Impact of the Research Quality Framework on ECU

1. Structuring an RQF

Issue 1: How should an RQF be applied to universities and publicly funded research agencies?

(a) An RQF should be applied in the same way to both universities and publicly funded research agencies.

☐ Strongly agree ☑ Strongly disagree ☐ No comment
☐ Somewhat agree ☐ Somewhat disagree

(b) Within the university sector, an RQF should be applied differentially to specific types of institutions.

☐ Strongly agree ☑ Strongly disagree ☐ No comment
☐ Somewhat agree ☐ Somewhat disagree

Impact on Edith Cowan University

(1a) Because the publicly funded research agencies (such as CSIRO, AIMS, and ANSTO) do not enrol research higher degree students, there would have to be some differences in the way the RQF is applied to PFRAs and universities.

(1b) It seems most unlikely that any of the New Generation University group will argue for differential assessment of their institutions. If universities such as ECU were treated differently in the RQF there could be a negative impact on student attraction, retention and teaching quality.

2. Defining and measuring research quality and impact

Issue 2: Research quality and impact should be assessed by appropriately constituted panels.

☑ Strongly agree ☐ Strongly disagree ☐ No comment
☐ Somewhat agree ☐ Somewhat disagree

Impact on Edith Cowan University

(2) There will be widespread agreement that expert peer review should be the basis of assessment. The alternative – bibliometric measures or reanalysis of existing quantitative data sets – would not advantage ECU.
3. Measuring research quality and impact

Issue 3: Assessment panel members should include the following (the categories are not necessarily mutually exclusive):

(a) Experts reviewers able to assess impact in a discipline area/academic field.

☑ Strongly agree □ Strongly disagree □ No comment
□ Somewhat agree □ Somewhat disagree

(b) Expert reviewers able to assess impact more widely.

☑ Strongly agree □ Strongly disagree □ No comment
□ Somewhat agree □ Somewhat disagree

(c) International expert reviewers.

□ Strongly agree □ Strongly disagree □ No comment
☑ Somewhat agree □ Somewhat disagree

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(3a), (3b) The shift from the global measures of quality (research income, publications, and research student completions) to discipline-based expert measures will draw attention to the unevenness of research at ECU (and other new universities).

(3c) The use of international expert reviewers will not differentially impact on the university, although it will increase the cost of the system for all users.

Issue 4: Assessment panels should be informed by metrics whose nature and relative influence may vary across different disciplines.

☑ Strongly agree □ Strongly disagree □ No comment
□ Somewhat agree □ Somewhat disagree

Impact on Edith Cowan University

(4) Some variation in the application of quality and impact measures is essential if the RQF is to deal appropriately with discipline differences. The nature and
influence of measures of impact would need to differ, for example, between
the physical sciences and the performing and creative arts.

Provided that panels have some capacity to shape the metrics, there may be
advantages for areas of excellence such as are found in WAPPA.

5. Measuring research impact

<table>
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<th>Issue 5 (a):</th>
<th>An RQF should recognise research impact through the measurement of different outcomes for different types of research and disciplines.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✔️ Strongly agree</td>
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<table>
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<th>Issue 5 (b):</th>
<th>An RQF should recognise the production and diffusion of technology and knowledge as elements of research impact.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✔️ Strongly agree</td>
<td>□ Strongly disagree □ No comment</td>
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<th>Issue 5 (c):</th>
<th>Where appropriate, users and those commissioning research should contribute to the assessment process by providing an external perspective on research under consideration.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✔️ Strongly agree</td>
<td>□ Strongly disagree □ No comment</td>
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<td>□ Somewhat agree</td>
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Impact on Edith Cowan University

(5a) The inclusion of impact, as well as traditional measures of peer reviewed quality, will provide opportunities for some of ECU’s high impact applied research.

ECU will need to invest – both in cash and the opportunity cost of researchers’ time – in developing the capacity to prepare credible ‘impact statements’. Work on this should begin immediately.

(5b) This is a logical consequence of the argument that quality and impact should be measured separately. There is no differential impact on ECU.

(5c) The inclusion of end users in the assessment is seen as positive for ECU.
6. Level of aggregation for assessment

**Issue 6:** What is the most appropriate level of aggregation for assessment?

- [ ] Subject/discipline area
- [x] Research grouping/research team/s
- [ ] Department/schools
- [ ] Faculties/Divisions
- [ ] Institutional level - university/PFRA

**Impact on Edith Cowan University**

(6) Regardless of the model used for aggregation, ECU’s areas of low research concentration and low research activity will become apparent from a discipline-based RQF.

From a management perspective the research team level is where competition for funds occurs and is the most appropriate level to measure performance. Small and nimble teams such as those at ECU can be highly effective and generate impacts of significance.

7. Who should be assessed?

**Issue 7:** Who should be assessed as part of an RQF?

- [x] Eligible staff nominated by institutions (based on guidelines to be provided)
- [ ] All eligible staff

**Impact on Edith Cowan University**

(7) ECU’s preference is for clear guidelines on eligibility for participation, and the option of nominating different of proportions of staff in different disciplines.

Assessing all staff would be difficult for ECU, when current RAI and data indicate that 30-50% of teacher-research staff is inactive (although there is a wide diversity across Schools).

There may be some impact from the RQF on the approach ECU will need to take to the management for performance and workload systems.

Attachment 1 taken from the UK’s 2001 Research Assessment Exercise, provides an example of the kinds of institution-wide assessments that may be developed in the RQF. This display describes the range of performance among research active staff, the scale of research effort in the institution, and the
percentage of eligible staff contributing to this research effort and performance.

8. Link to training of researchers

<table>
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<th>Issue 8: The training received by higher degree students in research requires a separate quality audit and/or assessment process.</th>
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<td>□ Strongly agree</td>
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Impact on Edith Cowan University

(8) Research training quality should be included in the RQF, rather than being dealt with separately by a body such as AUQA. There is no differential impact on ECU, and it might provide useful opportunity to demonstrate what we believe to be the high quality of ECU PhDs.

9. Focus of assessment

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<th>Issue 9: Assessment for an RQF should include a forward-looking strategic element as well as being based on past performance.</th>
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<td>✅ Strongly agree</td>
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Impact on Edith Cowan University

(9) The research growth path of ECU is based on building diversity and entering new fields of endeavour. A forward looking assessment would not disadvantage ECU.
### 10. Reporting arrangements

#### Issue 10: How should the outcomes of an RQF be reported?

(a) Reporting the outcomes of an RQF should be aligned to:

- [ ] Subject/discipline areas
- [x] Research grouping/research team/s
- [ ] Department/schools
- [ ] Faculties/Divisions
- [ ] Institutional level – university/PFRA

(b) Reporting on subject/discipline areas within any level of aggregation for the RQF should be aligned to the ABS RFCD codes or an appropriate subset.

- [ ] Strongly agree
- [ ] Strongly disagree
- [ ] No comment
- [ ] Somewhat agree
- [ ] Somewhat disagree

**Impact on Edith Cowan University**

(10) Impact on ECU of the level of aggregation for reporting was discussed under issue 6.

#### Issue 11: What should be the format of the ratings/rankings/benchmarks of an RQF? Please provide examples.

**Impact on Edith Cowan University**

(11) The approach foreshadowed in the issues paper will lead to research quality league tables, both at institution and discipline levels. The format of such tables is immaterial.

The wide public discussion that will follow publication of such league tables will increase the institutional consequences of higher or lower than expected ratings on student intake, research training and attraction and retention of research staff.
12. Links to funding

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<th>Issue 12: The resource intensity required for an RQF should be directly related to the level of funding that it informs.</th>
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<td>✔ Strongly agree</td>
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Impact on Edith Cowan University

(12) The RQF is likely to cost much more than – and be additional to – the current quantitative system of data collection.

Any loss of funds will be felt at the institutional as well as AOU levels. Current contestable block grants at ECU are $6M PA (3% of total budget).

The risk of reputational damage is likely to outweigh risk of loss of income from research.

13. Administrative benefits

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<th>Issue 13: An RQF ought to lead to commensurate reductions in reporting requirements for other Australian Government research accountability mechanisms.</th>
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<td>✔ Strongly agree</td>
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Attachment 1 Examples from the British RAE