

EI 2018 Consultation - Feedback Template

Australian Research Council Draft EI 2018 Submission Documentation – Public Consultation

Note: Provide all feedback using this template and email to ARC-EI@arc.gov.au with “EI 2018 Submission Consultation” in the subject heading.

Contact Details (required)*

Contact name	Dr Christina Parolin				
Address	Australian Academy of the Humanities				
	3 Liversidge St, Acton				
City	Canberra	State	ACT	Postcode	2601
Phone		Email	christina.parolin@humanities.org.au		
Are you providing feedback on behalf of an institution or as an individual?	On behalf of an institution				
Name of institution or organisation (if applicable)	Australian Academy of the Humanities				

*The ARC will not consider anonymous feedback. Institutions/organisations should include **all feedback in a single consolidated** written response.

1. Draft EI 2018 Submission Guidelines

Please indicate any feedback you have on the *Draft EI 2018 Submission Guidelines*. Please provide clear reference to the topic and section number for your feedback.

Response

The Australian Academy of the Humanities believes the methodology for the Impact component of the EI 2018 exercise is generally sound, but we have serious reservations about the Engagement component, specifically with respect to the lack of appropriate fit-for-purpose engagement indicators that can be applied across disciplines.

Engagement Metrics:

The set of metrics for Engagement make use of income, in various ways, as the primary proxy for Engagement (pp. 13-15 of the Submission Guidelines). In the Academy’s view this does not fit well with the broad definition of Engagement employed or broad range of benefits identified – specifically the contribution to society and culture – nor does it enable an inclusive and accurate assessment of the contribution to engagement from within the humanities, arts and social sciences (HASS) disciplines.

Each of the proposed indicators operate, with varying degrees of success, as a means of evaluating levels of engagement from within the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) disciplines. In response to at least two of the indicators, the HASS

EI 2018 Consultation - Feedback Template

disciplines will return results which appear to reflect minimal levels of public engagement; while that perception might be corrected in the accompanying narrative, it is inevitable that the metrics will be seen as a definitive measure and this will be to the reputational detriment of the HASS disciplines. Engaging with research end-users is a forerunner to achieving wider benefits and impacts – relying on income metrics will evidence a narrow range of activity.

If the Engagement component of the exercise is to cover the entire field of engagement across the sector, it is essential to include at least some indicators which work well for the HASS disciplines and thus serve as effective instruments for assessing levels of achievement. Such indicators should be included whether or not they are strong indicators for STEM. There has to be a level playing field rather than one in which the HASS disciplines are inevitably seen as an exception.

Research contribution to culture:

The Academy is pleased that the definition of impact has been revised to include explicit reference to culture. However, there is very little by way of guidance in the Impact Study Template (p.42) about the ways in which cultural impact may be evidenced by impact indicators – the examples given for possible additional quantitative indicators are ‘return on investment, jobs created, improvements in quality of life years (QALYs)’ (p. 43). We would also observe that ‘cultural impact’ will need to be reflected in the rating scale alongside the economy, society and the environment.

On the engagement front, it is unclear how the cultural benefits or impacts of research should be reflected within a broader suite of engagement metrics, which are at this point in the exercise optional (refer to Appendix F, pp. 40-41).

2 General comments

Please indicate any additional feedback you have on the development of the EI 2018 submission documentation.

Response

In principle, the Academy believes that the emphasis on Engagement and Impact (alongside Excellence) in 2018 has the potential to give visibility and incentive to the full range of academic research activity. However, there is more work to be done in developing robust, discipline specific indicators, and in developing data collection practices within our universities that can contribute to a comprehensive assessment of engagement activity and the wider benefits of university-based research. It is our position that EI 2018 will be an extension of the pilot exercise in many ways.

The engagement metrics developed for EI 2018 will not evidence important activity which has community, cultural and social value. As noted in our response to the submission guidelines (above), the Academy questions whether the engagement income metrics account for different disciplinary practices, and remains concerned that certain disciplines will be advantaged over others (which would contravene the Indicator Principles set out for EI 2018 in the *Engagement and Impact Assessment Pilot 2017 Report*, p. 56).

EI 2018 Consultation - Feedback Template

The focus on income data will not sufficiently capture how research delivers social, cultural and environmental benefits to the nation and risks the unintended consequences of encouraging research behaviour which pursues the dollar rather than the engagement. This will ultimately disadvantage those communities least able to afford to contribute funding but which nevertheless stand to gain considerable and often life-changing benefits from collaborative research endeavours.

There is a vast amount of engagement generated through HASS (and indeed much that is relevant to STEM as well) that will now not be captured by this process. Examples include appointments to and participation in the boards or advisory committees for government or statutory authorities; or attendance at the public events associated with non-traditional research outputs such as art exhibitions, theatre performances, and film screenings. It is inappropriate for such areas of engagement to be excluded from the metrics and thus from the overall account of the scale and character of public engagement involving university researchers. A more inclusive approach must be developed.

We note that the ARC is trialling the collection of co-supervision of HDR students data in 2018, and would be happy to work with the ARC, discipline communities and universities to contribute to developing better engagement indicators in future iterations of the exercise.