

## Preparing your ROPE

### ARC Discovery Early Career Researcher Awards (DECRA)

*This information is based on the current ARC Rules, last year's Instructions, assessor's comments and expert external advice. It was updated in January 2016.*

#### What is a ROPE?

Research Opportunity and Performance Evidence (ROPE) is a structured way for the ARC to compare your research CV to everybody else's. Your quality, as a DECRA candidate, is worth 35% of your score. You are assessed on your ROPE and your time and capacity to undertake the proposed research. ROPE goes beyond a simple list of publications. It allows you to set your work in context. It is your opportunity to show how your skills complement the research project and say why your research is superior to the other candidates.

#### How to get started

Read the ARC's *Instructions to Applicants* and *Funding Rules*. Pay attention to them and follow them. The ARC tells you exactly what it wants you to do.

Read an example ROPE or two from the library of successful grant applications (<http://www1.rmit.edu.au/browse;ID=vfmnslsnrx3f1>).

#### What is required?

##### **C7. Details on your career and opportunities for research since 2011.**

Please detail your career and research opportunities over the last five years (5,250 characters – about 750 words). Provide and explain:

- i. The research opportunities that you have had in the context of your employment situation, the research component of your employment, and any unemployment or part-time employment you may have had;
- ii. Indicate the percentage of your current role in research-only, teaching and research, teaching-only, teaching and administration, research and administration, administration-only academic, researcher in business, program or project manager or other business role, giving any additional information (for example, part-time status) needed to understand your situation. Give an indication of what percentage of time you have spent over the last five years in those roles;
- iii. The research mentoring and research facilities available to you;
- iv. Any career interruptions or other aspects of your career or opportunities for research that are relevant to assessment and that have not been detailed elsewhere in this Proposal (e.g. if you were a carer of a dependent child or any circumstances that may have slowed down your research and publications or affected the time you have had to conduct and publish from research).

#### How to answer

- Use this section to provide a snapshot of you and your research trajectory, so the reader can gain insight into who you are.

- Answer the questions in the given order and number them, i.e. (i) - (iv).
- In regards to tone, think of yourself as writing for a non-specialist but interested reader, such as a minister.
- Start with a clear summary statement – ‘I am scholar of...I was awarded my PhD five years ago in November 2011, from the University of... My thesis pursued...Since then 75% of my work time has been devoted to research; 15% to teaching, and 10% to administration and engagement’.
- Lead the reader where you want them to go, and write clearly and concisely.
- One way to structure this section is to write a short paragraph on each recent past position you have held, in reverse date order, and outline: any grants you have been awarded to conduct your research; your research time allocation; projects you have undertaken; mentoring you have received (e.g. specific names of academics, other than PhD supervisors if possible) and provide (e.g. HDR supervision); peer and industry networks you have established; publishing opportunities; any workshops/seminars/programs you have developed, coordinated or administered; and the research facilities available to you at RMIT.
- This section is all about elaborating on how you have used the resources available to you to generate research opportunities. For example, ‘in this year, in this environment, I was exposed to...method/team/project work...which resulted in my first publication in the leading journal of...’
- Don’t discuss teaching or non-research activities in detail. The focus is on your opportunities for research.
- Don’t assume the assessors know the questions. If a question is not relevant don’t just state ‘Not applicable’ or ‘None’. Say ‘I have had no significant career interruptions’ (for example).
- Be positive.  
Not good: ‘I don’t have much time for research’.  
Better: ‘My workplan allows 10% of my time for research, 80% teaching and 10% administration. I have made the most of this by...’  
Not good: ‘I have a heavy teaching load.’  
Better: ‘I teach x hours per week over y courses, each of which has in excess of z students.’ Be careful – assessors have heavy teaching loads, too.
- Your concluding paragraph on career interruptions should outline the specific month or year when your work was impacted by the noted event, but does not need to elaborate on any personal or confidential details. End this discussion positively by stating how during this difficult time you were still able to produce...research outputs.
- ***Note that sections C7 to C9 will be pasted into the online form which will remove all formatting apart from line spacing and caps.***

### **C8. Significant research outputs**

Please attach a PDF with a list of your significant research outputs (4 pages maximum). Provide your research publications split into the following categories:

- i. scholarly books;
- ii. scholarly book chapters;
- iii. edited books;

- iv. refereed journal articles;
- v. refereed conference papers only when the paper was published in full in the proceedings; and
- vi. other (e.g. major exhibitions, compositions or performances; public policy reports).

\* Asterisk the publications relevant to this Proposal.

#### How to answer

- For your publications, use exactly the headings (i)-(vi) provided, in that order.
- Number publications consecutively.
- Don't forget to asterisk publications relevant to the proposal.
- Don't cheat and put publications in the wrong category, i.e. reports and edited books cannot be listed as books and refereed conference abstracts are not to be included with refereed conference papers.
- Don't note book reviews, conference presentations, media op-eds, etc, unless there is a very important reason why they will assist your pitch. Unlike orthodox research outlets, these forums do not create knowledge in a way that will allow scholars to build on them over time.
- Briefly outline anything notable, such as: invited key note addresses, awards for best conference paper, research was fully funded by professional body, etc...
- Do provide full references, including all authors, page numbers (or numbers of pages for books, so substantial works are clearly visible), ISBNs, DOIs, and citation counts so reviewers can compare common characteristics in publication lists (note where you obtained your citation counts from, such as Google Scholar).
- Do check spelling.
- If a research output has been accepted for publication but has not yet been published, include the date of acceptance. Don't include items under review.
- In the Other category you can include non-referred items, such as contract research reports, submissions to government, industry inquiries, original artworks or fiction writing, curated exhibitions and other items counted as HERDC research outputs that reflect engagement with, and activity in the field, such a newspaper/blog writing. Do use sub-headings to organise these works. You may sparingly mention some under review work here if highly pertinent to the project, but F12 (vi) may be a better place to do so.
- Do NOT include references to outdated ERA journal rankings of A\*, A, B, C....

#### C9. A statement on your contributions to the research field of this Proposal

Please attach a PDF detailing your contributions to the research field and evidence of your performance which demonstrate your capacity to undertake the proposed research (1 page maximum). This could include your PhD research and related publications and presentations, subsequent contributions where applicable, as well as conference organisation and learned societies membership.

#### How to answer

- This is your opportunity to summarise your contribution, not only to your field of research, but outside academia. For example, what impact does your research

make to the economy, society, culture, national security, public policy or services, health, the environment, or quality of life?

- One way to structure this section is to provide an overarching narrative that describes your research to date, elaborating on three or so specific contributions, or how you have contributed to three or so areas of scholarship, themes, etc. Indicate what impact you have made and give evidence of this, i.e. the policy or practical impact of your work.
- Discuss the consequentiality of your inquiries. For example, ‘I explained...to clarify...’
- Go into detail about what you have achieved, rather than outlining what you have done, highlighting novelty and innovation, such as: conducting research on previously neglected topic, untested assumptions, original method, etc.
- Note any prestigious outlets or collaborations with significant experts, including publications in any dedicated special issues of journals with contributions from leading scholars, and subsequent citations in the national media as well as academic outlets.
- You can also note membership in relevant professional organisations and boards, and invitations to speak at academic conferences or provide expert opinion via media interviews, as evidence of the respect of your peers.
- Include that lovely quote from your examiner about your PhD thesis being the most inspirational thing that they had ever read. Talk about how that paper has been referenced by that key scholar in the field, or how you used it to make an important point.
- Use this section to demonstrate why you are the best person to undertake the research project. Be succinct and explicit, explain and justify. Show how this proposal builds on your previous work, taking it further.
- Be confident, but do not over-claim. Assessors can see through this.
- Do not dilute an otherwise strong list by including invitations to speak at local non-academic gatherings (like Rotary Club) or internal RMIT grants. These detract from your other achievements.
- Note that as well as ERA rankings no longer being seen as applicable, the ARC now subscribes to the view that journal impact factors are a poor measure of an individual’s research performance. Instead you may want to highlight Google Scholar citations if this will be particularly impressive.

### How do I present the best ROPE?

As Mark Bisby (former VP Research for the Canadian Institutes of Health Research) puts it, “It’s not a test, it’s a **contest**”! Don’t just aim to pass, you have to aim to win.

The best ROPEs are based on evidence. Anyone can say that they are the best – you have to **show** that you are the best.

The Discovery ROPE asks for ten career best publications, along with a brief synopsis of why they are good. It is worth thinking about this format for your contributions to the field.

## Further information

Other universities publish advice, too. Search for “Advice on ARC ROPE site: au”.

The Research Whisperer has published advice on how to present your research career:

- Telling research career stories – Part 1 & Part 2, Tseen Khoo, Sept 2013  
<http://theresearchwhisperer.wordpress.com/2013/09/10/research-career-stories-1/>  
<http://theresearchwhisperer.wordpress.com/2013/09/17/career-stories-common-mistakes/>  
In these two articles, Tseen talks about how to take the messiness of your career trajectory and present it as a coherent narrative.
- Pruning your research publications list, Jonathan O’Donnell and Narelle Lemon, 15 Nov 2011.  
<http://theresearchwhisperer.wordpress.com/2011/11/15/publications/>  
I got sick of writing ‘where are your page numbers’, ‘ISBN please’ and similar comments on people’s publication list, so Narelle and I sat down and wrote out what we wanted people to do.
- How I assess a funding application: Part 1 – Track-records, Tseen Khoo, 15 May 2012  
<http://theresearchwhisperer.wordpress.com/2012/05/15/assess-application-part-1/>  
Tseen talks about how she reads your track record when she is assessing grants. This is the view of an assessor, your audience.

As they are published, ARC Rules and Guidelines will be listed at:

ARC: <http://www.arc.gov.au/ncgp/decra.htm>

RMIT R&I: <http://www.rmit.edu.au/browse;ID=01us07n4wv9h1> (log-in required).

## Contacts

In the first instance, please discuss your DECRA application with your School Deputy Dean (Research).

In the College, we have people who can work with you on your application. Start with:

- Jonathan O’Donnell, Senior Advisor, Research Development  
Mobile: 0425 755 829 (Tuesday to Friday only)  
[DSCgrants@rmit.edu.au](mailto:DSCgrants@rmit.edu.au)  
<http://www.rmit.edu.au/staff/jod>