Research Quality Assurance Policy

Section 1 - Purpose

(1) This policy establishes a framework for research and research training quality assurance at the University, encompassing the policies and practices that govern and manage this work. It outlines the necessary foundations, strategic documents, governance structures, and quality assurance cycle to ensure that policies, procedures, and activities are consistent and optimised for ongoing improvement. The policy supports the University's responsibility to meet internal and external research quality standards while staying aligned with its strategic objectives and priorities.

Background

(2) The University's framework for research quality assurance is based on definitions and characteristics of quality research outlined by the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), the Australian Research Council (ARC), and the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC), and guided by principles of respect, rigour, transparency, accountability, innovation, and efficiency. The University's framework also addresses relevant sections of the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021 (Standards 4, 5, 6 and 7 and Part B, B1.3.16 and B1.3.19) and related guidance notes.

Scope

(3) This Policy applies to all staff and students involved in research at the University.

Section 2 - Policy

Research Quality Assurance Foundations

(4) Quality assurance requires a well-articulated and effective framework of policies and practices that ensure the University and its researchers meet internal and external quality standards and requirements.

(5) The University's approach to research quality assurance encompasses the University's Quality Assurance Framework Policy, strategic documents, governance structures, internal and external standards, and is supported by data collection and analysis, and a research quality assurance cycle.

Quality Assurance Framework Policy

(6) The University's Quality Assurance Framework Policy sets out the framework via which quality in all academic activities at the University, including research, is assured, enhanced, and improved. The framework reflects strong commitment to evidence-based decision-making and continuous improvement. It is intended to guide activities that contribute to the development of a university-wide culture of ongoing quality assurance as well as to meet the University's legislative and regulatory requirements.

(7) One important element of the Quality Assurance Framework Policy is its focus on continuous assessment, improvement, and assurance of quality policies and practices from emerging to mature (see Figure 1 – Four Stages of Quality Assurance Cycle).

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Strategic Research Framework

(8) The Strategic Research Framework, "Research Strategy 2035", enshrines research quality in the University's long-term aspirations, key objectives, and specific goals.

(9) The Strategic Research Framework is built on a comprehensive suite of well-established and publicly available research policies and plans (and related procedures) that cover important issues including academic and research integrity, animal and human research ethics, responsible conduct of research, research data management, intellectual property, health and safety, cultural inclusion and sensitivity, privacy, complaints resolution and others. Many of these policies and plans, such as the Macquarie University Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research, Research Data Management Policy, Human Research Ethics Policy, Animal Use for Scientific Purposes Policy, Biosafety and Biosecurity Policy, and Indigenous Research Plan 2020-2025 are the target of specific professional development programs and/or governance committees. Relevant policies and plans are listed and linked in Associated Information.

Governance Structures

(10) Research quality is assured at the University via the appointment, development, management, and mentoring of research staff with relevant qualifications, experience, and skills, guided by the University's Enterprise Agreements and relevant policies.

(11) Research quality also is assured via governance, reporting, and accountability structures that connect individual researchers, research collectives, Departments/Schools, Faculties, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) Portfolio, Academic Senate, and professional services across the University.

(12) These structures, including Department/School Research Committees, Faculty Research Committees, the Research Management Committee, the Academic Senate Research Committee, the Academic Senate and others, allow regular reporting, monitoring, and oversight of initiatives, interventions, and outcomes to ensure research quality and mitigate risks. Membership requirements of these structures ensure expertise and experience sufficient to provide leadership and judgement on matters relating to research quality.

(13) These structures also provide conduits for professional development activities that support research quality assurance policies and practices, which help to meet the requirements of Standard 4.1 (Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021) for staff with relevant research qualifications, experience, and skills.

Internal and External Standards

(14) Research quality is assured by the University's adherence to external, national standards. For example, the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research, 2018 led to the updated Macquarie University Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research.

(15) To receive funding from national Australian funding bodies, such as the Australian Research Council (ARC), the NHMRC, or other major agencies, the University must meet stringent requirements attached to their funding.

(16) Research at the University involves multiple, converging, internal and external "lines of sight", which strongly support quality assurance. These include:

a. internal, competitive, peer review of enabling support (e.g., via internal schemes),
b. internal mentoring and review of proposed grant application (e.g., via discipline and compliance reviews),
c. external, competitive assessment of submitted grant application (e.g., via Australian Research Council (ARC) Grant Panel processes),
d. internal or external ethics review of funded research (e.g., via low- or high-risk Macquarie or other Committees),

e. external peer review of outcomes of research for publication or external impact of research for stakeholders (e.g., via journal submission review), and
f. external national assessment (e.g., via Australian Research Council (ARC), Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) and Engagement and Impact (E&I)).

(17) Figure 2 – Examples of Sets of Internal and External Research Quality Standards demonstrates a rich internal and external ecosystem in support of research quality and offers examples of these converging internal and external research standards for individual researchers, research collectives, Departments/Schools/Faculties, and the University, which operate to assure quality.

Data Collection and Analysis

(18) Research quality is assured via collection and analysis of relevant data as well as improvements in the University's research data analytic capabilities. Research has the advantage of generally agreed objective (internal and external) performance indicators. While recognising that metrics capture only a subset of research performance and success, metrics offer useful comparisons (via normalising) within and across disciplines, and are supported at the University by a maturing data analytics capability.

(19) These structures also provide conduits for professional development activities that support research quality assurance policies and practices, which help to meet the requirements of Standard 4.1 (Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021) for staff with relevant research qualifications, experience, and skills.

(20) This data collection and analysis helps to meet the requirements of Standards 4.1.3 to maintain accurate and up to date records of research outputs and other research-related information. Two important elements of these requirements are ensuring the quality of the University's research data and ensuring appropriate governance access, which are the responsibility of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) and Business Intelligence and Reporting (BIR).

Research Quality Assurance Cycle

(21) An important measure of the success of the University's Research Quality Assurance approach is evidence of improvements consistent with the quality assurance cycle, as illustrated in Figure 1 – Four Stages of Quality Assurance Cycle. This includes stages for planning, implementing, reviewing, and improving quality outcomes over time, and can be applied to individual, collective and University levels.

(22) For instance, Figure 3 – The Quality Assurance Cycle in Support of Individual Researchers illustrates insights, actions, practices, and policies that may support an individual researcher in quality improvements over time. This element of the University's Research Quality Assurance framework also helps to meet the requirements of Standard 4.1 (Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021) for staff with relevant research qualifications, experience, and skills.

(23) Insights, actions, practices, and policies that support research quality can be targeted not only to individuals but also to collectives such as disciplines, Departments, or Faculties across the University.

Responsibilities

(24) It is the responsibility of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) Portfolio, Faculty leaders, research leaders, and researchers to ensure that research quality assurance policies and procedures are known, implemented, and contribute to the quality of Macquarie's research endeavours.

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Section 3 - Procedures

(25) Nil.

Section 4 - Guidelines

(26) Nil.

Section 5 - Definitions

(27) Nil.

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