Research dissemination in Creative Arts, Humanities and the Social Sciences
HERD-HO544

Published in: ***Higher Education Research and Development*****, 2006, *25*(3), 215-229**

Pat Bazeley
Research Support P/L
PO Box 2005
Bowral NSW 2576

Quality of Life and Social Justice Flagship
Australian Catholic University
115 Victoria Parade
Fitzroy, Vic.

pat@researchsupport.com.au
www.researchsupport.com.au

Keywords:

arts research; humanities research; social sciences research; research assessment; research impact.

Abstract:

An ethnographic case study of issues related to research performance and promotion of research was conducted within the Creative and Performing Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (AHSS) disciplines of a regional university. The purpose of the study was to explore a variety of ways in which the research work of those disciplines could be made more visible to others both within and outside the university. In reviewing the research performance, concerns and orientation of academics in AHSS disciplines, this paper addresses the issue of disciplinary variations in research activity and research focus, with implications both for future programs of research performance assessment, and for the promotion of research activity among currently disenfranchised AHSS academics. In the context of current Australian debates about a research quality framework, the data considered in this review address issues of impact, rather than quality.

The context of research performance assessment

Over the past two decades there has been a growing world trend toward assessing the research performance of academics, and to have a component of university funding dependent on the results of that assessment. As well as funding, universities derive considerable status from the performance of their academics or departments in these assessment exercises. Academic research performance is variously considered to include measures or ratings of research productivity (volume and/or quality of output), impact and reputation.

Australian universities have been included in this trend. Academic research performance has been quantitatively assessed since 1992, initially by the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET), and currently through the Department of Education, Science and Technology (DEST). The DEST data collection has focused on the dollar value of research income, the number of published research books, chapters and journal articles, and in more recent years, has placed increased emphasis on the number of higher degree completions. Essentially the current system has measured quantity rather than quality (Batterham, 2004). Funding based on this collection of data was initially distributed through the 'Research Quantum' component of universities' operating grants, and is now distributed through two schemes: the Institutional Grants Scheme (IGS) and the Research Training Scheme (RTS), with different data elements contributing in different proportions to the calculation of funds through each of these schemes.

Widespread dissatisfaction with the quantitative tools used to assess performance in the Australian system led the Commonwealth Government to establish, in 2004, an Expert Advisory Group (EAG) to develop a new Research Quality Framework (RQF) as a basis for allocating research funding to universities. Under the RQF, assessment of relative research performance will focus on the *quality* of original basic or applied research, and its broader *impact or use*, rather than on the current quantitative measures of income or production volume (EAG, 2005).

Approaches to assessment of research performance

Research performance, in the long term, is valued in terms of what one discovers, the impact on science and for society, by whom one trains, and by recognition from peers (Graham, 2004). "Evaluating performance [a multidimensional concept] is an inexact science" (Creswell, 1986, p.92), or indeed, "more of an art than a science" (Graham, 2004, p.16), where different criteria are needed for different purposes and in different situations.

Production of scholarly publications—journal articles and books—has been the most common metric by which research productivity has been assessed in universities internationally (Creamer, 1998). In Australia, productivity was originally assessed using 22 categories of output, but data collection and verification difficulties led to this range being reduced to a much smaller number of indicator categories (currently 4—refereed journal articles, authored books, chapters and refereed conference papers). There is an extensive research literature pointing to inherent flaws in publication counts and other output measures as an indicator of research productivity (e.g. stemming from differences in journal standards and requirements), to difficulties in quantifying publication output (e.g. with regard to weighting author contributions), and to disciplinary differences in publication style (e.g. length and number of authors). Suffice it to say that the course metric of raw publication counts has never been particularly acceptable to the Australian academic community,

although most have preferred that publication measures be included in this way rather than not at all.

Success in winning grants is often seen as a proxy for productivity, and, given the problems in defining and assessing output, was the preferred measure of productivity proposed by DEET when the Research Quantum was instituted. As well as their direct contribution to research performance (and the finances of the institution), success in winning grants is taken to be indicative of the researcher's having a track record of publications (or other output) sufficient to justify belief in their capacity to undertake the proposed research, thus it may be interpreted to indicate quality as well as quantity.

Publication and income metrics primarily provide a measure of quantity of output: quality plays little part in such assessments, except insofar as peer review plays a part in grant proposals succeeding and publications being accepted. Other international assessment systems have dealt with this lack of focus on quality by having academics submit a sample or a portfolio of publication output for committee review, for example, in the British and New Zealand systems (Morgan, 2004). The consensus is that review by expert peers (as distinct from peers in general) remains the 'gold standard' for quality, in the absence of any better method (National Academies Forum, 2004).

Excellent research will impact on the advancement of knowledge through further academic research—evidenced, in part and in the short term, through citation analyses, research student completions and departmental reputation. It may also impact in industrial, government, business and community settings through the transfer and application of new knowledge—requiring long term social and economic indicators for proper assessment. The Allen Consulting Group (2005) identified four dimensions in what society values—material, human, environmental and social—and in so doing, brought into focus the relevance of a wider audience for research. This wider audience, largely neglected in current Australian assessment system, appears to be given more significance in the preferred model for the new RQF, insofar as research groups will be asked to provide evidence portfolios of the context, relevance and impact of the work they put forward for assessment (EAG, 2005).

While some would argue that 'excellence' (variously defined) in research is sufficient in itself, others point to the need to be able also to place a dollar value on what is achieved, either in order to 'sell' the product and so gain support for further work (National Academies Forum, 2004) or as a common metric by which work across diverse disciplines might be assessed (Allen Consulting Group, 2005). Assessment of impact is, of course, complicated by the fact that the scientific basis for new discoveries, and their application, might be laid decades before the discovery is fully realised (Batterham, 2004), and indeed the one who set it in motion may no longer be remembered (or cited) by the time the impact is realised (Graham, 2004).

With any assessment system, there will be an element of game-playing by universities and the academics within them to maximise their benefits under the system (Morgan, 2004). One of the unfortunate impacts of the current system, for example, is the trivialisation of research writing through the 'salami slicing' of articles to increase publication counts. Performance choices will inevitably be fashioned to suit the criteria which are established, just as "publication is now viewed as the objective of research, rather than the dissemination of the knowledge contained within it [which has often been disseminated well before publication]" (Steele 2004, p.67).

New directions: one size does not fit all

The application of rigid, imposed, one-size-fits-all, quantitative measures often leads to manipulation of research, avoidance of risky research, use of inappropriate techniques—and withdrawal from 'the system'. The need for variable approaches to assessment of research to reflect variations in production for different disciplines emerged as a regular theme of the National Academies Forum (2004), as did the strong desire for assessment of quality rather than quantity. Disciplinary differences in approaches to publication—where in some disciplines articles are solo written and lengthy, while in others they may report a brief experiment and be multiple authored—have been well documented (Becher, 1987; Rhoades, 2001). Depending on the field and type of research, conference papers and e-journals may be more 'cutting edge' than published articles, pre-prints may give prime visibility within a relevant research network, technical reports to industry may have greater impact than can be measured by citation counts, and diffusion of research in some areas may best occur through articles in the popular press (Allen Consulting Group, 2005; Creamer, 1998). Disciplines may even differ in what they consider to be research—its boundary with scholarship being a case in point for the humanities (McCalman, 2004), and the growth of multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary work adds a complicating factor to assessment of quality by expert panels which are generally discipline based.

The preferred model for the RQF clearly recognises that there are disciplinary differences in the medium and style of research performance and in the nature of the impact that research might have, such that each discipline panel will have some freedom in determining appropriate criteria for assessment within their own area (EAG, 2005). The investigation of the work of those in AHSS disciplines, reported here, demonstrates the variety of orientation, product and impact that might be considered by panels with responsibility for those disciplines. The provision of data about their research by academics within these disciplines was often accompanied by a high degree of frustration with regard to lack of recognition for their work (particularly in arts and design), and negativity about an assessment system which neglected issues of appropriate audience and impact. Importantly, members of discipline groups which were almost invisible on the current performance data were often found to be remarkably active and, in some instances, to be gaining wide recognition and/or having significant impact within their field, or more broadly in society and culture.

Data for this investigation

Data were gathered through extensive periods of mixing and talking with academic staff both on-campus and by phone, interviewing designated research leaders and administrators, attending research meetings, and reviewing documentary sources (including performance records, media releases and web materials). In addition, 127 responses to a brief open-ended emailed survey covering research interests, methods, philosophies and activities were obtained. Data collection occurred over a 12 month period (late 2002-2003) and involved approximately 300 academic staff members (the number at any one time fluctuated a little with appointments and resignations).

For the purpose of this article, the disciplines within the AHSS area have been amalgamated into three groups – arts/design, humanities and social sciences. The information obtained across all sources has been collated to provide:

a) A summary of patterns of performance using DEST indicators for 2000-2001 (i.e. data submitted in June, 2002 – the most recent available from the Office of Research at the time of data collection), analysed by broad discipline area;

b) A count of target audiences (based on responses in the survey), in four categories: academic, professional, the general public, and government;

c) The kinds of research activities in which academics engaged;

d) The kinds of research products and recognition generated by those activities.

Observed patterns of performance

Publication patterns under the current system

It has been noted that differences in audience orientation and variations in the socialisation of academics in different disciplines give rise to differential levels, patterns and types of research output. Thus, historians prefer to write books, psychologists look to the journal article; disciplines which emphasise individual creativity tend toward non-traditional and non-collaborative forms of output. Table 1 provides a summary of assessable publication trends for Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences discipline groups drawn from the DEST data collection for 2000-2001, i.e. over two years, for this regional university. This summary makes clear how these differences are expressed across these disciplines. Disciplines vary with respect to the types of publications produced, patterns of collaboration, and overall levels of measured productivity.

Table 1: Performance patterns on DEST indicators, 2000-2001

Publication type	**Arts/Design**			**Humanities**			**Social Sciences**		
	S[1]	C[2]	T[3]	S	C	T	S	C	T
Books (A)	1	0	1	5	5	9	3	5	7
Chapters (B)	10	1	11	15	7	21	24	27	45
Articles (C)	4	6	9	43	24	61	47	106	119
Papers (E)	1	1	2	9	0	9	13	67	55
Exhib/Recording (J)	4	2	5	1	0	1	0	0	0
Totals	20	10	28	73	36	101	87	205	226
N contributions	30			109			292		
N contributors	21			59			99		
DEST points	28.7			121.05			182.75		
Proportion of academic staff[4]	16/68 (23.5%)			36/58 (62.1%)			71/132 (53.8%)		

1: Solo contributions; 2: Collaborative contributions; 3: Total separate products (whole or part) of each type, where those written entirely or collaboratively within the discipline area are counted once only, and those written collaboratively with someone from outside the discipline area or external to the university are also counted once; 4: Proportion of academic staff, including those in related research centres, who made contributions in 2000-2001.

The level of collaborative work in the Social Sciences stands out in strong contrast to work in Arts and Humanities. The majority of those who wrote joint papers worked regularly as a collaborative team, while others represent supervisor-student collaborations, other mentoring relationships, or simply temporary associations around a particular topic. Those disciplines with a relatively low level of collaboration as evidenced in these statistics are ones which have traditionally promoted a strongly individualistic research ethos, and in which academics find it most difficult to cooperate to form research concentrations. But level of collaboration is not necessarily associated with higher or lower levels of productivity: for both Humanities and Social Sciences (disciplines with the strongest traditions of scholarly dissemination, but with very different patterns of collaboration), productivity is running at approximately 2 DEST points per contributor in each. Neither does collaboration mean that more are involved in production of publications: Humanities has the highest proportion, of any group, of members who are generating counted publications despite being mostly solo producers. What cannot be discerned from these figures is the differential contribution to productivity of collaboration (where papers at least appear to be generated jointly) versus collegiality (such as might exist in research concentrations in individualistic disciplines). What can be mistakenly assumed from these figures is that those in the Arts/Design area are minimally productive.

The number of conference papers reported in Social Sciences stands out in contrast to other disciplines. Articles are the most common form of dissemination in Humanities and Social Sciences, while Arts/Design staff focus on book chapters rather than articles. Books are most commonly produced by those in the Humanities, and recordings and exhibitions (not counted after 2001) are almost entirely limited to Arts/Design. For the most part these differences reflect different publication cultures in those disciplines, but in some instances they also reflect differences in the opportunities available to produce the kinds of work which count. Compare, for example, the number of scholarly refereed journals available in education or psychology with what is on offer to a researcher in design, painting or theatre.

Differences exist also in the orientation of staff from different disciplines with respect to their understanding of what makes for research and a research product, with implications for the acceptability of their work in an accountability exercise. For example, those whose work is primarily funded through industry rather than competitive grants often experience difficulties in shaping their work for academic publication. The particular disadvantage experienced by those in creative and performing arts is evident in their relatively low level of counted works. Not only do those in these latter areas typically prefer alternative forms of dissemination to the scholarly print media, but (when they were eligible for DEST points) by comparison with, say, refereed conference papers, these alternative forms of audio and/or visual work had to meet especially stringent requirements to be accepted as a research product of appropriate quality, and validation of having met those requirements was more difficult to collect (hence many simply did not bother). It is also of interest to note that exhibitions of created works had to be "substantial collections of original work by *an individual artist* …" (DEST criteria, italics added) exhibited in a public gallery. There was no comparable requirement for a print publication to be produced solo (or to be a *collection of works* by one person), yet a single journal article or conference paper was considered equivalent in points terms to the exhibition of works.

The categories of research productivity recognised by DEST were meant to be indicative only of what is being achieved in any university. They were selected (by DEET at the time) as the best indicators (predictors) of overall research productivity that had originally been assessed

on the basis of some 22 items, in order to simplify the data collection and verification process. They were, therefore, not intended to proscribe the ways in which academics should publish or otherwise promote their research and its results. That said, recognition by DEST of specific categories—or their exclusion from what is recognised—inevitably has an influence on the publication patterns of academics, often with unintended negative consequences. For example, the exclusion of edited books (but not chapters) from the current collection is likely to influence the way people handle book production; the inclusion of refereed conference proceedings has radically altered the approach taken by universities to approval of attendance at conferences (with incidental negative consequences for a number of smaller professional associations), and to the style of paper presented at conferences (publication ready rather than a work in progress for discussion and development). This problem has been compounded by unpredictable and sometimes retrospective changes in the criteria for all but the core categories (for example, the exclusion of creative works for 2001-2002 collection, announced at the *end* of 2002) and difficulties in determining what can be considered to be research. Especially for those not in mainstream disciplines, the consequence has been a deal of insecurity in knowing the best way forward.

Target audiences and modes of dissemination

While it may well be an artefact of what is most easily measured, the emphasis in assessment of research productivity on the production of refereed articles and conference papers carries with it an implicit assumption that the primary audience for academic research is other academics, and that the most valued research tends to be basic in nature rather than applied—this despite the increasing pressure on academics to seek out commercial sources of funding for their research work.

AHSS academics were asked whom they saw as the target audience for their research, and in what form they would normally present results to those audiences. Target audiences were classified as being academic, the profession, the public, or government. The responses given clearly demonstrate that, from the point of view of researching academics, academic audiences are only one of a number to be seriously considered (Table 2). Disciplinary differences are, once again, quite marked, but even within the most 'traditional' academic disciplines reviewed, such as the Humanities and Psychology, non-academic audiences feature significantly amongst those listed. Modes of dissemination for their research also varied greatly across these disciplines, reflecting the diversity of product and of the audiences to which they were being directed.

Table 2: Target audiences for research output

Discipline area	N	Target audience for research[1]			
		Academic	Profession	General Public	Government
Creative arts/design	26	8	16	18	0
Humanities	44	30	5	21	4
Social Sciences	57	39	50	15	7

1. More than one response was recorded for a number of respondents.

Dissemination in Arts/Design. As one would expect, there is a particularly strong public performance focus to the work of creative artists. Second in importance as audience were other arts professionals while academic output was given significantly less emphasis. Few indicated interest in or experience of writing for refereed publications. Those in design focused on reaching relevant professions while retaining a considerable emphasis on public consumption of video/DVD and installations with a strong electronic/visual component. Their orientation is perhaps a reflection of a comparatively greater emphasis on exploring the methodology and theory of design and communication in both teaching and research, rather than simply on the performance itself.

Creative/research works being considered for these academics include musical composition, artworks, prints, photographs and sculptures, theatrical works (including re-interpretation of classic works), documentaries, digital design, sound and video productions. These works are disseminated through live exhibitions, performances and installations including national and international performance tours and participation in festivals, also through recordings and the web. Large audience numbers were often mentioned by those in the arts—significantly larger (by a factor of hundreds) than exists for the majority of academic books and journal articles.

Creative artists and designers disseminate knowledge and ideas stemming from their work (its basis, what was achieved, how it was achieved) through lectures, seminars and interviews for professional and public audiences; they curate exhibitions; they write encyclopaedia entries, catalogue entries and essays; they produce reviews and feature articles in professional journals and special interest magazines and newspapers, as well as the occasional refereed article, book/book chapter or report.

Recognition for their contribution is shown through the selection of their work for exhibitions or long term display in public buildings; public broadcasting of recorded works (audio, video, interactive DVD) and documentaries; commissioning of works; awards or nominations for awards, and through (usually public) review articles about their work.

Humanities. There is clearly a stronger focus on producing for an academic audience among humanities academics, but also a strong emphasis on a readership amongst the (informed) general public. As these are largely ‘pure’ academic disciplines (primarily history and literature), there was generally little concern with a professional audience. For the general public, humanities academics provide original literary works and reviews of current literary works, insights into cultural history, analysis of contemporary culture, and review or comment on historical or current events. Much of this public output will not ‘score’ for DEST (reflected in the lower number of assessable items coming from literature compared with history or cultural studies), but it nevertheless makes a significant and visible contribution to culture. How and where (i.e. in what publications) their work is reviewed is of critical importance to authors.

Books were commonly referred to as a primary medium for performance by humanities staff, and this group recorded more book publications than any other. Even so, because of their extended production time (as much as 10 years), they do not appear especially frequently in lists of outputs, and staff who are starting out or who are anxious to maintain recognition for their work or who wish for interim review of their work needed to publish articles along the way. Encyclopaedia entries, novels, poetry, and other literary works, newspaper and magazine feature and review articles and commissioned reports comprise a range of publication types commonly used in the humanities. In addition, work may be presented through public broadcasts of literary work, interviews, or comment; audio-visual

presentations, websites, electronic articles, film and video; and public lectures, conference papers (both academic and non-academic) and seminars. Social and political commentary is provided through Letters to the Editor, articles, reviews, and in radio broadcasts. Humanities academics also are often called upon to present study days on an area of expertise for senior high school students, an activity which, along with the writing of textbooks for those students, has the potential to promote the university and their work to those students. One had a substantively focused literary work adopted as the basis for a musical production, another detailed significant impact on the higher school certificate syllabus and examination process—an impact tied more to a lifetime of work than to a particular product.

Social Sciences. Psychologists and sociologists exhibit a classical academic focus with respect to research output, for the most part. There is an extensive range of refereed journals available for publication of psychology and sociology research and a strong tradition, into which psychologists and sociologists are socialised early, of reporting the results of research through journal articles. Nevertheless, within that more general academic orientation, many psychology staff also have a strong clinical-professional focus. They coordinate masters level professional training and deliver professional workshops, seminars and talks, and while their work may be well received by the profession (evidenced, for example, by waiting lists), it is not particularly able to be evidenced in DEST records.

Education academics, in contrast, generally place much more emphasis on targeting a professional rather than an academic audience for their work, with the majority (but not all) of their publications having an applied focus. They frequently engage in cooperative strategic or applied research with school or higher education systems in arrangements which mean that the results of their work are produced first and foremost in reports to those systems. These reports often are not allowed to be released for public consumption, may be otherwise unsuitable for open publication, or are disallowed as publications according to DEST criteria (the latter includes, for example, investigative work done under the Commonwealth's Evaluations and Investigations Program). The only opportunity for accredited publication arising from such work, typically, is if some aspect of what was done can be put into a more theoretical context and published as a journal article: to do so requires sufficient enthusiasm and time to revisit the work after reporting requirements for the stakeholder/client are completed, and often more problematically, assumes permission to publish in this way.

Education staff also are active on the executives and in journal editorship of various professional—primarily discipline-based—associations. Several are involved in discipline committees of the Board of Studies, determining curricula and setting examination standards for the school system. Some have produced teaching resources, curricula and programs which are widely used, not just in NSW, but also internationally; they provide professional development seminars and workshops for teachers or develop and present professional support programs for teachers, e.g. in leadership or educational technology. Through contributions to syllabus committees, their professional associations and associated journals, through professional development and their development of teaching resources, these staff exercise a significant influence on the direction of school education in NSW.

Social sciences academics reach public audiences through interviews on radio or television or articles in the print media, by taking an advocacy or consultancy role (e.g. with children's television programs, the United Nations), by contributing to government enquiries, through the preparation of technical manuals, and by making presentations to special interest groups. Each of these contributions draws on recent research or specialist knowledge built through

their research. Importantly, links built through (often time consuming) community or industry liaison result in further opportunities for research, through making research sites available and/or through developing funding partnerships.

A large proportion of the research work of those who work within a collaborative-emancipatory-transformative approach (from several social science disciplines) is of an applied, consultative type. The results of that work therefore are primarily presented live to stakeholder groups, with reports sometimes following thereafter—and perhaps, eventually, academic publications. These researchers place as much emphasis on reaching the general public and professional workers with their research as they do on reaching other academics.

Issues raised

Recognising alternate research products

At present, in order to gain recognition for their work, an artist or performer must write about the innovative, theoretical or methodological contribution of their research and then find a suitable scholarly venue in which to publish that. For many, however, the product or performance is seen as the climax of their research, in that it embodies the major intellectual input and is also the primary means of communication of the results of the research (i.e. is both substance and method of dissemination)—and 'suitable' scholarly venues are scarce. In a sense, these issues are paralleled for action-oriented social researchers. For example, the primary concern of the participatory-emancipatory action researcher may be to impact a particular (social) environment, but recognition will not be gained for such work unless it is reported in a refereed form.

Those working in literary fields experience different problems in having their work accepted as research. For example, the work involved in locating, organising and framing items for an anthology (in the case being discussed at the time, previously unpublished letters which provided considerable insight into the social history of the times) requires considerable research effort and skill, and may contribute new knowledge and or new understanding of the work or its context, even if the major content is not original work. Similarly, novels or poetry are not recognised, yet such works are often the product of extensive research and or scholarship as well as decisions about how to present the work—and they may be widely read (and quoted) by both academics and the general public. The place of the historical novel or some of the more creative ways of writing up anthropological or sociological research, and whether such works should be considered as outcomes of research or simply works of fiction, is currently a matter of contention. Problems with recognising creative output as research often stem from the non-traditional format of the works; in the case of a performance or installation, the temporality of the output; and difficulty in defining and determining quality. Nevertheless, if the academy is to include those working in arts, design and literature (for example), then it must also open its doors to and recognise modes of production and dissemination which are appropriate for them.

It has been argued that where research is primarily disseminated in non-traditional ways or for non-traditional products (such as artworks, performances, novels, or even social action), in order to gain recognition in a university environment, the researcher must be prepared to reflect on, contextualise, theorise or otherwise explain their work in a scholarly manner for the benefit of other academics and students, that is, both the work itself and the contextualisation of it are necessary elements in advancing knowledge. Iain McCalman noted, in his contribution to the 2004 National Academies forum on assessment of research,

that innovative research may find "new areas to explore or alternative ways of examining existing problems…interpreting new or existing bodies of knowledge in a new way…or by acts of creative practice or performance" (p20)—that it can and does include scholarship and non-traditional forms of output, but that, nevertheless, creative art and performance needs to be accompanied by a record of research activity, so others can understand the contribution being made. The difficulty, in Australia, is that those accompanying explanations will also typically be in forms (such as catalogue entries, reports or review articles in public media) not recognised (currently, at least) in performance assessment.

Recognising impact

One has to question the impact value of a journal article which may be cited once only, or never, and which remains current for just a few years, in relation to, say, a sound-art installation which is seen and heard by tens or hundreds of thousands, an artwork which remains on display for centuries, a report which impacts on a system which educates many thousands of children, or even a program which changes the approach of just one teacher, but who then touches the lives of some hundreds of children. Problematically, there are no readily available or routinely used measures for these types of impact. Although it is possible to specify some of the more obvious types of impact, such as numbers attending a performance, and to give indicators of other types, such as numbers of presentations made, increases in productivity, problems solved, or requests for repeat services, assessing impact on people's wellbeing is often a much more qualitative exercise.

As was illustrated by contributors to the National Academies forum, and by the Allen Consulting Group, the full impact of basic research may be a long time coming and the source of that impact possibly may never be recognised; the true societal impact of research is almost unmeasurable. While the problem of long term outcomes cannot be fully resolved in an assessment exercise, the preferred model for the RQF recognises the need to make use of a variety of quantitative and qualitative indicators of impact by seeking evidence portfolios from research groups and by recommending considerable freedom as to what that evidence might be (EAG, 2005). Such evidence will include reach into the community as well as into national and international arenas, it will be about contributing to industry and society, about contributing in discipline-specific genres and forums, and about being seen to be doing these things through attracting positive academic, professional and public media attention ("telling the story" of the research, as was so often mentioned at the National Academies Forum). How discipline panels will respond to such potential diversity of evidence remains to be seen.

Recognition and funding

Outcomes from research activity, as revealed through surveys or conversations with staff across AHSS in this regional university, were enormously varied, and recognition of these a significant issue for those staff. Each varied research outcome is potentially able to add to society's stock of knowledge, to increase understanding of, or to contribute to the development of the physical, social or cultural world. Each impact and each source of external recognition builds visibility for the both the researcher and the university. Each represents a continuing investment of time and effort, and each therefore needs be recognised and celebrated in some way. In contrast, the DEST data collection, as a uniform system of national assessment, recognises a severely proscribed range of indicator publications which are easily counted and easily verified. These provide an indicative measure of the

productivity for the whole university, not of individual departments or individuals within it. Because the collection is designed to determine university wide performance and funding levels, and does not reflect in its calculation the output of all disciplines, the workings of that collection should be understood and applied only in those institutionally based terms. When universities base internal forms of recognition on DEST-measured performance, they are abusing this principle, and in consequence also many of the researchers within their walls.

In the case of this university (and probably many others), administrative funding constraints have meant that information about other forms of output was not collected. In consequence of both this and an overarching concern with generating income, internal recognition of those other forms was also not forthcoming. Funding delivered to academic units for research has been allocated primarily on the basis of their contribution to the DEST indices. Designation of Research Active status, with workload implications, is also based on DEST indices (as, indeed, is recommended by DEST)—made worse by the fact that these are typically somewhat out of date at the time they are applied. One might argue, however, that it is better for researchers to determine the most appropriate or important audience for their research, and to then focus on what might be gained by skilfully targeting that audience (Creamer, 1998). Involvement in a collaborative community project, for example, may contribute to building relationships which are rewarded, over time, with further funds provided directly for research, with industry or community contributions to a proposed ARC Linkage grant, or in the attraction of a postgraduate student—with those funds, or the student, incidentally attracting significantly more returns from DEST (under the current system, as research income or higher degree completion) than would have been achieved through academic publication alone. Perhaps if staff are encouraged to develop their preferred mode of dissemination, reaching audiences most relevant to them, and gain at least intra-university recognition (across all disciplines) for doing so, they may develop more enthusiasm for undertaking and disseminating research, and so become more productive. The university, the researcher, and the world at large all stand to benefit.

In conclusion

This review of research audiences and research output and impact in AHSS disciplines of this regional university revealed that:

- researchers in these disciplines are addressing a range of audiences in the professions and the wider community, with an academic audience often providing a lesser focus;
- a lot more research is being done by AHSS researchers than would appear to be the case from the DEST returns, particularly in those disciplines which typically deliver new knowledge, fresh understanding or new methodology in non-traditional (primarily non-print) formats; and
- the impact of this research is widespread and considerable, but may not necessarily be reflected in usual academic modes of impact assessment.

Ultimately, choice of appropriate indicators of performance comes back to the question of the goals of the organisation and the purpose to which the measures are being put, rather than their ready availability (Rhoades, 2001; Toutkoushian et al., 2003). Each discipline must work out what kind of scholarly performance is to be valued for its own advancement, and similarly each university for its own internal purposes. Various measures of academic research output have different relevance within different academic traditions, and in different settings. Each type of measure or method of assessment employed is problematic in some

way or another; each introduces its own biases and has particular limitations. Discipline panels to be established within the RQF, under the currently proposed model, will have an opportunity to tackle the often difficult issues of what constitutes research, relevant research output and appropriate indicators of impact, and to devise procedures and guidelines specific to their particular fields. With a focus on quality rather than quantity, and with selected material only being gathered for review, a more inclusive yet less onerous approach will increase acceptability of assessment across the disciplines, and have the potential to spark new enthusiasm for research engagement.

References

Allen Consulting Group. (2005). *Measuring the impact of publicly funded research*. Canberra: Australian Government, Department of Education, Science and Training.
URL: http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/research_sector/publications_resources/profiles/measuring_the_impact_publicly_funded_research.htm

Barber, M. (2004). Excellence in mission-directed research. in National Academies Forum, *Measuring excellence in research and research training* (pp. 26-34). Canberra: The Academy of Science.

Batterham, R. (2004). measuring excellence: a Chief Scientist perspective. in National Academies Forum, *Measuring excellence in research and research training* (pp. 3-8). Canberra: The Academy of Science.

Becher, T. (1987). Disciplinary discourse. *Studies in Higher Education, 12*, 261-274.

Creamer, E. G. (1998). *Assessing faculty publication productivity: issues of equity* ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report No. 26 (2). Washington D.C.: The George Washington University, Graduate School of Education and Human Development.

Creswell, J. W. (1986). Concluding thoughts: observing, promoting, evaluating and reviewing research performance. In J. W. Creswell (ed), *Measuring faculty research performance* (pp. 87-102). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Expert Advisory Group (2005). *Research quality framework: assessing the quality and impact of research in Australia: The preferred model.* Commonwealth of Australia: Department of Education, Science & Training.
URL: http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/research_sector/policies_issues_reviews/key_issues/research_quality_framework/rqf_preferred_model.htm

Graham, R. (2004). Excellence in investigator-driven research. in National Academies Forum, *Measuring excellence in research and research training* (pp. 10-16). Canberra: The Academy of Science.

McCalman, I. (2004). Excellence in the humanities, creative arts and media. in National Academies Forum, *Measuring excellence in research and research training* (pp. 20-25). Canberra: The Academy of Science.

Morgan, K. J. (2004). The research assessment exercise in English universities, 2001. *Higher Education, 48*, 461-482.

National Academies Forum (2004). *Measuring excellence in research and research training* Canberra: The Academy of Science.
URL: www.science.org.au/proceedings/researchexcellence.

Rhoades, G. (2001). Managing productivity in an academic institution: rethinking the whom, which, what, and whose of productivity. *Research in Higher Education, 42*(5), 619-633.

Steele, C. (2004). Changing research practices in the digital information and communication environment. in National Academies Forum, *Measuring excellence in research and research training* (pp. 61-71). Canberra: The Academy of Science.

Toutkoushian, R. K., Porter, S. R., Danielson, C., & Hollis, P. R. (2003). Using publication counts to measure an institution's research productivity. *Research in Higher Education, 44*(2), 121-148.