Describing your Project Research Environment

This information is based on the ARC Rules and Instructions, assessor’s comments and external expert advice, as at January 2016.

What is required?

The research environment fits within your Project Description. The ARC considers it to be so important that they score it separately in the selection criteria.

Project Research Environment (0.5 – 1.5 pages)

Discovery – Project Research Environment is worth 15% of the overall marks.

- Is there an existing, or developing, supportive and high quality research environment for this Project and for HDR students where appropriate?

DECRA – Project Research Environment is worth 15% of the overall marks.

- Is there a supportive and collaborative research environment for the project?
- Will the Project provide the DECRA Candidate with the capacity and opportunity to develop an independent record of innovative, high quality research?

Linkage – Project Research Environment is worth 10% of the overall marks.

- Is there an existing, or developing, supportive and high quality Project Research Environment for this Project, both within the Administering Organisation and in the Partner Organisation(s)?

All three ask these two questions as well.

- Are the necessary facilities available to complete the Project? For example, access to University Library, resources and equipment.
- Are there adequate strategies to encourage dissemination, commercialisation, if appropriate; and promotion of research outcomes?

Here is what they ask for in the Instructions to Applicants (this is from Discovery).

- Describe the existing, or developing, research environment within the Administering Organisation/other Organisation(s) for this Project.
- Outline the adequacy of the Research Environment in your department, school or research group, and the extent to which it will provide opportunities for knowledge growth, innovation, collaboration, mentoring and student training.
- Describe how the Project aligns with the Administering Organisation’s research plans and strategies.

How do I present the best Project Research Environment statement?

This year, the ARC changed the title of this section from Research Environment to Project Research Environment, as a clear indicator that they want to know about your specific situation. In the past when we have provided templated text, we have received research environment statements that were, word for word, what we provided. Please understand that the ARC has made it very clear that it does not want the same environment statement from every application at RMIT.
Advice from assessors

In the DP16 Discovery round, two assessors provided specific recipes:

“It would be good to provide more factual measures of impact, e.g. rather than “The School of … has a history in fostering innovative … research at both a national and international level”, be specific about the achievements of the school and its recognition at a national and international level (e.g. list awards, impacts of specific projects, editorships, conference keynotes, etc.).”

“…the very strong indicators of quality that are associated with outstanding or exceptional places (e.g. number of Fellows at all levels from postdoc to senior Future and/or Laureate, ASSA Fellows, College of Expert members, top ERA ratings).”

Environment within RMIT and collaborating organisations

- The most important aspect of a good Project Research Environment statement is that it must be written specifically around the project. While a Centre might host the project, in the statement it is important to detail exactly how this will enable the project to succeed. For example, you can name other eminent researchers who may not be named in the grant but can be called upon as a result of their juxtaposition via the research environment. You can also name facilities or dissemination channels etc. that the project will leverage/use.

- Talk about the Centre or Group that your project sits within. Name key researchers and how they will contribute in various ways, as mentors, as advisors informally, etc., to different aspects of the project. Mention other significant grants that you’ve recently won and how these will provide resources that the proposed project will be able to leverage. Be as specific as possible and mention the project repeatedly.

- Make it clear that there is a critical mass of support in the Centre or School and that there is an upward trajectory of growth and quality. Talk about new, high profile appointments including investments the University has made (e.g. VC fellows) and the ARC has made (e.g. Future Fellows/other grants).

- Describe your area’s record of producing innovative, high quality research. Provide evidence of other high quality research outputs and how the project will benefit from these.

- Talk about the discipline’s success in the Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA). See: http://www.arc.gov.au/excellence-research-australia. Compare to proportional groups in Australia if this is advantageous. Please note that ERA is a measure of past performance.

- When you list your ERA score, also mention new staff and other factors that will improve your ERA in the future, or maintain your ranking. For an example see the excerpt from Prof Ralph Horne’s Project Research Environment statement on page 8 of this guide.

- Describe links to prominent, closely connected colleagues and how they will help you succeed with the project. Detail networks available to you, the specific expertise of scholars you will draw on, how such support will impact on the project (e.g. on what component of the research), and mentoring that you provide to others.

- Note any research programs you lead which houses prominent scholars, and highlight the theories and practices the cohort promotes and how these will BOTH enhance and be enhanced by the project.
• Discuss how the advisory boards of the Research Centre/School where the project is placed will impact the research. For example, will the board provide unique access to global interdisciplinary scholars and industry links?

• Detail any specific resources and facilities that the universities will provide. These could be coming from any level in the university.

• Mention any special arrangements for access to research leave, but check with your Deputy Dean (Research) first.

• Comment on seed grants you have received in the past from any RMIT Research Centre to undertake research with leading scholars based there.

• Note financial support for the project being provided by the University/School/Research Centre, through project funding or fellowships for: international collaboration and field-work; workshops with experts in the field, and research assistance.

• You don’t have to restrict yourself to your School or main research group, although that should be your main focus. You can also mention pertinent collaboration with other groups within RMIT, even in other Colleges.

• Note that you are writing your statement for all the organisations involved, not just RMIT. RMIT should be the emphasis as the lead institution, but all universities should be included. Use separate sub-headings for each university, or bold their names in the text. Within RMIT, you might have Chief Investigators from different Schools or Centres. Try to find an overarching narrative – do they all belong to the same Centre? If so, focus on that rather than simply including a paragraph for each CI.

Adequacy of the environment

• Show that you are already doing independent and high quality research by briefly mentioning your track record highlights. Then say how this will be materially transformed through the support of RMIT.
  e.g. ‘With RMIT’s support, this project will allow me to do B with the result C’.

• Describe how the Centre or Group provides support, consolidation and collaboration on the project and for your careers.
  e.g. ‘Centre X (or person Y) specialises in innovative method Z’.

• Explicitly talk about how your area provides opportunities for knowledge growth, innovation, collaboration, mentoring and student training and which aspect and how each of these will support the project.

• Note your School/Research Centre’s strong connections with industry representatives, and how will these be further strengthened through the project.

• Show how the research personnel in the budget (research assistants, post-docs and PhDs) is/will be integrated into the life of the School or Centre. The ARC expects these people to have a strong mentoring and training environment.

• Bear in mind that applicants from an emerging research area will need to describe a different environment to an established area.
Strategic research plan

- Link your project to the specific aspect of RMIT’s strategic research plan that fits with your research (and that of the other universities). Show where your project fits in. Pick up some of the language of that document, or use the relevant Enabling Capability Platform to indicate the strategic direction of the university. See: https://www.rmit.edu.au/about/our-strategy/

- Discuss RMIT’s Enabling Capabilities Platforms as a key mechanism for the delivery of RMIT’s research strategy and for embedding innovation in the research and innovation ecosystem. For example, ‘the Platforms are a new 2016 initiative and support building collaborative networks across the university and with key external partners’. See: https://sites.google.com/a/rmit.edu.au/enablingcapabilityplatforms/guiding-principles

- Discuss the school’s research strengths and plan and how the project aligns and will further promote these. For instance, are there any areas of research that the school is substantially and strategically investing in? Or seeking to advance?

Discipline, School and Research Centre key achievements

- You can start off this discussion by making a key statement then linking it to the project. For instance: ‘In 2015 QS rankings (see below), RMIT was ranked 20th globally in Art and Design, and 33rd Globally in Architecture and the built environment. This means it is among the world’s leading academies in these areas and has a very strong, internationally recognised research environment with strong global networks of world-leading researchers’.

- If you can link your project to these discipline areas, say how this will benefit the project and how the project will in turn further enhance Australian leadership in the discipline.

- Discuss how much research income the school generated in the last year. (See key details for each School below).

- Note how many major grants (category 1, 2 and 3) have been attained in the School/and or Research Centre where the proposed project will take place (This information will be circulated by the College shortly. In the meantime you can contact your Deputy Dean of Research for further details).

- Detail how many post-doctoral research fellows your School/Research Centre has hosted (See table below). What can be said of their research? E.g. is their research policy relevant? Is it unique or innovative?

Useful examples of Project Research Environment statements from recent ARC grant application winners

- “A foremost strength of RMIT University as the host institution for this project is the established expertise in cross-disciplinary research approaches to the impacts of emerging technologies in urban environments. This expertise brings together world-leading researchers in computer science, law, media and communications, and sociology, as well as the rapid growth of criminology at RMIT” – Dr Anastasia Powell, 2016 DECRA winner.

- “This project will be conducted within RMIT’s pioneering interdisciplinary and applied environment of design and technology. It will be located in two vibrant research centres: the Centre for Urban Research (CUR) and the
Digital Ethnography Research Centre (DERC). CUR is based in the School of Global, Urban and Social Studies (GUSS) and contains eight competitively awarded research fellows working on policy-relevant research relating to sustainability, housing and urban infrastructure” – Dr Yolande Strengers, 2015 DECRA winner.

- “RMIT’s Strategic Plan 2011-2015 articulates an ambition to become an urban university’ and developing global leadership in scholarship and teaching in the social, political and cultural aspects of living and working in an urban environment. RMIT achieved a rating of 4 (above world class) in its urban and regional planning program in the Excellence in Research Australia 2012 assessments. Centre for Urban Research’s (CUR) development of a research strength in urban broadband infrastructure complements and extends existing centre expertise in physical planning and urban design. At school level, GUSS’ strategic research focus on ‘the critical study of socio-technical change’ supports research on digital policy and technologies. CUR also provides a supportive platform for collaborative research within RMIT and beyond. This project will be a focal point for ongoing RMIT-based research on…” – Dr Ian McShane, 2015 Discovery Project winner.

- “The Strategic Plan 2015: Transforming the Future’ outlines the focus on making RMIT a ‘global university of technology and design’. This research proposal is firmly focused in RMIT’s traditional combined areas of strength: design and technology, situated within an international research context and for global dissemination…The research will be located in three major RMIT Schools: the School of Architecture and Design (SoAD), which was one of only two in Australia to receive a rating of 5 (the highest rating – “well above world standard”) in the 2012 ERA reporting, reflecting an exceptional balance of novel, creative and traditional research modes; the School of Aerospace, Mechanical and Material Engineering (SAMME) and the School of Computer Science and Information Technology (SCSIT) which both received a rating of 4 in ERA reporting “above world standard”…”– A/Prof Jane Burry, 2015 Linkage Project winner.

- “The project will draw upon the facilities of four world class Universities with networks, knowledge and experience in design and social sciences disciplines specific to the project. The Administering Institution is a large, urban, dual sector University with a leading profile of research concentrations and quality in the built environment disciplines, across architecture, building, design practice and management, and urban planning. The university’s strategic plan commits the institution to invest in being global in outlook, urban in orientation and connected to industry, government and community. The project is central to RMIT's research focus area the future of cities. Since ERA 2012, when RMIT performed outstandingly across the built environment, further strengthening of the research capacity and environment have been made across the built environment disciplines, including urban planning and design, in accordance with the strategic plan – 8 new design / planning professors, 3 new VC fellows, a crop of DECRAs and a recent new Future Fellow.” – Prof Ralph Horne, 2015 Linkage Project winner.

- “RMIT University has a long and distinguished history of applied and theoretical media research. The School of Media and Communication was formed in 2009 to respond to the need to consolidate this strength and develop
capacity for further research innovation”. “A strong commitment to research is demonstrated through the creation of new research centres that enhance the environment for research development and intellectual exchange” – Dr Heather Horst, 2014 Discovery Project Winner.

- “This research supports RMIT’s strategic commitment to research that is urban in orientation and actively connected with professions, industries and organisations. The project is situated in the School of Property, Construction and Project Management, which has a strong international reputation for construction management research, with an ARC Future Fellow, Professor Lingard and numerous ARC Linkage and Discovery grants (Professors Lingard, Blismas, Wakefield and Walker). In the last six years, researchers in the School have been chief investigators on over $2,700,000 of ARC funded projects, as well as attracting Australian China Science Research and US National Science Foundation funding and significant industry commitments. The School has been largely responsible for the ERA assessment of 4 in the FOR Building code. There are only two Universities who scored 4 in this area in the last assessment, UNSW and RMIT” – Prof Kerry London, 2014 Linkage Project winner.

- “The University has made a number of appointments to support this research focus including appointing…” The school of “Media and Communication has a strong and developing research culture and was ranked above world standard in the recent ERA round for Media and Communication. The School currently supports two APDs, a QEII, three Vice Chancellor’s Senior Fellows, an Early Career fellow, 107 HDR candidates, a top academic journal, Communication, Politics and Culture (previously ranked A through ERA), and 3 research centres, including Communication, Politics and Culture…” – A/Prof Tania Lewis, 2013 Discovery Project winner.

- “The Globalism Research Centre currently runs core research programs in two areas of direct relevance to this project: community formation and transnationalism, and insecurity and conflict. One of the GRC’s principal research fellows, Anne McNevin, has recently completed an ARC project on ‘Irregular Migrants and Political Belonging in Global Cities’ and is part of a vibrant group of Global Studies, Social Science, and Planning (GSSSP) researchers in this field. Additionally, GSSSP also houses the Centre for Applied Social Research, which has garnered a reputation for its scholar and applied research on labour practices and regulatory regimes. This group of researchers will also be a valuable resource for this project” – Prof Jock McCulloch, 2013 Discovery Project winner.

- “The project will be located within the research-intensive Centre for Sustainable Organisations and Work (C-SOW) in RMIT University’s College of Business (http://www.rmit.edu.au/bus/research/csow), with more than thirty social science researchers, this College-level Centre provides an excellent intellectual and logistical environment for the project. The Centre and College provide research capacity building support through a developing HDR program, research administration/development staff, and a full suite of intellectual and mentoring support via seminars, workshops, and publishing grants. In addition to this significant and in-depth level of industry sector engagement, the Centre’s staff are key participants in international research networks…” – Prof Peter Fairbrother, 2012 Discovery Project winner.
Key details for RMIT and each school within the DSC College to draw on
This information has been collated from current ERA rankings (2015), QS rankings, RMIT’s website, and College grant funding data.

RMIT University
- RMIT is #273 QS World University Rankings.
- RMIT’s 2020 Strategic Plan outlines the following priorities in relation research: undertaking research that solves public policy problems, promoting research embedded in teaching and engagement and conducting effective research training.
- Research at RMIT is also focused on five specialist areas of strength: (1) designing the future, (2) improving health and lifestyle, (3) smart technology solutions, (4) sustainability and climate change, and (5) the future of cities.
- RMIT’s eight Enabling Capabilities Platforms are: (1) Advanced manufacturing and fabrication, (2) Advanced materials, (3) Biomedical and health innovation, (4) Design and creative practice, (5) Global business innovation, (6) Information and systems (engineering), (7) Social change, (8) Urban futures.

Architecture and Design
- RMIT is in the top two universities in Australia in the Architecture (1201) Field of Research (FoR), with an ERA rating of 5 – performance which is well above world standard.
- Architecture at RMIT is #33 QS WU Rankings by Subject.
- The school generated a total of $906,969 in research funding in 2015.

Art
- RMIT is in the top four universities in Australia in the Visual Arts and Crafts (1905) FoR, with an ERA rating of 5 – performance which is above world standard.
- RMIT’s first submission for ERA in the in Performing Arts and Creative Writing (1904) FoR, bringing together researchers in music and sound (M&C, Art and A&D), performance studies and creative writing, returned a score of 3 – performance which is at world standard.
- Art and Design at RMIT is #20 QS WU Rankings by Subject.
- The school generated a total of $135,266 in research funding in 2015.

Education
- RMIT has an ERA rating of 3 for the Education (13, and 1301) FoR – performance which is at world standard.
- The school generated a total of $482,945 in research funding in 2015.
- Education and Training at RMIT is #151 QS WU Rankings by Subject

Fashion and Textiles
- RMIT is the top university in Australia in the Design, Practice and Management (1203) FoR, with an ERA rating of 4 – performance which is above world standard.
- The school generated a total of $873,392 in research funding in 2015.
Global, Urban and Social Studies

- RMIT is in the top four universities in Australia in the Urban and Regional Planning (1205) FoR, with an ERA rating of 4 – performance which is above world standard.
- RMIT is in the top two universities in Australia in the Built Environment and Design (12) FoR, with an ERA rating of 4 – performance which is above world standard.
- RMIT is among the Group of 8 Universities with an ERA rating of 4 – performance which is above world standard in the Cultural Studies (2002) FoR.
- RMIT has an ERA rating of 3 for the Studies in Human Society (16), Policy and Administration (1605) and Sociology (1608) FoR – performance which is at world standard.
- Social Science and Management at RMIT is #115 QS WU Rankings by Faculty.
- Arts and Humanities at RMIT is #140 QS WU Rankings by Faculty.
- Global Cities Research Institute.
- The school generated a total of $4,864,629 in research funding in 2015.

Media and Communication

- RMIT is in the top two universities in Australia in the Communication and Media Studies (2001) FoR, with an ERA rating of 5 – performance which is well above world standard.
- RMIT has an ERA rating of 3 for the Film, TV and Digital Media (1902) FoR – performance which is at world standard.
- RMIT has an ERA rating of 4 for the Language, Communication and Culture (20) FoR – performance which is above world standard.
- Communication and Media Studies is #101 QS WU Rankings by Subject.
- The school generated a total of $1,984,528 in research funding in 2015.

Property, Construction and Project Management

- RMIT is the top university in Australia in the Building (1202) FoR, with an ERA rating of 4 – performance which is above world standard.
- The school generated a total of $823,972 in research funding in 2015.
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Further information
The ARC Rules and Guidelines are published at:
RMIT R&I: http://www.rmit.edu.au/browse;ID=01us07n4wv9h1 (log-in required).

Submit your draft
Draft material should be submitted for review (in PDF format) to:
DSCgrants@rmit.edu.au