

Macquarie University and the University of Newcastle

Research Quality Framework

Quality Trial

March – September 2007

A report on the Macquarie University RQF Team's perspective of undertaking the Trial

Executive Summary

The Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) has stated that the primary purpose of the Research Quality Framework (RQF) is to establish an assessment framework that provides government, industry, business and the wider community with the assurance that the research conducted in Australian institutions, and particularly within the Higher Education Sector, has been rigorously assessed through internationally recognised processes. DEST has also indicated that it intends to use the results of the 2008 RQF to inform funding of universities' Research Infrastructure Block Grants.

In preparing for the 2008 RQF over recent months most Australian institutions have been undertaking trials and exercises. To the best of our knowledge none of these has involved rigorous external peer review of Quality evidence portfolios.

At the beginning of 2007 Macquarie University and the University of Newcastle decided to cooperate on a formal trial of assessment of Quality evidence portfolios of individual researchers. This was despite the fact that the RQF Proper will assess Research Groupings, rather than individuals. Using the experience gained by UK universities under the British Research Assessments Exercises (RAEs), the two Universities felt that assessing the outputs of individuals would best inform the process of formation of the RQF Research Groupings. More importantly, it was believed that such a trial would have intrinsic value in benchmarking the two Universities in the international research context.

In the Trial, in which around 65% of academic staff from the two Institutions participated, over 1,000 active researchers submitted Quality evidence portfolios. The portfolios were then assessed by 23 specially-constituted panels made up from a total of 87 external assessors of international standard. About 40% of these assessors were from overseas institutions – assessors from the UK with RAE assessment experience were particularly targeted. The Trial was fully electronic, with all portfolios and assessments transmitted digitally.

The results of the Trial have given the two Universities an excellent understanding of their current research strengths, as well as areas needing further development. The Trial not only has established an international benchmark for the Universities' research, but also enables the monitoring of future improvements in research performance. It has also highlighted the complementary research strengths of the two Institutions.

The Trial has also helped the two Universities prepare their academic and support staff for next year's RQF Proper by providing useful feedback to individuals and informing the process of forming Research Groupings.

Details of the Trial

Reason for Trial

DEST first announced plans for a national research assessment exercise, to be called the Research Quality Framework, or RQF, in 2005. Throughout 2006 DEST undertook consultation activities with the Higher Education Sector by way of an Expert Advisory Group (EAG) appointed by the then Minister (the Hon Brendan Nelson). The report of the EAG provided the first set of draft guidelines for the RQF. These guidelines provided a basic outline of the process, including an idea of the panels to be used, and the general concept of evidence portfolios. In 2007 there was a change in Minister for Education, Science and Training (to the Hon Julie Bishop). The new Minister appointed the

Development Advisory Group (DAG) to replace the EAG. DAG, with continuing interaction with the Higher Education Sector, proceeded to amend the guidelines for the RQF. Even by mid-2007 Submission Specifications for the RQF were still in draft form. The Final Specifications were released by DEST on 18 September, 2007.

Amidst all this uncertainty surrounding the Specifications, it has been very difficult for individual universities to know how to plan for implementation of the RQF. Although throughout 2006 Macquarie University undertook discussion with its partners in the IRUA, no firm plans eventuated. By the end of 2006 Macquarie was convinced that a trial of Quality assessment of individual researchers would not only assist in improving confidence in its formation of Research Groupings for the RQF proper, but would also intrinsically be a valuable exercise in benchmarking itself internationally. In discussion with the University of Newcastle it was discovered that that University was having very similar thoughts. The two Universities therefore decided to collaborate in a joint trial.

There were three major advantages to this collaboration. First, the cost of engaging assessors could be shared. Secondly, there was a perceived advantage to increasing the number of staff assessed by each set of assessors. Thirdly, the perceived complementary nature of the two Universities' faculty-mixes made development of suitable discipline panels easier.

Trial Design

By February 2007 the Draft DEST Specifications seemed to be settling upon 13 discipline panels for the RQF proper. For the Macquarie/Newcastle Trial the two Universities decided to establish a total of 23 panels based upon the combined strengths of the two Institutions. Each panel was to have three to five members. For the purposes of the Trial it was considered preferable to have a greater number of panels, each with fewer members.

Management of the 23 panels was divided between the two Universities, such that Macquarie managed 12 and Newcastle 11. In general, where a University dominated a particular discipline area, it was given carriage of the associated panel.

A review of the number of eligible research staff distributed across these 23 panels then provided an estimate of the number of external assessors needed, assuming that each individual's portfolio would be assessed by at least two assessors.

The assessors recruited for the Trial ideally were to be researchers with international repute who could be relied upon to assess research across a reasonably broad area (i.e. outside their immediate disciplines). To this end, wherever possible assessors were chosen who had experience in peer-review processes. For overseas assessors, preference was given to researchers from the UK and New Zealand who had direct experience with their respective country's RAEs. For Australian assessors preference was given to those assessors, with experience in reviewing Australian Competitive Grants Scheme (eg ARC).

In both Universities, Macquarie and Newcastle Heads of Division/Faculty were asked to nominate suitable individuals as assessors.

Design of Evidence Portfolios

In the early stages of planning of this Trial, the two Universities agreed that it be restricted to an assessment of Quality only. The decision by DEST to include Impact in the RQF was novel (Impact was not assessed under any of the RAEs undertaken so far by the UK,

New Zealand or Hong Kong). Partly because of this there were no precedents on which to base specifications, and early in the year DEST's development of Impact Specifications was still at a very early stage. As a result in February 2007 there was very little experience upon which to base assessment of Impact.

In all of the RAEs undertaken overseas the key evidence assessed has been chosen Quality Outputs from individual researchers (whether assessed as individuals or within groups). In these overseas exercises (and as is planned for the Australian RQF) assessors were asked to review copies of the Outputs themselves. To do this all of the research assessment exercises have had to overcome the problem of Copyright in the digital copies of the outputs available to the assessors.

After some deliberation, Macquarie and Newcastle decided not to follow this process, but rather have individual researchers nominate their four best outputs and add a short justification of their choice, plus details of their role in the chosen output. Assessors were to be encouraged to access copies of the outputs themselves where they were readily available, but this was not mandatory. This decision was partly justified because of the difficulties with Copyright, but also partly because of the experience in recent British RAEs, where some panels reported viewing less than 10% of the nominated outputs put up for assessment.

Once content and design of portfolios was settled, written guidelines for the Trial were prepared and circulated to Divisions/Faculties within the two Universities.

In their final format, the Trial evidence portfolio templates consisted of the following:

1. Details of the individual, including special status (e.g. Early Career Researcher), and the panel to which the portfolio was to be sent.
2. Space for the listing of the individual's Best Outputs in the census period (2001 – 2006). As for the RQF Proper, this was four Outputs for most of the researchers assessed, but could be two for Early Career Researchers. For each Output the individual was allowed up to 200 words to outline his/her role in the Output, and a statement regarding the special significance of the Output.
3. Space for a listing of the individual's Esteem Factors (up to six in the census period), with allowance for 50 words for each factor listed. For this purpose Macquarie developed a listing of Esteem Factor types:
http://www.research.mq.edu.au/policy/documents/RQF_Esteem_Factors_8.pdf .
4. A listing of the individual's research funding income for the census period.
5. A listing of the individual's supervisory load and Higher Degree Research Completions over the census period.
6. A complete "Body of Work" for the census period – usually consisting of a list of publications and/or other Outputs.

At the University of Newcastle all of this data was automatically generated and entered into the portfolio templates via downloads from the University's research database. At Macquarie, everything except for the Four Best Outputs and Esteem Factors were pre-populated into the template from the University's research database. The incomplete templates were then sent to the researchers, who individually completed them by inserting their chosen Best Outputs and Esteem Factors.

Lessons learnt from this part of the Trial

- Whilst the concept of pre-populating a template may be helpful from an individual researcher's viewpoint, when Newcastle circulated the completed evidence

portfolios to their individual researchers, they discovered that researchers frequently wanted to change/supplement the presented data – mainly in the areas of the Four Best Outputs and Esteem Factors. Macquarie, which at the time did not have the capacity to provide its researchers with complete templates, therefore appeared to have been little disadvantaged by this incapacity.

Recruitment of Assessors

At the time of recruitment of assessors it was estimated that between 1,050 and 1,100 staff from the two Universities were eligible for assessment. This had the consequence that each panel of assessors would cumulatively be required to review a total of approximately 100 portfolios (since each portfolio would need to be assessed by at least two assessors). The number of portfolios that it was deemed reasonable for each assessor to review was 25 – 30. This meant that there was a need to appoint 3 – 5 assessors for each panel, depending on the actual number of portfolios estimated for each particular panel.

As indicated earlier, nominations for suitable assessors who met the basic criteria described were sought from Deans of Division/Heads of Faculties. For each panel a ranked list of nominations was developed, and the nominees contacted in sequence until the required number of assessors for that panel was met.

Each assessor agreeing to participate in the Trial was then sent a formal Letter of Contract, outlining the duties involved and the pecuniary reward that applied (AUD\$3,000). The assessors were required to sign and return this contract. It is noteworthy that a significant number of assessors undertook this task digitally. Where assessors returned the signed contract by fax, this was one of the few cases of hardcopy (non-digital) communication throughout the whole Trial.

Lessons learnt from this part of the Trial

- The recruitment rate for assessors was approximately 50% - about 180 individuals were contacted before the quota (87) for the 23 panels had been appointed.
- When contacted, the reaction of the individuals approached varied widely – from “*it is a privilege to be asked to participate*” to “*I am totally opposed to all research assessment exercises*”.
- The level of payment AUD\$3,000 to assess 25 - 30 evidence portfolios, estimated to require 25 – 30 hours of work, appeared to be approximately correct. There was not a single case (even where the number of portfolios exceeded 30) where an individual openly sought higher payment (although of course some might have declined because the remuneration was not considered attractive enough).
- There was large variation in take-up by individuals across panels. For example, in one panel where three assessors were required, the first three individuals contacted all accepted. In other cases - and these were particularly in professional areas (eg in Law, Medicine, Psychology and Financial Studies) - there were a significant number of refusals before the assessment panel was complete.

Training of Researchers and Completion of Portfolios

Throughout the time that the content of evidence portfolios was being decided upon and assessors were being recruited, Deans of Division/Heads of Faculty were regularly briefed on the process of the early stages of the Trial. At Macquarie at this stage the

RQF Team also visited each Division, providing information to researchers who could ask for clarification on any point.

Soon after these training sessions, the evidence portfolio templates were sent to individual researchers with a request to complete/change/supplement them.

Because confidentiality was considered to be a key aspect of the Trial, great care was applied in handling the portfolios. In general at Macquarie the incomplete portfolios were grouped into Divisional sets and each Divisional set provided to the Dean of Division by USB. The Dean's Office was then responsible for providing each researcher with his/her draft portfolio. Completed portfolios were returned to the RQF Team by each of these Divisions (via USBs). In the case of two Divisions at Macquarie and all the Faculties at Newcastle the portfolios were emailed to the individual researchers, who returned their completed/amended portfolios by the same method.

Lessons learnt from this part of the Trial

- Good communication between Macquarie and Newcastle was crucial to the Trial's success - no more so than during this phase of the Trial because of the need for coordination of simultaneous activities at the two Universities. It was also deemed essential that researchers at the two Universities were provided with the same portfolio template and had access to the same information for their completion.
- Newcastle, using centrally populated templates, discovered that sending out these completed templates to researchers for final checking resulted in a significant workload arising from amendments by the researchers. Macquarie unwittingly had the advantage of researchers completing partially filled templates (because it did not have the capacity to produce complete templates from its research database). Both Institutions learnt at different stages of the Trial that overdependence on databases can result in unforeseen problems.
- Good communication with Divisions/Faculties also proved valuable when the portfolio templates were circulated to researchers. Most enquiries from researchers were handled very well locally (at the Divisional/Faculty level).

Dissemination of Portfolios to Assessors

This was possibly the most complex phase of the Trial. After each institution had collected all of its individual evidence portfolios, approximately half had to be sent to the other Institution - so that that Institution could then distribute the portfolios from both Institutions to its assigned assessment panels.

Thus, at Macquarie the evidence portfolios received from Divisions were re-sorted by assigned panel, and those portfolios associated with panels being administered by Newcastle were then emailed to the University of Newcastle. A complementary set of portfolios was received from Newcastle by Macquarie.

At each University the portfolios were then assigned to individual assessors. Each portfolio was sent to at least two assessors. Wherever possible, portfolios of researchers were assigned to assessors with detailed expertise in the relevant field.

The sets of portfolios were sent to individual assessors both by email, and a back-up set by CD (using express post). In most cases assessors appeared to prefer to use the email set, but some did employ the CD, it being readily portable – many of the assessors, especially those in the Northern hemisphere, were not at their home institution during the assessment period (July – August).

Accompanying each set of portfolio templates sent to each assessor was a detailed set of instructions. The two Universities decided to supplement the DEST RQF Specifications ratings definitions to incorporate a numerical (percentile) rating system that had originally been included in recommendations from EAG. The following table appeared in the Instructions to Assessors:

Rating	Descriptor
5	Research that is world leading in its field or makes an equally exceptional contribution in an area of particular significance to Australia. This research falls within the top 10% of research in its field internationally.
4	Research that meets world standards of excellence in its field or makes an equally excellent contribution in an area of particular significance to Australia. This research falls within the top 25% of research in its field internationally.
3	Research that is recognised internationally as excellent in terms of originality, significance and rigour but which nonetheless falls short of the highest standards of excellence. This research falls within the top 40% of research in its field internationally.
2	Research that is recognised as methodologically sound in its field and of high originality, significance and rigour. This research falls within the top 60% of research in its field internationally.
1	Research that is deemed to fall within the bottom 40% of research in its field internationally.

These rating scales appear to have been readily accepted by assessors.

Lessons learnt from this part of the Trial

- Both Institutions experienced last-minute changes to assessors (where an assessor dropped out unexpectedly). The expediency of having reserve assessors was found very useful.
- It is important to note that 30 or so evidence portfolios occupy significant memory, especially for transmission via email. Macquarie therefore used Zip files for this purpose and most assessors coped with this method of transmission successfully. In the handful of instances where this was not the case, the portfolios were attached as individual word documents.

Return of Portfolios from Assessors

All assessors returned their assessments to the Universities by email. The turn around time between submission to assessor and return by assessor varied from a few days to up to five weeks. In the latter case, this was usually due to the assessor's travel itinerary.

Once a set of assessments had been received from a particular assessor, he/she was asked to submit an appropriate invoice to the University. A draft invoice template was provided for this purpose. Most assessors chose to be paid personally via such an invoice process. A couple preferred to be paid via their respective Institutions.

The level of feedback provided by assessors varied a great deal. Some provided only one line, while others provided 400 – 500 words. In general, the content of feedback was extraordinarily constructive – believed to be of great assistance in providing researchers with peer comment (see below).

With regards to the rating scale, the Trial design called for assessors to provide a more refined rating than the basic RQF 1 – 5. To this end, each rating scale was subdivided into High/Medium/Low. This was in part to assist in rationalising the two (or more) assessments for each portfolio. All assessors seemed to accept this refinement and used the sub-ratings intelligently in returning their scores.

Lessons learnt from this part of the Trial

- The main characteristic of this phase of the Trial was that the handling of the data had to be meticulous. Not only were the assessments deemed strictly confidential, their entry into a master spreadsheet had to be error-free. This master spreadsheet was used not only to transfer data from Macquarie to Newcastle, but parts of it were later used to distribute information to Divisions.
- Feedback to Researchers from Assessors: whilst the level of feedback varied significantly from assessor to assessor, the types of comments were consistent, often forthright and generally useful. Examples were:
 - Don't cite any four best outside of the census period.
 - Take care in choosing the four best (don't choose conference proceedings over journal articles).
 - Avoid review articles in the best four publications as they generally do not contain original ideas.
 - It is not advisable to include book reviews in four best outputs (weakens the submission).
 - Pay particular attention to why the four best outputs are important (justification of choice and explanation of role).
 - Make sure that the publication fits into the category assigned to it (e.g. peer-reviewed Journal Article = C1, etc.).
 - A well-crafted annotation can give a good indication of where work has come from and where it is going.
 - Not enough detail provided on the quality of the chosen outputs and their impact on the field.
 - Choose an additional publication rather than double up on an edited collection.
 - Esteem Factors should not fall outside the census period.
 - If the amount awarded for a prize is small, but the prestige of the award is high, omit the amount.
 - Go for "big ticket" Esteem Factors.
 - Be wary of relying on Google Scholar for evidence of peer esteem.
 - Be wary of including self-citations or citations by co-authors.
 - Have an up-to-date web page that includes your full body of work, Esteem Factors and research interests.
 - Make sure publication details on your website are up to date, i.e. published works not still listed as forthcoming. [Note: several assessors referred to accessing individuals' websites.]
 - If publications are not numerous, indicate how they might have contributed to some new body of work, and when this might be published.
 - Indicate if any PhD completions have gone on to distinguished careers.
 - Highlight the specific expertise you bring to collaboration.

- Provide strong evidence that you have initiated and lead research on your chosen topics.
 - Provide evidence of the unique contribution of your work and include comments by leading world researchers on its quality.
 - Don't use adjectives such as "elegant" without explaining why an approach should be so regarded.
 - Broaden the target audience for publications, i.e. think "outside Australia, outside region".
 - Low or absent HDR supervision affects quality rating – assessors believe active researchers should be supervising (and completing) HDR students
 - Low or absent research funding affects quality rating – assessors believe active researchers should be competing for and attracting ACG grants, or, where appropriate, attracting other research funding.
 - Low publication rate (relative to opportunities) affects quality rating – assessors believe active researchers should be producing outputs at a rate consistent with their discipline and employment status.
 - Don't rely on email enquiries as a measure of impact; stick with citation counts from reputable sources.
 - Don't make the mistake of thinking typographical errors don't matter.
 - Indicate citation counts and journal impact factors.
 - Write in plain English.
 - Provide a translation of any quotes in foreign languages in case the reviewer can't read the language.
 - If English is not your first language, have what you've written proof-read by a native English speaker.
- A few assessors found the assessment of Early Career Researchers difficult. The Instructions to Assessors directed them to assess a portfolio only on its absolute merits – and most did. But some could not resist commenting on a researchers' performance *relative to opportunity*. This type of assessment is a familiar concept for competitive grants schemes, but was not appropriate for the Trial. Moderators were made aware of this, and told to take such comments into account when determining a final score.
 - Both Universities had been keen to see how their Early Career Researchers and Level A staff fared in the Trial, not least because they had been vociferous in feedback to DEST on the draft specifications for inclusion of Level A staff in the RQF Proper. Both were pleased, therefore, when a number of Level A staff received high ratings for their portfolios. This was felt to justify the Universities' stance on the issue.

Appointment of Moderators, Handling the Raw Data and Moderation

Despite the refinements in the rating scale (using the High/Medium/Low descriptors), there was often disagreement between the two assessors' scores. Where this disagreement was relatively small (less than three sub-rating points) the average score was used to generate a final rating (with no sub-rating descriptors). Most assessments (> 55%) fell into this category. The rest were submitted for moderation.

To achieve moderation, each University appointed at least one Moderator for each of the panels for which it was responsible. These Moderators were senior academic staff of the

Universities with peer-review experience. They were allocated to panels close to, but not directly within, their own discipline area. They were instructed not to assess the portfolios themselves, but rather to read the assessors' comments and, if necessary, discuss with the assessors the discrepancy in ratings between the two so as to reach a consensus. In some cases the Moderators could just simply use the assessors' comments to resolve the issue. The option of recourse to third assessor was available, but was not taken up by any Moderator.

Lessons learnt from this part of the Trial

- Neither University allowed sufficient time for the moderation process. Not only did individual Moderators take more time than anticipated to contact assessors, in several cases individual Moderators had to be replaced for various reasons. This was crucial in defining the completion phase of the Trial, as exchange of data between the Universities required all Moderators' comments and final ratings to be received and processed.
- The moderation process was used to rationalise assessors' scores for portfolios rated by assessors from a particular panel, and for this the process was found to be very successful. The two Universities are convinced of the efficacy of the assessment process in providing realistic comparative scorings within-panel. There was slightly less confidence with comparison of between-panel ratings. While the moderation process assisted in this aspect, there still remained the perception that some disciplines might rate "harder" than others. There was thus the possibility of "bracket creep" - where some assessors might tend to rate highly in their own disciplines.

The fact that there was variation in the "hardness" with which individual assessors scored portfolios could be compensated for within a panel. But it was suspected that where such an activity was systemic, the only solution was inter-panel moderation, and that this was not a task easily undertaken. Despite these comments, the two Universities have a high level of confidence in the results of the Trial.

[Note: It is predicted that inter-panel moderation will be a major challenge for DEST in the RQF Proper.]

Synthesising Assessor Comments

As part of the assessment process, assessors were asked to write comments in support of the rating given, and to make suggestions for improvement of evidence portfolios. In the cases where significantly disparate assessors' ratings required moderation, the moderator was required to provide comments explaining how the final rating was reached. Macquarie University and the University of Newcastle had agreed that researchers would be provided with a single final Quality rating, together with a single consolidated comment. To achieve this, the comments of the two assessors per portfolio, and the moderator's comments if relevant, were consolidated by the RQF teams at each Institution. Care was taken to remove any inappropriate remarks and comments that might identify the assessor; at the same time constructive criticism and encouraging comments were retained.

Data Exchange

Once all assessments (moderated or otherwise) had been entered into each University's master spreadsheet, a date was set for exchange of data. That is, provision of assessment data on Newcastle portfolios by Macquarie assessment panels to Newcastle, and vice versa. This was achieved by exchange of USBs and resulted in each Institution having a complete master spreadsheet for all of its assessed staff. For each researcher's evidence portfolio this master spreadsheet contained a final rating score, plus an edited set of comments (derived from the individual assessors' comments, and the Moderator's comments, where appropriate).

Dissemination of Results to Divisions/Faculties

Once each University had its master spreadsheet containing results for its researchers the results were disseminated internally. At Macquarie, the results were separated into Divisional sub-sets and passed to the respective Deans by way of USB. The Deans then provided each researcher with his/her assessment details. At Newcastle, each researcher's details were transmitted directly to them by email from the Centre. In both cases the Universities generated Word documents from their respective master spreadsheets. It was these individual Word documents that the researchers received. The Word document consisted of the final rating plus the edited assessment comments.

Deans of Division/Heads of Faculty also received a set of charts showing panel profiles (distribution of ratings across each panel), plus a chart showing the overall Trial Profile.

It was agreed by both Institutions that profiles showing comparison of Macquarie and Newcastle would *not* be made public, and that individual rating data was to be kept strictly confidential.

*It should be strongly emphasised that although the aim of the Trial was to determine Quality ratings for individual researchers within each University, Assessors were instructed to base their evaluations on the individual portfolios **as presented for assessment**. As such, a number of factors were taken into account besides the quality of the Best Research Outputs, the Esteem Factors, and the overall Body of Work. Presentation, including typographical and grammatical errors, played a significant role in the determination of some ratings. A number of assessors commented that several portfolios appeared to have been prepared in haste, or that their presentation indicated a lack of seriousness on the part of the researcher in addressing the task. Other assessors felt that the justification for the selection of the best outputs and/or the researchers' percentage contributions were either inadequate or missing altogether. It should be noted that in many cases issues such as these were instrumental in lowering the rating of portfolios from high-quality researchers.*

Lessons learnt from this part of the Trial

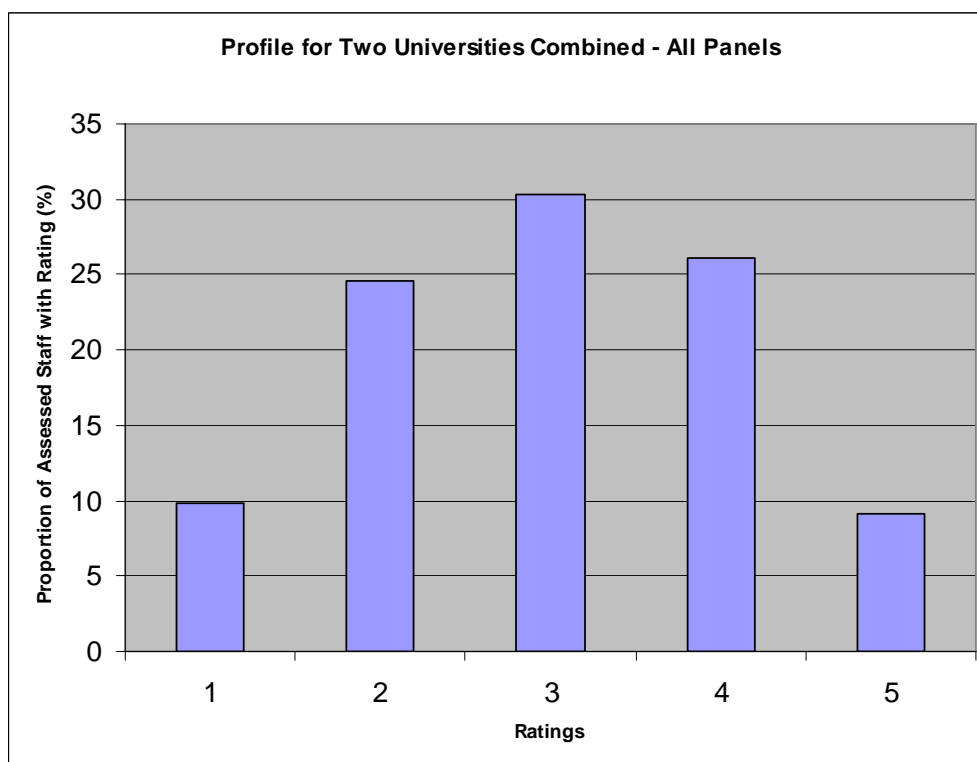
- On the whole, the results of the Trial seemed to have been well received by researchers at both Institutions. One of the main purposes of the Trial was to inform Divisions and Faculties regarding the formation of potential RQF Research Groupings. This appears to have been successful.
- From the start, the Universities were concerned that researchers not see the results of the Trial as a reflection upon their personal worth. All documentation was treated as confidential, and care was taken in feedback to individuals to ensure comment referred to the evidence portfolio rather than the individual. Obviously, some staff who received a score lower than they expected were

disappointed. But it was gratifying that in most of these cases researchers acknowledged that the rating was that of the portfolio they submitted rather than an evaluation of them as an individual.

Results

The results of the Trial can be categorised under two headings. First, there are the metric profiles of Divisions and Faculties generated from accumulated individuals' ratings. Secondly, there are the benefits accrued from the Trial process.

The overall percentage ratings profile for Macquarie and Newcastle is shown below.



It is significant that, for the two Universities combined, almost 10% of the researchers were rated 5 (by definition being rated in the top 10% of researchers internationally). The relatively symmetrical profile also indicates that the claims by Macquarie and Newcastle to be research intensive universities can be substantiated. The symmetry of the profile, with relatively low numbers of researchers rated "1" can be rationalised in terms of the design of the Trial. Generally, only research active staff with at least four Quality Outputs were admitted as eligible participants in the Trial (ECRs with at least two). In other words, if *all* staff had been included in the Trial a much different profile would have eventuated (with far more researchers rated 1 and 2).

Two additional profiles were prepared for Macquarie alone, one with Level A researchers separated, and the other with Early Career Researchers separated. The two profiles are, unsurprisingly, similar. However, they show that Macquarie has significant numbers of Level A/ECR researchers rated 3 and 4. The University's determination in suggesting to DEST that Level As be included in the RQF Proper has therefore been justified.

Perhaps the greatest benefit from this Trial has been the experience gained by the University and its staff. These benefits include:

- Exposure of staff to a peer assessment process.
- The production of evidence portfolios, and the discipline that this requires.
- The need for care with which “Four Best Outputs” must be chosen.
- Practise with Esteem Factors.

Conclusions/Comments

The decision by Macquarie and Newcastle to undertake a trial involving assessment of individual researchers’ evidence portfolios has been totally exonerated. Using internationally-renowned external assessors has given the results credibility, and the overall result provides evidence for the two Universities’ claims to be research intensive. The results are also of great assistance in aiding formation of the Universities’ Research Groupings for the RQF Proper.

The Macquarie RQF Team

Tiziana Basilicata
Georgina Chinchen
Peter Freeman
Jennifer Newton
Jim Piper

September 2007