

Research 'must shun red tape'

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ANY research impact exercise run in parallel to the Excellence in Research for Australia audit should avoid increasing administrative demands on universities.

This caveat was designated as critical at the recent Group of Eight and Australian Technology Network of universities symposium to advance the organisations' Excellence in Innovation for Australia trial, proposed for next year.

"This requirement argues for a selective rather than comprehensive evaluation of research for impact," a report on the meeting states.

It said the impact evidence should be accepted on the basis of whether it was verifiable, rather than insisting on extensive and expensive verification.

The EIA trial will involve 12 universities: all five of the ATNs, four Go8s and Charles Darwin University, the University of Newcastle and the University of Tasmania.

They will submit discipline-based data, but the report acknowledged it would be a challenge to decide on what kind of material should be collected and a method of assessment.

The partners are in the process of assembling an advisory board and a technical working group.

Other essential elements of the EIA were that all disciplines be included because "to omit any discipline is to designate it as having no (or) limited impact".

"A corollary of this is that the EIA must allow discipline-specific models for evaluating impact."

These should include a combination of quantifiable and qualitative indicators and case studies.

In a paper to the symposium, the vice-president of the Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering, Peter Laver, pushed the importance of research collaboration in order to innovate.

"What arrangements exist are often serendipitous and based on the linear model . . . whereas higher-quality, more complex collaborative efforts with continual feedbacks are more effective," Mr Laver said.

"An applied research quality evaluation system enjoying parity of esteem with academic research would reduce the 'pressure to publish' psychology and foster more and better collaboration," he said.

He proposed "research application evaluation committees" for each discipline cluster.

These would "ideally include representatives from the corresponding ERA research evaluation committees" as well as internationally recognised practitioners in the field and prominent users of the research outputs.