Innovative Research Universities Australia

Research Quality Framework (RQF) Model

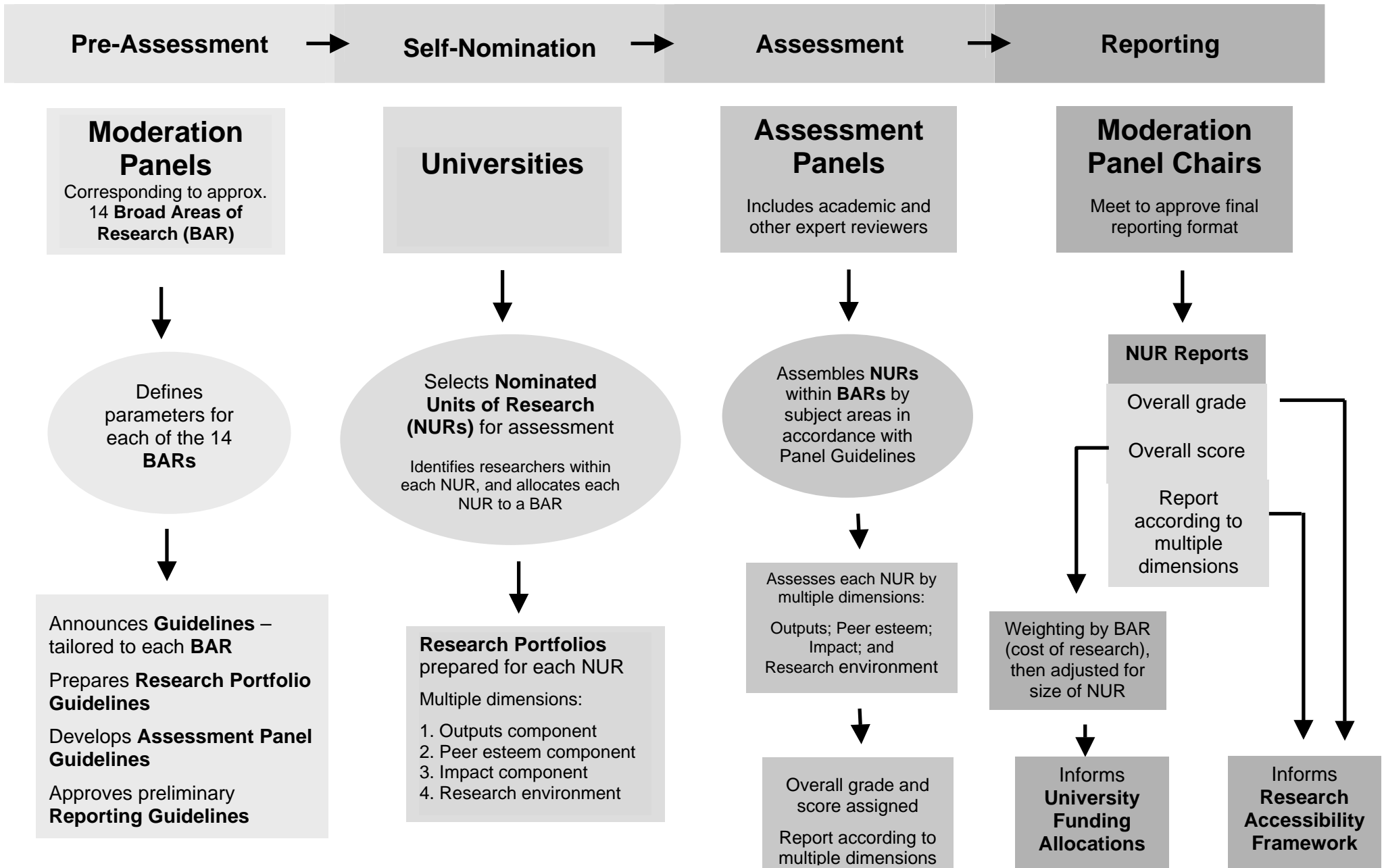## Advantages of the IRU Australia RQF Model

- It **focuses** RQF assessment on the areas that matter most to the future development of Australia's research and innovation system – namely research units such as institutes, centres, teams, clusters, groups and other collaborative networks.

- It creates an RQF **acceptable** to the entire university sector by assessing and rewarding research excellence wherever it occurs and in whatever form it occurs.

- It promotes **diversity** by encouraging universities to specialise in particular fields of research, enabling each institution to achieve its maximum potential whether globally, nationally, regionally or locally.

- It is **flexible** and **adaptable**, providing each university with the opportunity to be assessed according to its nominated research priorities and providing Moderation Panels with the ability to develop tailored assessment and reporting guidelines to suit the needs of different disciplines.

- It is **fair** by not requiring universities to conform to a one-size-fits-all RQF – no university will be blocked from involvement in the RQF as a result of size or low level of participation in research.

- It takes a **holistic** approach by linking reporting to both funding and to the planned Accessibility Framework.

- It is **well grounded** in lessons learned from overseas – seeking to avoid the issues associated with assessment of individuals or entire universities and encouraging behavioural outcomes that will complement other aspects of university activity such as learning and teaching, community outreach and regional development.

Objectives of the IRU Australia RQF Model

The main objectives of the IRU Australia RQF Model are to:

- Improve the quality of Australian research.

- Demonstrate the excellence of Australian research to our stakeholders.

- Identify and reward research, from basic and experimental to strategic and applied, attaining excellence both in terms of quality and impact at the local, regional, national and international levels.

- Inform significant funding allocations through a new **Research Performance Fund** and a **Community Outreach and Regional Development Fund**.

- Inform the future **Research Accessibility Framework**.

- Assess all universities under the same flexible framework allowing each the freedom to choose their own level of participation.

Research Quality Framework – IRU Australia RQF Model

Pre-Assessment	→	Self-Nomination	→	Assessment	→	Reporting

Moderation Panels

Corresponding to approx. 14 **Broad Areas of Research (BAR)**

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Defines parameters for each of the 14 **BARs**

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Announces **Guidelines** – tailored to each **BAR**

Prepares **Research Portfolio Guidelines**

Develops **Assessment Panel Guidelines**

Approves preliminary **Reporting Guidelines**

Universities

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Selects **Nominated Units of Research (NURs)** for assessment

Identifies researchers within each NUR, and allocates each NUR to a BAR

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Research Portfolios prepared for each NUR

Multiple dimensions:

1. Outputs component
2. Peer esteem component
3. Impact component
4. Research environment

Assessment Panels

Includes academic and other expert reviewers

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Assembles **NURs** within **BARs** by subject areas in accordance with Panel Guidelines

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Assesses each NUR by multiple dimensions:

Outputs; Peer esteem; Impact; and Research environment

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Overall grade and score assigned

Report according to multiple dimensions

Moderation Panel Chairs

Meet to approve final reporting format

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NUR Reports

Overall grade

Overall score

Report according to multiple dimensions

→ Weighting by BAR (cost of research), then adjusted for size of NUR

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Informs **University Funding Allocations**

→ Informs **Research Accessibility Framework**

Major Features

Components	*Key Details*
Moderation Panels **Broad Areas of Research (BARs)** **Assessment Panels**	The IRU Australia model is based on approximately 14 Broad Areas of Research (BARs) drawn from the 24 ABS RFCD codes. A Moderation Panel for each BAR would be responsible for developing Assessment Panel Guidelines, Research Portfolio Guidelines and Reporting Guidelines, determining the metrics and other assessment methods available for use in respective BARs. The Moderation Panel for each BAR would convene Assessment Panels to undertake the assessment of Nominated Units of Research (NURs) for that particular BAR. Assessors could be drawn from a specific discipline area or from an array of disciplines (from other BARs) in the case of interdisciplinary research groups. In all cases, the work of the BAR Moderation Panel and the Assessment Panels would be informed by quantitative indicators and other evidence provided in Research Portfolios; these would be used to make final judgements about the NUR, and whether it is achieving quality and impact at an international, national, regional and/or local level, as appropriate.
Nominated Units of Research (NURs)	NURs are the basic unit of assessment in the IRU Australia Model. These are to be self selected by each university with no lower or upper limits to size or number submitted for assessment. The performance of an entire group is assessed. Individuals may be allocated to more than one NUR, but cannot count for more than the total available research effort for that individual. Universities may submit more than one NUR to a particular BAR for assessment although these would usually be in separate subject areas. They may overlap if, for instance, staff members are split between NURs.

Research Portfolios	Universities will prepare **Research Portfolios** for each NUR with four components which are referred to as the **multiple dimensions**:
	
	     1. Output component (mainly assessed using metrics)
	     2. Peer esteem component (assessed by peers only)
	     3. Impact component (assessed by peers and expert end-users)
	     4. Research environment component (assessed by peers and expert end-users)
	
	 Each NUR is assessed on the basis of the Research Portfolio developed in accordance with guidelines set for use in that BAR. The impact component would include a description of the strategic intent of the NUR. Individual staff member performance is not assessed. Assessment Panels may co-opt members from other BARs to assist with interdisciplinary NURs.

Peer/External Review	Yes – using virtual assessment where practical. Assessment Panel members with subject knowledge are to be drawn from Australia and overseas. Members might also be drawn from commerce, industry, government and the broader community to assess broad impact.

Subject flexibility for Assessment Panels	The Moderation Panel would choose the broad assessment methods for each BAR. Assessment Panels would then be provided with some flexibility in the choice of appropriate indicators and assessment methods, particularly for assessing the multiple dimensions.
Provisions for interdisciplinary research	Groups to be assessed within broad disciplinary framework by panels with flexibility to co-opt members from a range of disciplines (from any BAR).
Provisions for Early Career Researchers	An assessment of researcher development will be incorporated into the Research Environment component of the Research Portfolios submitted for each NUR.
Support for collaboration	Collaborative centres involving several universities, such as CRCs, may be submitted for assessment (as a NURS) with the rating for the entire unit being applied to each university member according to their level of participation.
Reporting of Outcomes	A report on each NUR will be issued providing an Overall grade, Overall Score and Multiple Dimensions Report. Outcomes will be reported in such as way as to inform both funding allocations and a future Research Accessibility Framework.
Funding mechanism	Creation of a new Research Performance Fund (RFP) with possible scope for a Community Outreach and Regional Development (CORD) Fund to reward 'Third Mission' research outcomes.
	Funding provided to universities as a block grant to support the work of high performing units and/or to be used strategically to improve future performance of current or planned NURs.
Funding Formula	Allocations determined according to:
	1. Overall numerical score for NUR
	Adjusted according to the following weightings:
	2. Broad area of research (i.e. funding rate for each BAR determined by cost of research)
	3. Size – number of staff submitted for assessment
Research Accessibility Framework	Each NUR will be provided with an overall grade and a detailed report on its multiple dimensions and research profile. This information will in turn feed into the Research Accessibility Framework.
	This will enable end users such as industry, government departments, researchers and potential research students to access sophisticated, information-rich reports that will point to the research that is most appropriate for their respective needs.