

ATN RESPONSE TO 'THE PREFERRED MODEL'

Overview

As outlined in its response to the RQF issues paper, the ATN is strongly committed to an eventual model which:

- will support funding for the highest value research, irrespective of where that research is undertaken;
- is developed in consideration of the national innovation agenda;
- takes into account the critical significance research *impact has on end-users*, together with research quality;
- will promote collaborative linkages with industry, business, government, the community and other universities.

Funding

A research framework which supports research excellence in the area of impact and quality, wherever it occurs, must prevail.

Continuing to fund this research is critical for the national innovation agenda - both at an economic level and at a social level. Any change to this would be detrimental to our nation-building efforts and we strongly advocate that research ought to be funded irrespective of where it occurs.

To that end, the ATN is seeking further clarification of the Minister's comments in the Foreword relating to the impact of the RQF upon funding distributed by the ARC and the NHMRC.

It is important to note that there are both basic and applied problems to be solved in every discipline or sector of the economy. Often it is difficult to draw the boundary between the two and basic research often finds its origins in applied research and applied research follows from basic research.

A good research environment is focused on both and the ATN strives to provide such an environment. An example of this in practice exists within the Creative Industries faculty at QUT. This faculty brings together researchers from a number of disciplines, including performing arts, humanities, social sciences and media. They are successful in both basic and applied research, have attracted a CRC, an ARC Centre of Excellence, a Federation Fellow and significant levels of nationally competitive grants and industry funding.

It is doubtful if this kind of faculty and the research it undertakes would thrive as well as it does in a non-ATN type research environment.

The National Innovation Agenda

The Federal Government's innovation platform encourages, and indeed rewards collaborative research with industry. Any move to rate research impact downwards (against research quality) would surely act as a disincentive for industry collaboration and force researchers to become more inward looking in their efforts.

Research impact *must* be seen as an intrinsic part of the value of research. Ultimately, the goal of research should be focused on improving our policy and practice, and having a positive influence on society in general. Knowledge for its own sake most definitely has value, but should we not also be encouraging researchers to find ways to change and improve things in the real world?

Assessing and Funding Research Impact and Quality

The RQF sets out to measure research quality and the ATN supports the importance of focusing on quality and impact, including impact upon peers. However, of equal importance is that of the impact of our research on end users.

The ATN trial RQF has found that there is, of course, a reasonably strong relationship between the impact that research has, and its intrinsic quality.

Research which has a high impact on the community often would be considered high quality research. This is not however, always the case, nor does it take into account the change in 'impact' that given research might have over a period of time.

Whilst the Preferred Model Paper describes a separate rating of research quality and impact and references the importance of impact throughout, the aggregate research measure gives a significantly higher weighting to measures of quality.

If impact is to have any real influence on the way that research is assessed, as it should, the ATN maintains there must be separate funding pools for quality and impact, preferably each comprising 50% of the total funding available.

For descriptors and criteria the EAG recommends further consultation. The ATN Trial is showing many different examples of how evidence is being brought forward to demonstrate quality and impact. *(A copy of the ATN RQF Trial assessment guidelines is attached as part of this submission)*

RQF Assessment Panels

While the establishment of RQF Assessment panels by aggregation of ABS RFDC Classifications is convenient and generally representative it is likely that the amount of funded research covered by some panels will be rather unequal.

Panel members, be they international or national assessors, should also be sympathetic to cross disciplinary and inter-disciplinary research. This must be a criterion for selection of assessors.

International Benchmarking

The eventual national RQF must encourage diversity and reward impact driven research. As a nation we are poised to lead the international research debate on the development of impact assessment.

Indeed, as Australia is leading the way in determining the weight that impact will be given when measuring the significance of research, we will be in a very real way *setting* the international benchmark for assessments of this kind.

Obviously, if we however separate quality and impact scores then the quality score can be used for international benchmarking and there is no need to conflate them.

Strategic Context Statements

Initial ATN RQF trial assessment activities and evidence from the UK RAE suggests that the overview/strategic direction section of the submission is crucial in establishing the context and enabling adequate assessment. We agree that guidelines should be provided for institutions to indicate the type of information, which would be appropriate for the context statement.

The ATN Trial is indicating that context statements aid the review process by providing evidence on research culture and environment, esteem, research training and sustainability of the research group. It is therefore integral to the data provided to support both the quality impact and broad impact.