



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

REVIEW OF THE

eSCHOLARSHIP RESEARCH CENTRE (ESRC)

2015

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The University of Melbourne

Academic Services, Research and Collections

Review of eScholarship Research Centre (ESRC), 2015

Purpose

The purpose of the review of the eScholarship Research Centre is to assess its contributions to the University of Melbourne and make recommendations on its continuance as an institutional research centre of the University and on other issues as outlined in the terms of reference.

Background

The eScholarship Research Centre (ESRC) was established in 2007 as a social and cultural informatics research centre within Information Services (later the University Library). This followed the review of its predecessor the Australian Science and Technology Heritage Centre (1999-2006), which was based in the Faculty of Arts. The subsequent review of the ESRC in 2010 recommended the continuation of the existing administrative arrangements. The ESRC's Social and Cultural Informatics Lab (named in 2013) was created as a development and testing ground for informatics solutions in archival science, the social sciences and digital humanities. The broader ESRC research agenda included the advancement of knowledge in the discovery, contextualisation and interpretation of information in published literature, archival records and research data.

The main functions of the eScholarship Research Centre (ESRC) are:

- Engagement through participation with the community in the creation and dissemination of information to address societal needs; and
- Scholarly services through working with the University of Melbourne and others to enhance their digital archive and knowledge preservation infrastructure;
- Research into social and cultural informatics, archival science and research data management; and
- Collaboration with other researchers in the use of digital technologies to extend their research capabilities.

For the period under review, the governance of ESRC was through direct regular reporting and oversight of the Library Executive and the University Librarian. The Director of the ESRC was a member of the Library Executive. The ESRC operations were included in the Library operational plans and reports.

Under the new Melbourne Operating Model enacted in 2015, the ESRC was situated within Research and Collections, Academic Services, University Services. It remained the only Non-Faculty institutional research centre in the University of Melbourne.

The *vision* of Research and Collections is: "To advance the University's research, learning and engagement agenda through the acquisition, care and leverage of its rich and diverse scholarly collections infrastructure." Its *mission* is to: "Develop, implement and maintain services, systems, processes and partnerships that facilitate the acquisition, discovery and access to collections and unlock their potential in support of the needs of Melbourne's scholarly and learning community".

Terms of Reference

The processes for reviewing institutional research centres in the University of Melbourne are defined in the policy document MFP1020 (Centres and Institutes for Research and Research Training Policy): <https://policy.unimelb.edu.au/MPF1020#section-16>

In summary the policy states that:

- Research centres 'are central to the strategy of raising the teaching and research profile of the University';
- Research centres 'are a mechanism for meeting the emerging needs of the multi-disciplinary requirements in new teaching and research areas';
- A research centre 'has the potential to be of demonstrable benefit to the University';
- 'The academic purposes and objectives' of the research centre 'cannot be achieved reasonably within an existing University organizational structure';
- A research centre 'can demonstrate financial viability';
- A research centre 'must show evidence of support from the relevant Faculties [and in the case of the ESRC from Research and Collections, Academic Services] and have confirmation of consultation across discipline areas';
- 'For reporting purposes, each centre should be clearly aligned with one Faculty' [or its equivalent]

For the period 2010-2014, within the context of the broader guidelines above, the review of the eScholarship Research Centre should take into consideration:

- Evaluation of the ESRC in relation to its main functions and role within the University;
- Evaluation of the ESRC in relation to *Growing Esteem 2014* and the strategic objectives of the University with respect to research, learning and teaching, and engagement;
- Evaluation of the ESRC in relation to its activities, interactions and collaborations with the University Library, in particular Research and Collections, Information Technology Services, Melbourne Research, and the Faculties in particular the Faculty of Arts
- Reflection on the tools and services developed and utilized by the ESRC in its projects and activities, in particular the *Online Heritage Resource Manager (OHRM)*; the *Heritage Documentation Management System (HDMS)*; and *Documenting Records as Archives (DORA)*
- Assessment of the funding and operational guidelines for ESRC, in particular, the recent funding history of the Centre and extensive and high risk reliance on external funding;
- Reflection on the ESRC engagement with collaborative partners – government, industry, philanthropic trusts, other funded bodies, both local and international.
- Reflection on the ESRC staff profile and roles.

For the period 2015-2019 and in light of the implementation of the new Melbourne Operating Model the review of the eScholarship Research Centre should consider:

- The nature and scope of the ESRC research agenda;
- Its structural and operational links within Research and Collections and other sections within Academic Services;
- The staffing profile of the ESRC (does it have the right mix of skills?);
- The funding of the core activities of the ESRC (that is, its services to the University).

Key Issues:

The key issues identified in the 2010 review remain worthy of consideration. That report stated:

A significant issue and the focus of much discussion within the Panel was the dichotomy between the service and research mission of the Centre.

- *How should the service aspects of the Centre work, and in what ways is the Centre providing a core service to the University?*
- *With regard to research, does the Centre have a research agenda, how does this align with the University, and what needs to be done to focus and grow the research side of the ESRC?*

The Panel noted that the two functions were not mutually exclusive and that research learning can be a positive outcome of service projects. On balance, the panel recommends that ESRC's role as an e-Research support service to the University should be strengthened and that the nexus with research be clarified.

Review Panel

The following people were members of the Review Panel:

Chair:

Professor David Goodman – *Historical and Philosophical Studies, Faculty of Arts*
[d.goodman@unimelb.edu.au; phone: 8344 7859]

Ex-officio:

Teresa Chitty – *Director, Research and Collections, Academic Services*
[teresa.chitty@unimelb.edu.au; phone: 8344 4984]

Internal:

Professor Julie Willis – *Research, Architecture, Building and Planning*
[j.willis@unimelb.edu.au; phone: 8344 7192]

External:

Dr Lyle Winton – *Deputy Director (Research Platforms), NeCTAR*
[lyle.winton@nectar.org.au; phone: 8344 4848]

Executive Officer:

Maggie Scott – *Communications and Events Officer at the Bio21 Institute, University of Melbourne*
(formerly Administration Officer at the ESRC, 2010-2014)
[mkoscott@unimelb.edu.au; 0433 661 254]

Methodology

Timeline:

20 January 2015: Melbourne Research informs the Director of the eScholarship Research Centre that the Centre is due for review.

2 April 2015: Confirmation of the Terms of Reference.

17 April 2015: Call for written submissions.

21 May 2015: Deadline for written submissions; including the report on the activities of the ESRC since its last review in 2010.

12 June 2015: Meeting of the Review Panel and invited interviews.

Early August 2015: Review Panel report and recommendations discussed with the head of Academic Services.

October 2015: Final Review Panel report of recommendations sent to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Research.

The following is a list of people who have made submissions to the review in writing or by interview to the panel:

University of Melbourne

Chancellery:

- Philip Kent – *University Librarian & Executive Director, Collections*

University Services:

- Dr Leo Konstantelos – *Manager Digital Scholarship, Research and Collections*
- Donna Mcrostie – *Associate Director Research Information Management, Research and Collections*
- Jenny Ellis – *Director, Scholarly Information*

Faculties:

- Professor Patricia Grimshaw – *Faculty of Arts, School of Historical and Philosophical Studies*
- Dr Nick Thieberger – *Faculty of Arts, QEII Fellow, Department of Linguistics*
- Professor Cathy Humphreys – *Faculty of MDHS, Social Work*
- Professor Johanna Wyn – *Melbourne Graduate School of Education, Youth Research Centre*
- Dr Robert Crawford – *Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning*
- Professor Lyn Yates – *Melbourne Graduate School of Education*

ESRC Staff:

- Associate Professor Gavan McCarthy – *Director, ESRC*
- Dr Cate O'Neill – *Find & Connect Project*
- Helen Morgan and Dr Nikki Henningham – *Australian Women's Archives Project*
- Ailie Smith – *UoM ANDS-funded Major Open Data Collection (MODC) Project*

- Dr Rebe Taylor – *Honorary Research Fellow*
- Chris Kirk – *Honorary Research Fellow*
- Elizabeth Daniels – *Project Archivist and PhD Candidate*

External Australian

- Professor Shurlee Swain- *Australian Catholic University*
- Richard Vines- *Victorian Department of Environment and Primary Industries*
- Justine Hazelwood – *Public Record Office of Victoria*
- Dr Christine Kenneally – *Journalist and linguist*
- Professor Sue McKemish and Dr Joanne Evans – *Faculty of Information Technology, Monash University*
- Anne-Marie Schwirtlich – *National Library of Australia*
- Dr. Mary Crawford – *National Foundation for Australian Women*
- Associate Professor Cressida Fforde – *National Centre for Indigenous Studies*
- Professor Paul Turnbull – *Digital Humanities, University of Tasmania*

External International

- Professor Michael Moss – *Northumbria University, Newcastle*
- Assistant Professor Stephen Weldon – *University of Oklahoma*
- Professor William Maher – *University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign*

Before completion of the final draft report, briefing sessions were held with Doron Ben-Meir (Executive Director) and Rebecca Bond (Director, Major Initiatives, Contracts and Grants) at Research, Innovation and Commercialisation (RIC), and with Neil Robinson, Executive Director Academic Services and Academic Registrar.

Preamble

This Review notes, as did the previous review, the national and international reputation of the Centre, and the esteem in which key staff, such as the Director, Gavan McCarthy, are held. The Review Panel again commends the ESRC on its contributions to a number of significant projects that have supported University of Melbourne academics, increased research outputs and infrastructure and increased the profile of the University in e-Research. The Centre's work ranges from formal service provision on major research projects, to informal and start-up advice to colleagues across the university, to development of key e-scholarship and data management tools and resources. The mix of these things will always be a topic of discussion and review, but the overall high importance of the Centre to the university is not in doubt. It is even clearer in 2015 than it was in 2010 that the e-scholarship contribution of the Centre underpins key aspects of the role and mission of the University. The Panel reflected that, in 2015, the distinction between 'e-scholarship' and 'normal' scholarship is less clear than it once was, because almost all scholars have some engagement with digital technologies and capacities. One submission to our review noted that during the review period (2010-2014) 'scholarly communication and practice have undergone continual transformation'; another that the field of informatics has been 'exploding' with activity. These transformations only underscore the crucial role of an acknowledged locus of e-scholarship expertise and experience within the University.

For the period 2010-2014, the Review was asked to comment on these particular matters:

- **Evaluation of the ESRC in relation to its main functions and role within the University;**

Testimony collected for the review was unanimous in pointing to the importance of the functions the ESRC has been carrying out. There can be no doubt that the University needs an e-scholarship research centre, and that this one has – within the constraints of its resourcing – been doing an excellent job.

- **Evaluation of the ESRC in relation to Growing Esteem 2014 and the strategic objectives of the University with respect to research, learning and teaching, and engagement;**

Research: The ESRC directly assists a range of research projects. It is also an important part of the University's research diffusion process. *Growing Esteem 2015-2020* anticipates an increase in partnerships and collaborations in research. It applauds attempts to increase research impact and talks of the imperative need to 'meaningfully translate our research and scholarship to the wider

community'. It is thus significant that the work of the ESRC has played a valuable role both in *enabling* research collaborations and partnerships, and in *showcasing* ways of making research accessible to the wider community.

The *Melbourne's Scholarly Information Future* strategy plan articulates the aspirations:

- [to] provide an outstanding information environment that facilitates creativity and the development of critical thought and knowledge and;
- [to] disseminate the University's scholarly widely, inviting local, national and international collaboration and communication.

The ESRC has over the review period materially assisted the achievement of those goals, *supporting and enabling* the University's research and knowledge diffusion aims.

The Centre's staff publish research themselves, often in co-authorship with university researchers.

Much of this research is generated from the substantive matter of the particular projects, rather than addressing central issues in informatics and e-scholarship method. There is a smaller but valuable body of work produced by the Centre in the review period on e-scholarship and informatics issues.

More stable funding would we believe allow an expansion and consolidation of this research contribution of the staff of the Centre on important issues in informatics, archiving and e-scholarship theory and practice (as opposed to the enormously important service role of facilitating, and indeed partnering, the research of other scholars).

Engagement: The ESRC has been playing a very important role in the Engagement programme of the University. One submission described the engagement aspects of the Find and Connect project as 'humbling'; this is work on a scale, and with a level of reach into the community, that most academics never attain, and the expertise of the ESRC has been crucial in making it happen. The Centre has been actively helping a wide range of university scholars to think about the engagement and knowledge diffusion aspects of their projects and in giving them the benefit of years of accumulated experience in these areas.

Teaching and Learning: While the Centre does not engage in university teaching to a significant extent, its staff are involved in RHD supervision, and its work with other University of Melbourne academics is reflected in and enhances their teaching activities. Teaching more broadly conceived includes the training role the Centre has taken on, with academics, outside organisations, and with library and Information management staff in the university. This latter teaching role is important but could be put on a more business-like footing in the environment of the Melbourne Operating Model. The review panel noted Leo Konstantelos' observation for example that ESRC consultation and knowledge-sharing is currently 'neither communicated systematically nor forms part of a defined service'; there is reason

to want some greater definition and clarity about these service provision roles in the future, especially if the university is to provide a higher level of core funding to the Centre. Consultancy income could be expected to rise with a more stable core staff, building upon the enviable reputation the Centre has already established. Also looking to the future, an expanded teaching role could be an important part of expanding and diversifying the revenue base of the Centre – the Director sees possibilities in developing a University Breadth subject, and in offering specialized units at masters and PhD level.

Sustainability: The ESRC, with its diverse sources of funding, is already modelling one of the planks of the sustainability strand of Growing Esteem 2015-20, which is reducing dependency on any one source of funding. The work of the ESRC on archiving data and research also assists the university with the Growing Esteem aspiration that well-executed research can and should prevail for generations.

- **Evaluation of the ESRC in relation to its activities, interactions and collaborations with the University Library, in particular Research and Collections, Information Technology Services, Melbourne Research, and the Faculties in particular the Faculty of Arts**

Submissions from the Library, including from University Librarian Philip Kent and Director of Scholarly Information, Jenny Ellis, were very positive indeed about the relationship of the ESRC to the Library. They emphasised the role of the ESRC in training library staff in digital scholarship, including through the embedding of Library staff seconded to the Centre. They regarded the Centre's past affiliation with the Library as mutually beneficial – and they fully expect that productive relationship will continue within the Melbourne Operating Model, under which both the ESRC and Digital Scholarship are part of the Research and Collections division of Academic Services.

The value provided by the ESRC to researchers in the Arts Faculty in particular was clear from several submissions. Arts researchers typically lack the technical skills needed to make e-scholarship projects work on their own, but are often dealing with material and issues of high public interest and concern. All the evidence is that the ESRC collaborations, major and minor, with Arts scholars (and with scholars from other HASS faculties and units including Education, Social Work, Law, and Business and Economics) have been working extremely well. The ESRC also works with academics in STEM faculties and departments, including Science and MDHS. Further developing the STEM relationships of the ESRC (which after all began as a science archiving project) would make even clearer that the Centre has a university-wide service and research role; this capacity to consolidate and expand existing relationships on the STEM side would be another benefit of more stable funding.

The Faculty of Arts and University Library are currently collaborating on a proposal to establish a Digital Humanities Laboratory on two floors of the Arts West Building. The project involves the establishment of a shared facility that will provide services and infrastructure to support University

researchers, professionals and select industry experts and students working on humanities and social sciences (HASS) digital projects. The space will offer a combination of research project development space for staff and students, as well as technical expertise and services focused on infrastructure and technology able to 1) promote and communicate digital humanities research development and its methodologies; 2) enhance and build scale in research development in an increasingly dynamic and prominent field of research endeavour; and 3) deepen key strategic relationships with external organisations through increased digital research capability and expertise. The ESRC has been integrally involved in planning for this facility and is expected to make a significant contribution to its establishment, ongoing operation and future success.

- **Reflection on the tools and services developed and utilized by the ESRC in its projects and activities, in particular the Online Heritage Resource Manager (OHRM); the Heritage Documentation Management System (HDMS); and Documenting Records as Archives (DORA)**

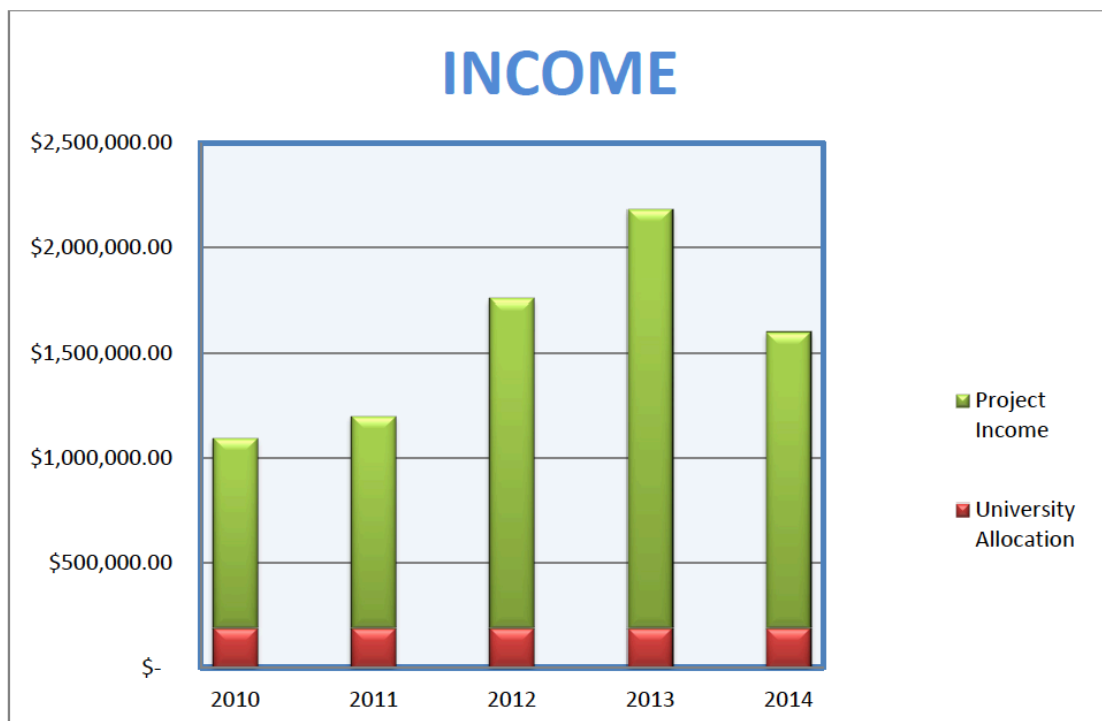
The provision of what one submission called ‘reliable public information infrastructure’ is a key part of what ESRC does. The current and future status of the tools it has developed was one of the important issues upon which the panel focused. The Online Heritage Resource Manager (OHRM) was developed by the ESRC and its predecessor organisations from 1999 and has been upgraded regularly since; it has been used in at least 11 major digital scholarship projects. The Heritage Document Management System (HDMS) was used in the award-winning Stories in Stone project, the Diane Barwick papers project and others. DORA (Documenting Records and Archives) was released in 2012 as a tool that could be used by archivists in the field; it has recently been used by the Victorian Department of Environment and Primary Industries.

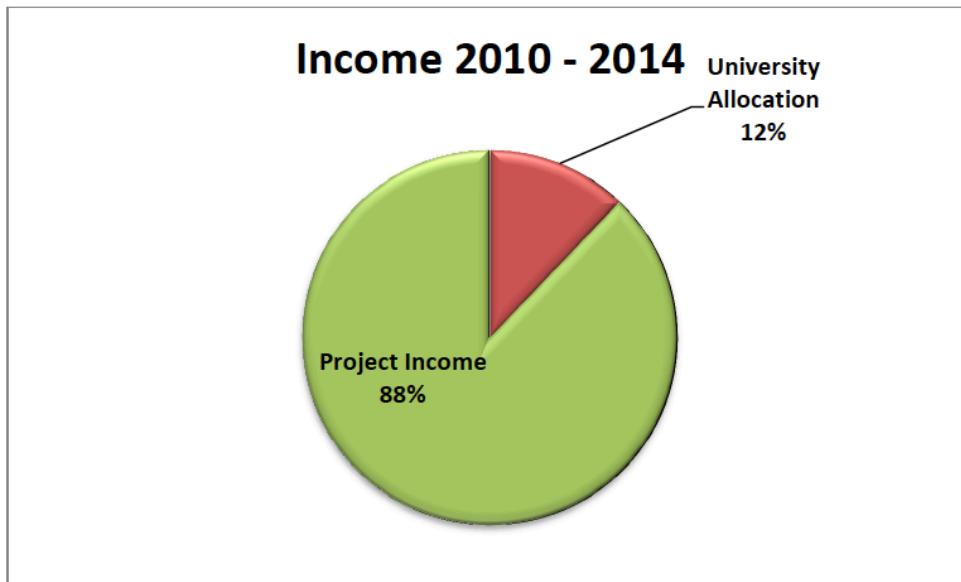
Several submissions suggested to us that these tools (in particular the OHRM) are now in need of updating. The National Library of Australia submission, for example, noted that material from many past ESRC projects (the Australian Women’s Register and Encyclopaedia of Australian Science in particular) had been successfully aggregated into Trove and has hence gained greater visibility and traffic. But the submission also questioned whether OHRM was designed with future aggregation possibilities sufficiently in mind. Digital humanities researcher Nick Thieberger suggested that the ESRC tools needed updating ‘in the context of Web 2.0 and the current digital research environment’; Richard Vines (of the Victorian Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources) suggested the tools were ‘becoming rapidly outdated’. Dr. Leo Konstantelos of the University’s Digital Scholarship unit told us that the OHRM ‘holds much unharnessed power and great untapped potential’ – but he agreed that the future iterations of OHRM would need greater interoperability and integration with library systems. ESRC Director Gavan McCarthy also looked forward to having the

capacity to remake OHRM as a web platform with a technology upgrade. It was hence clear to the review panel that the updating and repurposing of some of the ESRC's key tools has to be a priority for the next five-year period, and that the Centre has to be resourced in such a way that this upgrading and revision is possible while work simultaneously continues on projects. There is also a need to maintain capacity to service past users of the tools and projects made with them well into the future. The Panel recommends that a technical review be undertaken to assess stability, flexibility and sustainability of existing ESRC tools and systems.

- **Assessment of the funding and operational guidelines for ESRC, in particular, the recent funding history of the Centre and extensive and high risk reliance on external funding;**

The first thing that needs to be said is that the Centre has been very largely self-funding over its entire life, including the past five years. These tables from the Centre's 2010-14 report demonstrate this quite clearly:





The five-year report does on the other hand acknowledge that: ‘What is not shown in the figures above is the effective University allocation covering accommodation costs and one-off equipment allocations. This was a substantive contribution and provided a solid and stable basis from which the Centre could seek project funding.’

A chorus of submissions made the point to us in different ways that the unstable, project-specific funding upon which the ESRC largely relies had to some extent curtailed its potential benefit to the University: there has always been a need to move on to the next funded project, rather than extend or deepen the work on the previous one; there has always been a risk of losing talented staff because security cannot be promised; energy has gone into seeking new projects rather than core informatics and e-scholarship work. Project-dependence makes the Centre reactive rather than able to chart its own longer-term research agenda; there are questions about the back-end sustainability of existing projects once the funding has dried up. Only one submission (Shurlee Swain of Australian Catholic University) pointed to some benefits of project-dependent funding, in that it kept the Centre hungry and willing to say yes to a range of projects and collaborations. While there is no doubt some truth to this, the panel was convinced that greater stability of funding is essential for the University to gain maximum value from its existing investments in the Centre. One example of the need for a slightly larger floor under the Centre is its need for a systems administration and architect specialists within its core staff. The five-year report makes this clear: ‘it has not been possible to systemically embed the systems administration and information technology development functions into the stable personnel team. This has been recognised as both unsatisfactory and unsustainable in the longer term’. Having core functions such as these casually staffed would be less than optimal in the next phase of the life of the Centre.

- **Reflection on the ESRC staff profile and roles.**

As noted above, a systems architect is a high priority. Leo Konstantelos characterized the technical capacity of ESRC staff as 'variable' with 'predominantly low to middle – technical skills', a range he thought appropriate for the focus on archival science and contextual information. But he argued that the Centre lacked 'strong, qualified and continuing ... technical support', including skills required into the future for system administration; infrastructure maintenance and security; software development, maintenance and upgrading. Director Gavan McCarthy acknowledged the gaps in staff skills and agreed that some of the more technical IT support roles really needed to become a more stable part of ESRC staffing; cooperation with Digital Scholarship could work to fill some but not all of those gaps operationally. For these reasons, we recommend the addition of one high-level system architect to the basic and supported staff complement of the Centre.

Findings

The panel reports its findings according to the Terms of Reference and other Key Questions:

- **The nature and scope of the ESRC research agenda**

The ESRC identifies its research topics and scope as:

- Social and cultural informatics;
- Archival Science;
- Research Data Management
- Scholarly Services to enhance the University of Melbourne's digital archive and knowledge preservation infrastructure

Past reliance on external funding for staffing has meant that the research capacity of the Centre has not been as fully realized or operationalized as it might have been. The research capacity of the Centre is certainly visible in its partnering and advising. There is no question that the Centre has had a significant research impact. But we believe that the return for a slightly larger commitment to maintaining the core of the Centre would be a significantly enhanced research output in the major areas of the Centre's intellectual engagement – informatics, archival science, research data management. If a larger investment *is* made however, targets should be set for the Centre's research productivity, to ensure that it does indeed produce more publications in specialist scholarly journals in its core areas of interest. Documenting the Centre's past and present practices, including its innovative action-research methods, in scholarly article outputs, will become increasingly important.

- **Its structural and operational links within Research and Collections and other sections within Academic Services**

The panel was interested at the outset to investigate the relationship between the ESRC and the other university bodies working in related areas – including ITS Research Platforms, Digital Scholarship, also in Research and Collections and lead agent for the recently established pilot of the Social and Cultural Informatics Platform (SCIP). Would there be a case for amalgamation and rationalization? There was unanimity from those active in the field that up to now, the existing roles and organizations have made sense, are working, are differentiated in meaningful ways, and are collaborating in ways that have made the existence of a number of agile, smaller cooperating units a virtue rather than a problem. In the future it was indicated by some that closer alignment of the ongoing operational aspects of the Centre's business with Digital Scholarship, and SCIP in particular, would be desirable. Leo Konstantelos' submission suggested that there would be possibilities for

collaboration or co-provision of services between ESRC and Digital Scholarship in areas such as knowledge management, collections development and maintenance, digital preservation, upskilling and staff training, and research data management. Certainly as SCIP grows and reaches a point where its activities and services can be operationalized as business as usual, it would make sense for this to be done in relation to the ESRC's activities and priorities.

It was agreed by all we spoke to that being in a central University structure, rather than attached to one Faculty, has been and will continue to be a positive thing for the ESRC. It was also agreed that the hybrid professional/academic roles that the ESRC has been developing for its staff have evolved into something innovative, useful and sustainable.

The organizational structure and location of the ESRC within Research and Collections is effective and provides scope going forward for clearer articulation and more formal arrangements in areas of collaboration and service provision in supporting digital humanities and archival science, data management and informatics in particular. In the short term, we recommend that mutually agreed lines of demarcation between the ESRC, Digital Scholarship/SCIP and Research Platforms should be identified, documented and displayed on relevant websites and elsewhere, so that potential clients of each know where to turn and why. At the same time we recommend that the Director, Research and Collections leads a planning process that will formulate a vision for future operational and strategic alignment of Digital Scholarship, SCIP and the ESRC.

- **The staffing profile of the ESRC (does it have the right mix of skills?)**

The ESRC has amassed a significant skill base in digital archival and knowledge systems.

It has a unique and interdisciplinary skill base. We note however that the ESRC is missing the consistent high-level technical skills necessary to maintain the agility and currency of the software platforms it has established. These platforms underpin the projects that the ESRC completes. They require, as noted above, an ongoing systems architect to support the information systems they have developed in their software.

- **The funding of the core activities of the ESRC (that is, its services to the University).**

Prior to the Business Improvement Program (BIP) the Director's position was funded from the Library's salary budget, while all other staff were funded from external research funding. Under the new model, post BIP, six positions (5.6 FTE) in the ESRC are counted within the cap of 84 FTE positions in the Research and Collections (R&C) division of Academic Services. One of them, the Director's position, is funded from an 'agreed deficit' against the R&C budget. The other five (4.6 FTE) positions are still funded from soft, ESRC-generated project money. Despite not being provided

for in the R&C budget, they are nonetheless and somewhat puzzlingly counted as staff within the R&C complement.

This is anomalous and unsustainable. If the positions are to remain part of the R&C complement, they need to be funded from the R&C salary budget; if they are not funded, they should be removed from the R&C position count. Funding six positions may not be necessary to withstand the fluctuations of research funding and maintain ongoing stabilization. On the other hand, funding too few positions, as so much of our evidence attested, would prevent the ESRC from capitalizing upon previous investment and unlocking its potential. We recommend that three (3) FTE positions are confirmed as part of the R&C FTE complement and funded accordingly from the R&C budget. In line with the post-BIP funding model, these will be professional not academic positions. Failing to fund these positions and provide a floor under the Centre to withstand the fluctuations of research funding, would threaten the sustainability of the ESRC.

We therefore recommend the following three positions are confirmed as continuing, university-funded positions:

- 1) An Information Architect, capable of providing the higher-level technical skills and support the Centre needs;
- 2) a Senior Research Archivist; and
- 3) a Research Archivist who could both undertake core informatics and e-scholarship work to extend and deepen the research project work undertaken by the Centre, realizing potential for improved research productivity.

In addition we recommend that the Director's salary be funded as part of the 'floor' under the Centre's operations. This poses some organizational problems. The Director is level D on the academic scale and so formally cannot be employed under University Services. The Centre however does not sit in a Faculty, and there is no obvious academic unit against which the Director's salary could be charged. The Review Panel cannot solve this problem, but it does strenuously recommend that a solution be found. It would be anomalous to have a Centre in which the Director's position was less secure than the positions of the staff he directed, and quite anomalous to have a Research Centre without senior academic leadership.

Key Questions:

- ***How should the service aspects of the Centre work, and in what ways is the Centre providing a core service to the University?***

We have made it clear in the above that we do, and why we do, regard the Centre as performing a core service to the University. We have recommended above that an explicit written statement of the demarcation between the service functions of the ESRC and those of Digital Scholarship/SCIP be produced and made available to potential users, and that planning be undertaken for future strategic and operational alignment of these services. The ESRC currently needs to maintain its service as well as its research functions and the balance and tensions between the two is an issue. We endorse the suggestion that the Centre formalize some of its advice giving and mentoring roles, making clearer to whom these services are available and on what basis.

- ***With regard to research, does the Centre have a research agenda, how does this align with the University, and what needs to be done to focus and grow the research side of the ESRC?***

The services the ESRC provides are also the subject of its research – archiving practice and archival science, data curation and management, informatics, the development and maintenance of tools in these areas. That is why, to date, no clear and simple separation has been made between the service and research functions of the Centre. Closer alignment with Digital Scholarship and the SCIP will provide an opportunity for the Centre to be resourced in such a way that it can articulate its own research agenda and sustain a higher level of scholarly publishing on its own account as well as in collaboration.

Conclusions

Commendations

The Panel commends:

- The leadership and vision of Centre Director Gavan McCarthy;
- the range of ambitious, innovative and socially important projects the Centre has worked on during the review period; and
- the ability of the Centre to commence and sustain long-term research and collaboration relationships with a range of academic, government and community partners.

Affirmations

The Panel affirms:

- That the University needs and benefits from the e-scholarship services and research conducted by the Centre and that these should be continued, with the proviso that planning is undertaken to align the service/support functions of the Centre with Digital Scholarship in order for the Centre to prioritise research and development in digital archiving science, informatics and data curation.

Recommendations

The Panel recommends:

1. Provision of a floor under the Centre of four (4) stable and university-funded positions.

These would be, in the R&C budget:

- 1) An Information Architect, capable of providing some of the higher-level technical skills and support the Centre needs.
- 2) A Senior Research Archivist, and
- 3) A Research Archivist who could both undertake core informatics and e-scholarship work to extend and deepen the research project work undertaken by the Centre, realizing potential for improved research productivity.
- 4) The 4th position is the Director. This should also be funded. While the Panel could not solve the organizational problem of how to have an academic salary funded within an administrative unit, it strongly recommends that a solution be found.

2. That the Director, Research and Collections lead a planning process that will formulate a vision for future operational and strategic alignment of Digital Scholarship, SCIP and the ESRC.
3. That mutually agreed lines of demarcation between the ESRC, Digital Scholarship/SCIP and Research Platforms be identified, documented and displayed on relevant websites and elsewhere.
4. That an internal review be undertaken to assess stability, flexibility and sustainability of existing ESRC tools and systems.
5. That with a Centre so reconfigured, the University should then have higher expectations in terms of research output and of ongoing provision of operational services to the university; this would be reflected in changes to organizational structure and would need to be spelt out in future service catalogues, operational plans and evaluated in annual PDF assessments.
6. That over the next five-year period, the Centre explore alternative revenue sources, including consultancy and teaching, that would have the possibility of reducing somewhat its current heavy dependency upon project-based research funding.

Response to the Panel's Recommendations from Academic Services

Recommendation 1

Accepted. Staffing of the ESRC was reviewed in preparation of the 2016 budget and as a consequence of this four positions were confirmed as continuing and included in the FTE cap for Research and Collections. These positions are: the ESRC Director, Senior Research Fellow, Senior Research Archivist and Research Archivist. All other existing, continuing positions are funded from external funding.

The ESRC Director and Senior Research Fellow are academic positions and as such are acknowledged as exceptions to the normal University Services position of funding only professional positions. The nature of these positions will be reviewed as and when they are vacated.

While accepting the viewpoint of the Panel of the requirement for an Information Architect position it is the opinion of Academic Services that the internal review to assess stability, flexibility and sustainability of existing ESRC tools and systems (Recommendation 4) should reconsider the need for this position in the overall context of required technical capability and capacity.

Recommendations 2 and 3

Accepted. Responsibility for these actions will be assigned to the Director, Research and Collections

Recommendation 4

Accepted. The review should also assess overall technical capability and capacity required and assess the need for an Information Architect position as per Recommendation 1.

Recommendation 5

Accepted. In order to identify and measure research performance in annual PDF assessments, the Director, Research and Collections should explore options for appropriate academic supervision for the ESRC Director and Senior Research Fellow.



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