‘ASPIRE’ (Acknowledging Successful Performance In Research Excellence)
ECU Research Performance Scheme Guidelines

Research @ ECU

Research and research training are integral to what it means to be a university. Research at ECU responds to key trends in national and international research environments that are characterised by a movement towards concentration of expertise, the importance of collaboration, an emphasis on increasing quality and on having definable, measurable impacts.

ECU is committed to undertaking high-quality research that has strong social, economic, environmental and cultural impact and, as a researcher or research student at ECU, you are expected to undertake research in alignment with these goals.

To this end, the ECU ‘ASPIRE’ scheme provides you with guidance on that which the University values and esteems when it comes to research performance. ASPIRE is a system for measuring and quantifying research performance which rewards researchers for research activity and quality. In essence it provides an incentive towards the ongoing improvement of the University’s overall research performance.

Defining Research

Only activities that meet the accepted definition of research (being the short form for research and experimental development, often abbreviated as R&D)\(^1\) are eligible for recognition under this scheme.

Research is defined as creative and systematic work undertaken in order to increase the stock of knowledge – including knowledge of humankind, culture and society – and to devise new applications of available knowledge. For an activity to be an R&D activity it must satisfy five core criteria:

1. To be aimed at new findings (novel);
2. To be based on original, not obvious, concepts and hypotheses (creative);
3. To be uncertain about the final outcomes (uncertain);
4. To be planned and budgeted (systematic); and
5. To lead to results that could be possibly reproduced (transferable and/or reproducible).

The above definition encompasses pure and oriented basic research, applied research and experimental development.

Research Performance Indicators

ECU’s 2017-2021 Strategic Plan sets a strategic goal of advancing research and knowledge translation, through: growth in research capacity and culture; extensive research collaboration; increased knowledge translation; and growth in research training. In support of the University’s targets for advancing research and knowledge translation, and in alignment with the ASPEO (Academic Staff Performance Expectations and Outcomes) Framework, ASPIRE recognises research performance within the major indicator categories of: Research Income; Research Training; and Research Outputs.

The research performance measures within these categories are outlined in detail in Table 1.

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Table 1: ECU ASPIRE Research Performance Indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INDICATOR CATEGORIES</th>
<th>RESEARCH ‘ACTIVITY’ MEASURES</th>
<th>RESEARCH ‘QUALITY’ MEASURES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research Income</td>
<td>• Dollar Value of:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Australian Competitive Grants Income (Category 1)</td>
<td>• Australian Competitive Grants (Category 1)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Other Public Sector Research Income (Category 2)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Industry and Other Research Income (Category 3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) Research Income (Category 4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Training</td>
<td>• Number of:</td>
<td>Number of:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Supervised Doctoral Completions</td>
<td>• ‘Timely’ Supervised Doctoral Completions i.e. ≤ 4 Years (EFTSL)³</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Supervised Masters by Research Completions</td>
<td>• ‘Timely’ Supervised Masters by Research Completions i.e. ≤ 2 Years (EFTSL)⁴</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Outputs⁵</td>
<td>• Number of Publications:</td>
<td>Value of:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Books⁶</td>
<td>• Field-Weighted Citation Impact (FWCI) as sourced from SciVal (Scopus)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Book Chapters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Journal Articles</td>
<td>Number of:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Conference Papers</td>
<td>• Internationally Co-Authored/ Created Research Outputs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Number of Non-Traditional Research Outputs (NTROs):</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Original Creative Works</td>
<td>Number of:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Live Performance of Creative Works</td>
<td>• High Quality (“Major”) NTROs as validated by a review of the Research Statement and associated verification materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Recorded or Rendered Creative Works</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Curated or Produced Substantial Exhibitions or Events</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Performance Data Collection and Reporting

Research performance data is collected on an annual basis and validated by the Office of Research and Innovation (ORI). Data is subsequently used for both internal and external reporting requirements.

Externally, data are reported to the Department of Education and Training for the Higher Education Research Data Collection (HERDC) and the Australian Research Council (ARC) as part of the University’s Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) submission. HERDC performance subsequently drives the allocation of Research Block Grant Funding to the University.

Within ECU, aggregated summaries of performance are produced at the University, School and Research Institute/Centre level and disseminated via the EIM data warehouse portal. Research performance data are then used to determine internal Research Block Grant Funding distributions and can be used to inform School and Research Institute/Centre reviews as well as individual staff Management for Performance (MPS) discussions. Data collected will be the authoritative source of research performance data reported for academic promotion applications.

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² Research income based on total amount received by ECU versus total amount granted.
³ Timely completions are calculated based on EFTSL consumed as reported in Callista.
⁴ Timely completions are calculated based on EFTSL consumed as reported in Callista.
⁵ Outputs must have been produced at ECU to be eligible e.g. demonstrate a publication association in the by-line.
⁶ Refer to Appendix 1 for guidelines regarding Accepted Research Books.
Calculating Rewards

In addition to the above mentioned internal reporting, performance data collected for each individual ECU researcher is also used to calculate monetary rewards. Individual summary statements of rewarded performance and funding allocated are provided to researchers. Funds allocated under the ASPIRE scheme are placed in a project account for the recipient to use towards future research-related activities.7

In order to determine the total funding awarded to each researcher, identified performance measures (as per Table 1) are assigned a certain value or ASPIRE ‘points’, as detailed in Table 2.

Table 2: ECU ASPIRE Points

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INDICATOR CATEGORIES</th>
<th>RESEARCH ‘ACTIVITY’ MEASURES</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research Income</td>
<td>&gt;$5,000 and &lt;$10,000</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&gt;$10,000 and &lt;$50,000</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&gt;$50,000 and &lt;$100,000</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&gt;$100,000 and &lt;$500,000</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&gt;$500,000</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Training</td>
<td>Supervised Doctoral Completion</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supervised Masters by Research Completion</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Book8</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Book Chapter9</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Journal Article</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conference Paper</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Trad Research Output</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Outputs</td>
<td>RESEARCH ‘QUALITY’ MEASURES</td>
<td>Points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Australian Competitive Grants (Category 1) &gt;$500,000</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Australian Competitive Grants (Category 1) &gt;$10,000 and &lt;$500,000</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>'Timely' Supervised Doctoral Completion</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>'Timely' Supervised Masters by Research Completion</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Field-Weighted Citation Impact*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Internationally Co-Authored/ Created Research Output</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Major&quot; NTRO10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Field-Weighted Citation Impact (FWCI) Points

FWCI data will be sourced annually by ORI directly from SciVal – a research performance assessment tool provided by Elsevier that draws on publication and citation data from Scopus. The FWCI essentially indicates how the number of citations received by a researcher’s set of publications compares with the average number of citations received by all other similar publications in Scopus and normalised for the subject field, publication year and publication category type.

Only staff11 who have journal articles or conference publications accepted by ORI in the current ASPIRE year are considered for FWCI points. It is the responsibility of researchers to ensure they have submitted their research outputs in RAS by the annual ASPIRE deadline (normally the end of March) and to maintain the currency and accuracy of their profile in Scopus12.

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7 For further information on the management and use of ASPIRE funds, refer to the University’s Research Performance Scheme Funding policy.
8 Refer to Appendix 1 for guidelines regarding Accepted Research Books.
9 The full points allocation is only available for one chapter in any given book, irrelevant of the number of chapters produced. Further chapters are weighted by the remaining number of chapters within the book.
10 Refer to the supplementary Guidelines for Non-Traditional Research Outputs for further information.
11 Given limitations with the Scopus source database, FWCI data is unable to be verified for adjuncts, honorary and emeritus researchers and students. Therefore, only ECU staff are eligible for this component of the scheme.
12 Scopus can be accessed via the ECU Library Databases.
The steps involved in calculating an individual researcher’s FWCI points are as follows:

1. SciVal publication window is six years i.e. six years prior to the current ASPIRE collection year.
2. SciVal publication categories are filtered to journal articles, reviews and conference papers.
3. SciVal publication affiliations include both ECU and non-ECU affiliated research outputs.
4. FWCI scores are only eligible if ≥ 1.00, being at or above world average.
5. FWCI points = FWCI score multiplied by total pro-rated points for ORI-accepted journal articles and conference papers in the current ASPIRE collection year.

FWCI points are calculated post calculation of all other performance activities and added together with any other assigned points to determine an individual researcher’s total ASPIRE allocation.

**Reward Eligibility**

Staff will only qualify for ASPIRE if they are research active, which is defined as having produced at least three (3) University-approved research outputs within the previous three years (i.e. including the current collection year) or one Research Book. These research outputs may have been produced prior to appointment at ECU.

Only research outputs submitted by the annual designated deadline will be eligible for reward. Should an output be rejected by ORI but subsequently corrected and resubmitted in a timely fashion, eligibility will be based on the original date of submission irrespective of the date of final acceptance.

ECU students are ineligible to receive an ASPIRE reward directly, although the value of their allocation is calculated and forwarded to their relevant school. Funds received by the School from this source are expected to be used for HDR student support.

It should be noted that ineligibility for ASPIRE in a given year does not negate the need for researchers to report their research performance activities, as all data collected is included in University reports.

**Pro-Rata Apportionments**

Based on the annual performance data collected, ORI calculates the total number of points for each activity. Points are pro-rated according to the total number of ECU researchers who contributed to the research effort. For example, if a Journal Article was produced by two ECU authors and a researcher from another international institution, the points would be calculated as follows:

Journal Article (5) + Internationally Co-Author (2) = 7 points / 2 ECU authors = 3.5 each.

For all indicators within each indicator category, the total ASPIRE points will be apportioned as per that outlined in Table 3.

**Table 3: ASPIRE Pro-Rata Apportionments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator Category</th>
<th>Pro-Rata Apportionments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research Income</td>
<td>Determined by the FTE apportionment for named Chief Investigators at the point of award, as reported in the Research Management System (RMS).&lt;sup&gt;13,14&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Training</td>
<td>Determined by the percentage split of Supervision at the point of completion as reported in Callista.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Outputs</td>
<td>Determined by the number of Authors/Creators as entered for each output in the Research Activity System (RAS).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Quality measure points only apply for activities awarded activity measure points.

<sup>13</sup> Based on ECU net receipted income only i.e. the total amount of the funding received by ECU.
<sup>14</sup> FTE will be equally apportioned amongst ECU researchers where FTE is not relevant, e.g. for equipment grants.
Funding

The dollar value of one ASPIRE point can vary in any given round, depending upon the total amount of funds available for the scheme in each year and the amount of research activity across the University. All participating researchers are advised of the amount they are awarded and summaries of ASPIRE outcomes are reported to each School.

To ensure that the funds provided to recognise individual or group performance are distributed equitably amongst these categories, the total funds allocated in the strategic budget are apportioned as follows:

Research Income 35%
Research Training 20%
Research Outputs 45%

The funds within each category are then distributed according to individual performance (as determined by points allocated) within each category. For example, for every $100,000 allocated to recognise performance in ASPIRE, $35,000 will be available for Research Income performance, $20,000 for Research Training performance and $45,000 for Research Outputs performance. An individual receives a share of the funds within the category according to their share of the total points within that category. Their total allocation will be the sum of their share in all categories combined15.

A maximum payment of $20,000 will be provided to an individual researcher in any round. Allocations below $200 are forwarded to the individual’s respective organisational unit.

Appeal Process

If a researcher believes they have been disadvantaged because of special or unique circumstances not covered by these guidelines, or believes that the guidelines have been incorrectly applied, they may submit an appeal to the Office of Research and Innovation for consideration.

Researchers are encouraged to promptly review their annual ASPIRE Statements in RAS, as soon as available. Appeals will only be accepted up to the end of the calendar year. All appeals must be made by the researcher in writing and submitted to ras@ecu.edu.au.

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15 ASPIRE Statements, which summarise activities and allocations, are made available annually via RAS.

Last updated: September 2017
Appendix 1

Accepted Research Books

According to Government Specifications for external reporting, research publications are books, book chapters, journal articles and/or conference publications that comply with the definition of research and are characterised by:

- substantial scholarly activity, as evidenced by discussion of the relevant literature, an awareness of the history and antecedents of work described, and provided in a format which allows a reader to trace sources of the work, including through citations and footnotes;
- originality (i.e. not a compilation of existing works);
- veracity/validity through a peer review process or the quality control processes of a commercial publisher;
- increasing the stock of knowledge; and
- being in a form that enables the dissemination of knowledge.

Publication is more than the release of a work. It implies quality control (such as peer review or in-house quality control) and enhancement through processes such as assessment or review, editing, copy-editing, design, and conversion of the work to an appropriate format.

An acceptable peer review process is one that involves impartial and independent assessment or review of the research publication in its entirety before publication, conducted by independent, qualified experts. Independent in this context means independent of the author.

Publishing your thesis via a ‘Print-On-Demand’ publisher

The development of relatively low-cost digital printing presses, which can print and bind single copies of books from a file containing a digital copy of the text, have spawned a new industry known as ‘print-to-order’ or ‘print-on-demand’ publishing. Manuscripts submitted to conventional book publishers go through a rigorous selection process before they are accepted for publication as the publisher is making a significant financial commitment when opting to copy-edit, proof-read, commission cover art, print and market a book.

In contrast, print-on-demand publishing is a ‘no-risk’ business model as these publishers generally require authors to submit the text ‘camera-ready’. There will be no proof-reading or formatting. Authors create their own books via a submission ‘wizard’. Consequently, this form of publishing is considered by some to be ‘self-publishing’ or ‘vanity press’ (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Author_mill).

The publishers are confident that each book will generate at least a few orders from the author’s friends and family. In exchange for transferring their copyright in the work to the publisher, authors generally receive one free copy and, in some cases, the promise of royalties if income from sales exceeds a specified level. The publisher then lists the book with Amazon.com and Barnes & Noble, setting an exorbitantly high price on the book that has so far cost them nothing.

Vanity presses that target the popular fiction market can sit back and wait for budding authors to submit their novels. However, print-on-demand publishers that specialise in scholarly content have to ‘cold call’ authors to acquire the content they need. Often they will get their leads from institutional repositories (like ECU’s Research Online) that hold digital copies of PhD and Masters theses, and from university graduation lists. The authors may not be aware that an invitation from a print-on-demand publisher is, in some cases, the publishing equivalent of ‘spam’ email.

Some people do accept the invitation and have their thesis published as a book. However, authors need to read the publishing agreement terms very carefully so that they understand the full implications of the deal and can make an informed choice. The information below relates to the main ‘print-on-demand’ publisher that is known to be contacting authors of PhD and Masters theses.

16 Queensland University of Technology (QUT) Library Information Sheet
VDM Verlag/Dr Mueller ([http://www.vdm-publishing.com/](http://www.vdm-publishing.com/))

The word ‘Verlag’ is German for publishing house so do not confuse with well-known publisher such as Springer-Verlag. VDM Verlag offers the same service under the following business names VDM Publishing House, LAP Lambert Academic Publishing, and Verlag Classic Edition. As Alphascript Publishing they also publish a series of ‘books’ which are compilations of Wikipedia articles.

The terms of publishing by such publishing houses includes the following:

- No editing or proof-reading service is provided and no peer review is undertaken.
- Books are listed with Amazon.com (prices vary but often quite expensive).
- Authors receive one free copy.
- Authors bear full responsibility for any copyright-infringing content in their thesis.
- Royalties are paid just once a year. However, VDM is not obliged to pay the author anything unless royalties average 10 euros or more per month and, if royalties average between 10 and 50 euros per month, authors will be paid in book vouchers rather than cash.
- The publishing contract requires authors to give VDM Verlag exclusive dissemination rights for all print and electronic versions of the work. The author’s university may be permitted to include the thesis in a thesis-sharing network (e.g. ECU Research Online) only if the network is specified in the application form.

Excerpt from the VDM Verlag publishing agreement:

1. The Author grants the Publisher, regardless of location, for the duration of the lawful copyright, the exclusive license of duplication and dissemination (right of publishing) for the work and for all print and electronic editions without restriction as to the amount or number of editions in the German and the English language. The Author shall remain the owner of the copyright of their work.

2. For academic works (diploma thesis, master thesis, degree thesis, doctoral thesis postdoctoral thesis, etc.) the non-exclusive assignment of the license of duplication and dissemination as download file or e-book by the Author to the thesis sharing network(s) and to the full text server(s) specified by the Author in the web application VDM Online is permitted.

3. The Author grants the Publisher, for the duration of the main license, the following exclusive ancillary rights – as a whole or separately – the license of any other kind of duplication and dissemination of the work, as a whole or in part, including, in particular, by means of digital, photomechanical or similar procedures (e.g. (digital) photocopying).

Implications for ECU researchers and research students

If you are a HDR student, you should reflect on the potential downside of assigning exclusive rights to a publisher before signing any contract – especially if there is a chance you may wish to include parts of your thesis in a publication. If you decide to go ahead and publish your thesis with VDM Verlag, please ensure that you specify ECU Research Online ([http://ro.ecu.edu.au/](http://ro.ecu.edu.au/)) as a ‘full-text server’ in the web application form.

All researchers should consider whether their scholarly reputation would be enhanced by publishing via such organisations. It could also affect the opportunity to have the work accepted in reputable peer-reviewed journals.

ECU advises against vanity publishing and, given the Government's requirements for peer review and specific exclusion of theses, ORI will not accept such works submitted in RAS for ASPIRE.17

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17 Endorsed by the University's Research and Higher Degrees Committee on 15 July 2014 (Resolution RHDC11/14).