disciplinary spectrum – particularly in the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences.

In the UK there has been programmatic support and analysis of engagement activities (knowledge exchange) through Higher Education Innovation Funding (HEIF) since 2001.

A 2014 report on Knowledge Exchange Performance and the impact of HEIF details the major external engagement categories for universities by percentage of income earned<sup>5</sup>.

<b>Knowledge exchange mechanism</b>	<b>% Total Revenue – all universities</b>	<b>% Total Revenue – arts based universities</b>
Contract research	34	2
Collaborative research	23	6
CPD and continuing education	20	58
Consultancy	11	14
Regeneration and development programmes	5	9
Facilities and equipment services	4	10
Intellectual property (including sale of shares)	2	2

From this table it is clear engagement income related to IP (commercialisation) is only a small share of the total and that if an institution has a large focus on HASS disciplines, then the majority of engagement income comes through CPD (Continuing Professional Development) and continuing education.

**Conclusion**

Consistent with their statement of November 2016 the Go8 Vice Chancellors are supportive of impact assessment for university research.

The Go8 is committed to working with the ARC, Department of Education and Training and the Government to develop a rigorous, fit-for-purpose and effective engagement and impact assessment process.

This will be of great national benefit in improving university performance in delivering impact and in increasing both public confidence in and support for research.

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<sup>5</sup> Knowledge Exchange Performance and the Impact of HEIF in the English Higher Education Sector – Report for HEFCE. Tomas Coates Ulrichsen.