

29 August 2025

The Regional Universities Network (RUN) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the consultation on the ***New Australian Research Council (ARC) Research Insights Capability***.

RUN is a national collaborative group of seven regional Australian universities:

- Charles Sturt University,
- CQUniversity Australia,
- Federation University Australia,
- Southern Cross University,
- University of New England,
- University of Southern Queensland, and
- University of the Sunshine Coast

This submission reflects the positions of RUN institutions, and in doing so, also aims to represent the views of those students and communities which RUN universities serve; the one-third of Australians who live outside of metropolitan centres in Regional, Rural and Remote locations.

## Overview

RUN, while supportive of the proposed objectives and principles of the New ARC Research Insights Capability, holds significant concerns regarding the future direction of the exercise.

At the outset, there is insufficient detail available in the consultation draft for RUN to adequately gauge what outcomes are being proposed by the exercise, and therefore adequately gauge the extent of value (or otherwise) that would be realised by RUN universities.

RUN recommends, as a matter of urgency, that additional information be provided to the sector so an informed and useful consultation process can take place.

The consultation draft suggests there will be no objective measure of research quality as a feature of the proposed Data Dashboards, In-depth/Bespoke reports, nor the State of the Research Environment Report. The absence of objective evaluations of research quality significantly diminishes the usefulness and impact of the exercise for regional universities and their external stakeholders. This is an acute limitation that risks reducing the ability of the ARC to conduct meaningful evaluation of Australia's research capability.

While RUN is encouraged by the prospect that the capability aims to be less burdensome for stakeholders, the concern is that this efficiency comes at the expense of an objective measure of research quality that would otherwise demonstrate the individual research capabilities of Australia's universities.

RUN also holds concerns about the proposed use of Open Alex, noting the unacceptably high levels of predatory/fraudulent journals that it currently accommodates, alongside an indexing policy which does not screen for publication outlet quality.

[www.run.edu.au](http://www.run.edu.au)

## **What is the value of research evaluation to you?**

RUN universities consider objective, ranked research evaluations – particularly those overseen by the Australian Government – to be a highly effective capability-demonstrating instrument. Previous research evaluations have allowed RUN universities to demonstrate to its students, communities, and external stakeholders that world class research quality exists – indeed flourishes – right across regional Australia. Previous research evaluation exercises evaluated quality, rather than quantity, thereby enabling smaller, and newer universities to demonstrate that the research conducted by them was indeed of unequivocal standard. This cannot be done as clearly using traditional university ranking metrics.

Like many universities, RUN universities continue to use Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) results to celebrate regional research quality and impact to meet multiple objectives:

- raising the visibility of research careers to aspiring students seeking to join the research-trained workforces of regional Australia;
- promoting the niche research capabilities and reputation of institutions to their regional communities, industry partners, and prospective international institutions and international students; and,
- assisting institutional decision-making in terms of resource focus and prioritisation, as well as useful benchmarking against like-universities.

Objective research evaluations focus universities to improve their research capabilities by providing an external metric on which to base their decisions and allocations of finite resources. This is particularly important to smaller and/or regional universities whose distinct social missions make it difficult, if not impossible, to achieve economically scaled operations. An important component of the social missions unique to regional universities involves raising and enabling the tertiary/research aspirations of regional communities with persistently lower levels of undergraduate and postgraduate attainment. The role played by ranked research evaluations as a tool that assists the social missions of regional universities should therefore not be underestimated.

Research evaluations allow RUN universities to celebrate research quality and impact occurring outside of our largest capital cities. Regional universities elevate the status of research culture within the communities they serve by highlighting the areas of institutional research outputs ranked as world class or above. Regional communities take great pride from those pockets of world class research being conducted by their local institutions. It has been some time since Australia last conducted institutional evaluations, which has diminished the opportunity to celebrate current local research achievement and contribute to broader culture-setting objectives. RUN urges the resumption of a national system of institutional research assessment that features objective, ranked institutional research evaluations.

## **What are the questions about the research sector would you like a research insight capability to answer?**

How will the proposed model demonstrate the capabilities of individual Australian universities (at a granular Field of Research level) on an empirical comparison standard?

RUN notes that the ARC will not rank, score or rate institutions but will openly share

knowledge, highlight key issues and successes across the sector, and produce annual assessments (via State of the Research Environment Reports). RUN holds significant concerns that such an approach would risk undermining the ability of the exercise to demonstrate the individual research capabilities of Australia's universities.

## **Do you see value in the outputs of the proposed ARC Research Insights Capability?**

There is insufficient detail available for RUN in the consultation draft to provide any meaningful assessment of the proposed outputs: Data Dashboards, In-depth/Bespoke reports, or the State of the Research Environment Report. As such, RUN can only offer limited feedback:

### ***Data Dashboards***

RUN would seek more information to better understand what data is proposed for each dashboard. A basic requirement of the dashboards, however, would be the availability of data to be downloaded in a flat file format. Any dashboard must enable interactivity and have clearly defined definitions. Any dashboard must also be freely accessible – RUN universities would not support their institutional data sitting behind a paywall.

### ***In-depth and bespoke reporting***

It is unclear to RUN what the focus and purpose of reporting will include, who the audience would be (i.e., individual universities, or higher-level sectoral reports?), how much resourcing would the bespoke reporting require, and how will this cost be borne by users/consumers? Will AI be utilised in the development of bespoke reports, and if so, how can the accuracy and effectiveness of outputs be managed consistently?

The lack of available detail of this output makes it difficult for RUN to properly consider its overall value. Regardless, any in-depth and bespoke reporting must ensure that the underlying data is accessible to all university stakeholders, and be downloadable. The reporting must not suppress data – or at least suppress data in a sensible, consistent way to ensure repeatable results.

### ***State of the Research Environment Report***

RUN would support a State of the Research Environment Reporting regime that remains on a fixed release schedule (e.g., annually, or bi-annually) and insulated from political timing/interference. RUN would also support a dedicated focus within each scheduled report on the state of the regional research environment (with attention given to, for example, regional university research grant success, outputs, impact, PhD training and research workforce development etc...).

## **What are your views on the proposed principles?**

RUN is generally supportive of the proposed principles; Inclusive; Open & transparent; Contextual, ethical and culturally appropriate; Dynamic and adaptable; Impartial, robust and credible; and Useful. However, RUN would question the usefulness of the exercise (and by extension, the Useful value) if it provided no objective measure of research quality that would otherwise demonstrate the individual research capabilities of Australia's universities, whether they be large and metropolitan, or small and regional. In this case, RUN would advocate a reconsideration of the use of the principle, 'Useful'.

**Do you have data that could be shared with the ARC, or are you aware of a data asset, which could be useful to the ARC?**

RUN would question the efficacy of any alternative data or data assets that would not already be known to, or utilised by, the ARC. The ARC has already invested in Clarivate Analytics, and RUN has no objection to a continued utilisation of this as a citation resource. If the ARC considers that further/alternative data assets are required, RUN suggests a scan of reputable, mature data assets utilised by global counterparts that may be adaptable to domestic contexts (such as SciVal, for instance). While RUN is largely agnostic in this sense, RUN would urge the ARC to consider the national interest in investing in (for instance) SciVal and/or Clarivate data assets or dashboards and making them accessible to all Australian universities at no cost. Many Australian universities – particularly those smaller and/or regional institutions, could never justify the investment individually, or even collectively (via the RUN network, for instance). Ultimately, RUN universities are seeking data assets that reveal what research is being undertaken at each Australian university, and how well they undertake this research from a globally contextualised quality perspective.

As part of the Research Insights Capability exercise, the ARC's potential utilisation of the open scholarly publications database OpenAlex has been raised with RUN. The members of the RUN network would strongly discourage the utilisation of OpenAlex in the ARC's research evaluations. RUN does not consider OpenAlex to yet hold the reliability and credibility of alternatives (such as Scopus or Web of Science), given the unacceptably high levels of predatory/fraudulent journals that it accommodates. The indexing policy of OpenAlex, for instance, has been made as inclusive and comprehensive as possible with no screening for publication outlet quality in place. RUN notes that OpenAlex may emerge as a suitable option in the future as it continues to address its well-publicised flaws and shortcomings. However RUN does not see OpenAlex as a reliable or credible publication database today.

**For further information please contact the RUN Secretariat at [info@run.edu.au](mailto:info@run.edu.au)**