

## ***Assessing the wider benefits arising from university-based research: Discussion paper response template***

### **Introduction**

Please provide any comments you have in relation to the issues raised in Part 1 of the paper, addressing if possible the following questions raised in Section 1.5:

1. How might the above definitions be improved or supplemented?
2. Are these definitions sufficient to describe the relationship between research, research engagement and benefits?

The current definition frames the concept within a University knowledge production modality rather than having a more exchange based orientation. It uses terms like “knowledge transfer” rather than “knowledge exchange”, and does not recognise that the outputs may be co-created with users and that university research may be inspired by real world challenges as conveyed by engagement with users – who may often be bringing critical background intelligence and knowledge to the engagement. (Indeed gaining ideas about research directions was cited as the second highest motivating factor for those researchers engaged in applied research activity (survey conducted in a KCA member University). On a more minor level, in the context of “dissemination”, it may be beneficial to use “extension” terminology also as that is a commonly used descriptor for that type of translation to a broader community of users.

### **Aims, outcomes and principles**

Please provide any comments you have in relation to the issues raised in Part 2 of the paper, addressing if possible the following questions raised in Sections 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3:

1. Are there alternative or additional aims that should be included?
2. Are there additional purposes or uses that should be considered to assist the design of the assessment?
3. What are your views on the draft principles? What other principles or considerations should be addressed?

Another aim related to aim 3 might be to highlight the benefits for universities in this engagement (in terms of research directions, relevance and gaining knowledge from interactions with users)

While potentially subsumed by other outcomes, additional purposes might include:

- Providing an evidence base to better shape and direct the design and operation of government funding programs directed at facilitating such engagement (ARC Linkage, NHMRC Development Grants and many other sector and niche specific schemes at Federal and State level)
- Providing an information base that supports other government initiatives directed at linking communities of interest (eg precincts/networks).

In terms of the draft principles:

- Principles 1-4 are essentially sound. In particular it will be very important to minimise the administrative burden. However it should be noted that there is potential and appetite to

rationalise existing data sets rather than just reusing them: so the administrative burden should be considered in aggregate. KCA has already started dialogue on this topic with the Department, and has surveyed its members on how to rationalise the National Survey of Research Commercialisation. It is KCA's understand that the Department is also interested in such rationalisation and improving data quality. In relation to principle 5, the issue of granularity by discipline is potentially a difficult one dependent on its definition but also because as referenced in the paper itself because there may be a desire to focus on areas of economic impact in the user base rather than discipline definitions that are more relevant internally to an institution.

- We note also the reference to the "**Australian** economy, society and/or environment". Clearly this is important but it is suggested that it is important to consider global impacts, networks and engagement – not just a parochial focus. Most of the grand challenges Australia faces have a strong global dimension and our engagement is already global.

## Methodological considerations

Please provide any comments you have in relation to the issues raised in Part 3 of the paper, addressing if possible the following questions on research engagement metrics, research benefit case studies, and use of collected information.

### Research engagement metrics

#### **What considerations should guide the inclusion of metrics within the assessment?**

Cost benefit considerations should guide inclusion, as should likely compliance. Both of these factors are likely to point to fewer and more focussed metrics. Potential complementarity to likely case studies may be another factor to consider.

#### **What are the lead indicators for research benefits?**

This is a more interesting and problematic topic that needs to be workshopped. These might include meaningful engagement metrics around earlier stage interactions with potential users, and measures of repeat business later in the cycle, and indicators around the breadth and extent of translation and dissemination. Comprehensive and consistent gathering of such data is likely to prove challenging

#### **What information do universities currently collect that might form the basis for research engagement metrics?**

There is a wide variety of information but there different approaches in different institutions. For example there may be information within Faculty on outreach and extension activity, within commercial offices on contract research and commercialisation interaction at a deeper level than that visible in the National Survey on Research Commercialisation (profiling the nature of the interaction, levels of repeat business and looking at other leading indicators such as business networking activity), and within the media and communications areas.

#### **What metrics are currently available (or could be developed) that would help to reveal other pathways to research benefit?**

This requires further consideration and research.

Noting that the Higher Education Staff Data collection is currently being reviewed, are there any research engagement metrics related to university staff that should be considered for inclusion?

It may not be appropriate to changes to that particular collection, but perhaps consider whether there is an opportunity to couple with aggregations of the type of community engagement data that may exist inside staff planning & development review processes (bearing in mind that community engagement is often a fourth stream of activity considered following research, teaching and administrative activities). However the extent of capture of this information in central systems may be highly variable.

**In addition to ERA, NSRC, GDS, AusPat and HERDC data, are there other existing data collections that may be of relevance?**

**What are the challenges of using these data collections to assess research engagement?**

Perhaps consider the use of metrics on the results of RDC funding and outputs. Challenges here may include lack of standardisation and transparency of that information (but it is submitted that this is an important objective anyway given the matching government funding)

**What is your preferred unit of evaluation for research engagement and why?**

Probably 4 digit – 2 too high, 6 too low

**What are the issues related to using FoR codes?**

They are not really reflective of the user classifications

**Is there a need to use four- or six- digit FoR codes or will the two-digit code suffice?**

**What are the opportunities and costs of breaking down analysis to the more detailed level?**

**Given an interest in “outcomes,” would it be better to use the ABS’s Socio-Economic Objectives for research (SEO) codes? Why/why not?**

Quite possibly as it is closer to the user group, but there is a dependency on the priority of other motivating factors in the metrics exercise

## **Research benefit case studies**

1. What considerations should guide the inclusion of research benefit case studies within the assessment?
2. How should the number of case studies provided by each university be determined?
3. Are there any issues with institutions being able to submit joint case studies? If so, what are they?
4. What information should be included within a case study?
5. How should a case study be assessed? Should it be scored or rated in some way?
6. Are reach and significance useful concepts for an assessment of the benefits arising from university-based research?
7. What would make useful criteria for assessing the benefit of university research?
8. Are there data/evidence collection standards that you consider best practice within the university research context?
9. Is there data regularly collected by universities that could be employed to provide a picture of research benefits? If so, how is this information captured and validated?

There are many complex questions here that are often further complicated if there is an attempt to standardise and approach across disciplines. One overall consideration is the extent to which, in aggregate, the metrics and case studies paint a complementary or holistic picture. Numbers of case studies must not be over burdensome. Joint work is common so not providing for joint case studies would be problematic, but there are obvious problems of co-ordination, apportionment or provision for multiple counting and reconciliation. There are clear complications when it comes to trying to have assessment that is relevant to individual differing fields and of broader application, quite apart from the cost of administering assessment. But perhaps consideration should be given to differing rationales for metrics and case studies, with quantitative metrics being more useful for benchmarking while case studies might have some of the complementary motivations of cataloguing and promoting positive engagement and benefits without a disputable qualitative assessment being required. Existing practices around data and evidence gathering are very varied, so while additional information exists in various quarters (including commercial offices, marketing, communications and Faculty), workshopping will be required to achieve consensus around approaches that are generally applicable and implementable.

**Should timeframes be used to limit what is reported on through case studies? If so, what timeframe(s) should be used?**

Differential time lags from research to impact in different areas make standardisation of this difficult (for example, contrast a mobile phone app to drug development).

**What is your preferred unit of evaluation for the assessment of research benefits and why?**

SEO codes may be preferable given the applied/user focus these entail.

***Approach to case studies***

**What are the strengths and weaknesses of the model?**

Strengths and weaknesses are related to some of the answers to earlier questions, especially when it comes to an attempt to put in place a fair, nuanced and cost effective assessment system. Hence the suggestion above that there be further consideration of the extent to which detailed assessment is required to achieve relevant outcomes of the program when complementary metrics are considered. In this respect look at the identified detail and rationale of the overall process as identified in Box 1 of this section of the discussion paper – communication and insights into pathways can be achieved without detailed assessment, and if further evidence is required to substantiate claims then the further enquiries could be made of institutions, or a spot audit could be performed.

## Use of collected information

**How might case studies and metrics be combined within the assessment?**

**Should outputs of the assessment be included within compacts and/or the research block grants calculation methodology?**

**What other existing instruments might they be integrated within?**

The case studies and metrics should be complementary. There would need to be further consideration and justification before outputs should be considered in funding calculations, and if this path was chosen then the assessment methodology would need to be more rigorous (and hence more costly) – so query overall cost/benefit.

## Next steps in the consultation process

Please provide any comments you have in relation to the issues raised in Part 4 of the paper, including on the proposed pilot exercise.

As noted above and proposed in the discussion paper, workshops are a key requirement to help build consensus around what is useful and practical. KCA is aware of some of its members commencing similar processes already and would be interested in helping to facilitate engagement with the University commercial arms and offices that it represents to ensure that there is adequate consultation.

## Other comments

Please provide any other comments you have in relation to the discussion paper.

KCA is very supportive of greater focus on the benefits flowing to the economy and the broader community from university based research, both by means of appropriately tuned metrics and case studies, provided that this is done in a sensible and cost effective manner. There is a good opportunity to rationalise and co-ordinate with existing approaches as well as introducing new measures.