



Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee
the council of Australia's university presidents

Media Release

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A model Research Quality Framework

The Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee today released its statement *Enhancing Australia's core research capacity – developing a Research Quality Framework*.

AVCC President Professor Di Yerbury said the AVCC statement incorporated a preliminary model of how Vice-Chancellors believe the Research Quality Framework (RQF) should work.

"An effective Research Quality Framework will demonstrate the value to Australia's future from further investment – from both public and private sources – in research and innovation," Professor Yerbury said.

"The AVCC is confident the RQF will reinforce the value of Australian research to the community, to business and industry, to the environment and to the nation. It will also provide the basis for future investment in research, targeted at research of high quality and high impact carried out across the national innovation system – in universities and research agencies.

"The AVCC supports the development of a Research Quality Framework to assess the excellence of research in Australia, and makes a strong argument to the Government for the need to boost its investment in research block funds. This is necessary for its successful implementation."

The AVCC model for the RQF is predicated on the Framework being used to distribute an enhanced research block funding program. The preliminary model has four components:

1. *the elements of the RQF assessment*: should include assessment of research quality, research impact, and research training outcomes. The model leaves open the option of including strategic planning as a further element to be assessed;
2. *the level of assessment, reporting and funding*: the basic level of assessment should be of research groupings determined by the university with outcomes reported for each of those groups; and funding then allocated to the universities for each to allocate internally according to its own priorities;
3. *Expert Panels*: should include expert reviewers from Australia and overseas with knowledge of a relevant discipline or academic field, and expert reviewers, including members of business and the community able to assess the broad impact of research; and
4. *the link between assessment and funding*: this would involve each expert panel producing a rating for each research group against the relevant assessment elements. The AVCC model proposes that ratings made by the Expert Panels should be used to determine funding consistent with the level of assessment.

The AVCC statement has been submitted to the Government's Expert Advisory Group on the Research Quality Framework, which is chaired by Sir Gareth Roberts.

"The AVCC looks forward to the coming National Stakeholder Forum on 2 June 2005 where the AVCC model and other proposals will be discussed and refined," Professor Yerbury said.

The AVCC Statement is available at www.avcc.edu.au/rqf

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Recommendations

1. The AVCC recommends that the National Stakeholder Forum consider the AVCC model for the Research Quality Framework (RQF) and develop it further as the basis for a trial of the RQF later in 2005.
2. The AVCC recommends that the RQF should be used to allocate substantially enhanced research block funding programs made up of current Research Training Scheme and Institutional Grant Scheme funds, plus additional new investment.
3. The AVCC recommends that the Research Infrastructure Block Grant allocation should not be subject to the RQF and continue to be allocated on the basis of income from National Competitive Grants programs.
4. The AVCC recommends that university research block funding should continue to be allocated via two main schemes, one providing general support and one providing support specifically for research training.
5. The AVCC recommends that transition arrangements should apply for three years, to allow a gradual shift from current performance-based funding to RQF-based funding starting in 2007, following resolution of all aspects of the RQF by the end of 2005.
6. The AVCC recommends that the RQF include assessment of research quality, research impact, and research training outcomes. Universities and other research organisations would be assessed against those criteria which apply to their distinct research missions and profiles.
7. The AVCC recommends that the basic level of assessment should be research groupings determined by each university, based on provision by the research grouping of relevant evidence about research outcomes.
8. The AVCC recommends that the basic level of reporting should be the research grouping.
9. The AVCC recommends that funding distributed via the RQF should be allocated to institutions to be allocated internally according to their own processes and priorities. This will ensure that universities continue to target funding strategically at important priority areas and have the capacity to develop new areas and respond to emerging needs.
10. The AVCC recommends the establishment of a limited number of Expert Panels using either a modified ASCED or ARC and NHMRC discipline clusters.
11. The AVCC recommends that Expert Panels include:
 - expert reviewers from Australia and overseas with knowledge of a relevant discipline or academic field; and
 - expert reviewers able to assess the broad impact of research, including members from business and community.
12. The AVCC recommends that the Expert Panels assess research quality, research impact, and research training, on the basis of relevant information and data provided by universities. Expert Panels' assessments should be based on the judgement of the members.
13. The AVCC recommends that the ratings of quality, impact and research training be weighted by a rating for the amount of research by the research grouping and the relative cost of research in each Panel's area.