



Newsletter No.4 of June 2007

Introduction

The Research Quality Framework (RQF) process continues to build momentum and this week the Draft RQF Submission Specifications were released to RQF contact officers.

This *Newsletter* provides details about:

- the Draft RQF Submission Specifications process;
- the Draft RQF Technical Specifications process;
- an update on the RQF Pre-Implementation Trials;
- a summary of outcomes from the RQF Reference Committee meeting held on 12 June 2007; and
- What's Next?

Cheers

Leanne Harvey
Branch Manager of RQF Taskforce

1. Draft RQF Submission Specifications process

The Draft RQF Submission Specifications and Administrative Information for the Implementation Assistance Program (IAP) and the Australian Scheme for Higher Education Repositories (ASHER) programme were sent to Contact Officers on 29 June 2007.

Researchers who wish to make comments regarding the Draft Specifications should direct their comments to their RQF Contact Officer who will submit all comments for their institution/organisation to the RQF Taskforce.

RQF Contact Officers will be required to fill out a questionnaire as part of their response. The closing date for responses is 13 July 2007.

We envisage the broader consultation process will begin on 20 July 2007. When the Specifications have been finalised they will be forwarded to the Minister for approval.

DEST is also developing a range of other material referred to in the Specifications, including the *RQF Technical Specifications*, *Panel-Specific Requirements* and *Guidance Material for Assessment Panels and Advisors*.

Late July, DEST will be placing a range of other documents on the DEST website, including:

- the application form for the exemption from the *in situ* requirement;
- ranked outlets lists for the development of discipline-specific metrics,
- guidance on managing copyright in research outputs; and
- a draft impact statement template.

2. Draft RQF Technical Specifications process

The Draft RQF Technical Specifications will be sent to Contact Officers in mid-July 2007.

Institution IT Technical Staff who wish to make comments regarding the Draft Specifications should direct their comments to their RQF Contact Officer who will submit all comments for their institution to the RQF Taskforce.

The Draft RQF Technical Specifications are being released for consultation and therefore it is not recommended to commence building system interfaces based on these Specifications. However, the Specifications can be used to inform the institution's high level design and the likely system interfaces to DEST.

The closing date for responses to the Draft RQF Technical Specifications will be two weeks after release in mid July.

3. Update on RQF Pre-Implementation Trials

A total of 13 institutions have been selected to participate in RQF pre-Implementation Trials. There are 12 Trials in total, with two institutions collaborating on a joint submission involving a cross-institutional research group. The major objective of the Trials is to inform the development of the RQF Specifications, and the documentation provided by DEST for the Trials included a draft of the Specifications.

The Trials were very broad ranging, testing issues such as:

- multi-disciplinary research i.e. submission of Evidence Portfolios across more than one cluster of RFCD codes;
- cross-institutional research i.e. research undertaken across more than one institution entailing multiple claims on research outputs;
- group size i.e. issues arising from Evidence Portfolios presented by groups of significantly different size;
- group coherence i.e. assessment of work presented by actual Research Groups and those which have been formed for the purposes of RQF processes;
- assessment of Non-Traditional research outputs such as live performances etc;
- the support and information systems which are being developed for the RQF; and
- the use of digital repositories for the construction and assessment of Evidence Portfolios.

The approach taken for the Trials varies by institution depending on the focus of the issues which they are testing. In general, each of the Trials involves:

- the development and submission of Evidence Portfolios for nominated Research Groups;
- providing access for assessment;
- an assessment of a range of Research Outputs and claims for Impact; and
- an assessment of the Trial and assessment process.

Institutions have been asked to report on any issues and comment on any matters which have come out of the Trials relevant to the development of the RQF Specifications. In addition, DEST has

asked targeted questions which are intended to address issues identified during the drafting of the Specifications, and raised in discussions at the Discipline Workshops earlier this year.

A report summarising the outcomes will be made available at a later date on the website.

4. Summary of outcomes from the RQF Reference Committee meeting held on 12 June 2007

Development of metrics for quality

The following quantitative measures may be used to inform the RQF assessment process:

- (a) ranked research outlets;
- (b) citations analysis; and
- (c) research income.

The metrics are being considered to supplement the expert review process. Metrics provide additional indicators of the quality of the Research Group. They will not be combined or weighted in any formulaic way to obtain a single quantitative rating without an assessment of the other components of the evidence portfolio.

The development of metrics for the assessment of quality commenced in June 2007. DEST has started work on a research outlets ranking exercise, which with the help of the sector and peak bodies will result in discipline-specific rankings of journals, publishers, conferences and/or venues into four tiers.

For those disciplines that opt to use citations analysis, these will comprise citations per publication. A commercial data supplier is currently being sought to undertake development of this metric.

DEST is also currently working to identify which research income is appropriate to collect for research groups in each of the panel areas.

Assessment Panel Chairs

In early June, Assessment Panel Chairs considered all Assessment Panel nominations received. Panel Chairs are currently in the process of finalising their recommendations from the nominations. There will be a targeted consultation with the sector for nominations for International and end user members. Panel Chairs will meet again on 10 July 2007.

Management of exemptions

There are a range of areas in the draft RQF Submission Specifications that allow for exemptions to be claimed by researchers or Research Groups.

Self Assessed Exemptions

Self assessed exemptions would apply to Level A Researchers, Other Assessed Researchers (ECRs, Career Interruptions, Indigenous) and the minimum Research Group size.

Researchers and/or Research Groups must provide a short statement outlining why they meet the exemption.

In Situ Requirement

This requirement was put in place in late 2006. This requires that on the 31 March 2007 census date, researchers must either:

- (a) be in a tenured position or on a contract for three years or longer; or
- (b) be *in situ* for three months or longer prior to the Staff Census date.

DEST will manage this process and will assess each application on its merits and based on a transparent assessment process that will be released to the sector for consultation following the release of draft RQF Submission Specifications.

Exemption from Impact Assessment

In some cases, the research orientation, the discipline and/or the stage of development of a Research Group's research may mean that it would not be appropriate to assess it on the basis of broader impact. Research Groups that fall into this category will receive a publicly-reported rating of "Not Assessed".

The Research Group's application for exemption from Impact Assessment must include a statement of reasons, outlining why the Research Group claims exemption. This exemption will be managed by the Assessment Panel as part of the lodgement of submissions. A Research Group that does not make a satisfactory case for exemption will receive a rating of "E" for Impact.

5. What's next ?

- **Panel-Specific Requirements**

Panel-Specific Requirements are being drafted with input from Panel Chairs, to supplement the generic requirements outlined in the Draft RQF Submission Specifications. The Panel-Specific Requirements are designed to provide for variations in information requirements over the 13 Assessment Panels.

Draft Panel-Specific Requirements will be released to the sector for consultation following consideration by Panel Chairs.

- **Guidance Material for Assessment Panels and Advisors**

Guidance Material for Assessment Panels is being drafted to assist Panel Members and Advisors in the assessment of Quality and Impact. It will elucidate the criteria for Quality and Impact, and the method for arriving at the final rating. This Guidance Material will, therefore, also assist Research Groups to tailor their Context Statement and Impact Statement.

DEST has commenced work drafting the Guidance Material.

- **Draft Technical Specifications**

Draft Technical Specifications will be sent to Contact Officers in mid-July.