Managing grant publication mandates: an interoperable, implementation model

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Abstract
How do we measure performance? How do we report it? For universities, performance can be measured in a variety of ways - the number of students enrolled, the number of graduates, theses completions, research grant funding obtained, research outputs in the form of publications, prestige attained by staff and the institution as a whole, and reputation. Some of these performance measures are easily quantifiable, others less so, e.g. prestige and reputation. And of course performance measurement regimes change with time, such that what was considered an appropriate measure at one time may be deemed no longer relevant or even desirable. For example, publication of conference papers in proceedings is now deemed less desirable than publication in A* journals, largely as a result of issues arising from the ERA process. This changing dynamic could also be said to apply to the current effort in Australia to measure performance in regards to research grants and related published research outputs, arising from the introduction of federally-supported mandates. It is a swiftly changing landscape, requiring transformative thinking and process change. The case of the University of Wollongong and its efforts to implement a new grants reporting and performance management regime may be typical, if not representative.

Keywords
implementation, grant, managing, interoperable, mandates, model, publication

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Managing grant publication mandates: an interoperable, implementation model

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“Output and outcome reporting plays an increasingly significant role in government research funding and policy.” Reporting Requirements, Australian Research Council, www.arc.gov.au, 1 May 2013.

How do we measure performance? How do we report it? For universities, performance can be measured in a variety of ways – the number of students enrolled, the number of graduates, theses completions, research grant funding obtained, research outputs in the form of publications, prestige attained by staff and the institution as a whole, and reputation.

Some of these performance measures are easily quantifiable, others less so, e.g. prestige and reputation. And of course performance measurement regimes change with time, such that what was considered an appropriate measure at one time may be deemed no longer relevant or even desirable. For example, publication of conference papers in proceedings is now deemed less desirable than publication in A* journals, largely as a result of issues arising from the ERA process. This changing dynamic could also be said to apply to the current effort in Australia to measure performance in regards to research grants and related published research outputs, arising from the introduction of federally-supported mandates. It is a swiftly changing landscape, requiring transformative thinking and process change. The case of the University of Wollongong and its efforts to implement a new grants reporting and performance management regime may be typical, if not representative.

Research Grant performance

Most university academics, at one time or another, go through the research grant application process. Success rates vary, though they are usually low. For example, during 2012 the success rate for NHMRC research grant applications was 20.5% (NHMRC Project Grant success rate, 2012).
The attainment of a research grant is an achievement in itself and highly valued at the individual and institutional level. In many instances attainment is the primary and single measure used to assess performance, and tables showing grant monies received figure prominently in university and research centre annual reports. For example, the *University of Wollongong Annual Report 2012* (Table 3) reports on ‘UOW Competitive Research Income 2007-2011’, noting a total of $54.1 million in grant income for 2011 and commercial research income of $21.2 million for 2012 (University of Wollongong 2013). In-kind support and resources secured in association with grants are also highly valued.

A typical example of the primacy of attainment is the University of New South Wales webpage on ‘Research Grant Performance’ which only lists grants obtained (UNSW 2013). Likewise, the Australian Group of 8 (Go8) universities coalition, in its policy note of March 2012 entitled ‘Research performance of Australian universities’, primarily addressed the subject in terms of financial inputs (i.e. successful grant applications) rather than outputs or outcomes (Go8 2012).

The outputs and outcomes of any research grant can be many and varied, though substantially consist of peer-reviewed journal publications, reports and conferences presentations and publications, alongside development of teaching and learning objects, curriculum materials, and tangible products, which may or may not be subject to patents and commercialisation. With the majority of research outputs falling into the publications basket, it seems logical that performance assessment of research grants by universities would focus on this area. However this does not appear to be the case. It may in part be due to the difficulties encountered in associating research outputs with research grants, along with the lag time between attainment of the grant and the publication or production of outcomes. Publication may occur during the life of the grant or, commonly, following its completion.

Whilst the link between grants and derived publications has not traditionally been a focus of performance measurement by institutions or funding bodies, recent mandates and improvements in research management systems have made the implementation of such linkages both desirable and achievable. The implementation of the Excellence in Research Australia (ERA) research assessment exercise in 2009 marked a step in the evolution of performance assessment within the higher education sector. It brought to focus the role of published research outputs as a metric and followed on the development of the Higher Education Research Data Collections (HERDC) annual assessment since 2002. Neither HERDC nor ERA sought a connection between research grants and published outputs. However the appearance of research grant mandates in 2012 is a driver for the development of such linkages. The ultimate aim is to record contemporaneously all research grant
outcomes and outputs alongside the original grant details. Such a task seems both simple and logical, yet in practice it is neither.

Managing mandates

During 2012 two significant events occurred in Australia in relation to research grant management. The major federal funding bodies - the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) and the Australian Research Council (ARC) - introduced mandates requiring placement of research grant published outputs on open access in local institutional repositories. There were numerous drivers to this, including local community calls for open access to health research by sectorial lobby groups. Internationally there have been moves in a similar direction, with, for example, President Obama of the United States issuing a memo in February 2013 which mandated open access to “federally funded scientific research” (Holden, 2013).

The Australian mandates and associated funding agreements were worded in such a way that it became the responsibility of the administering institution and the chief investigator to deposit publications in a repository (refer Appendix 1: ARC and NHMRC policy and funding agreement extracts regarding grant related publications).

The mandates generated a great deal of activity within the sector and required all research institutions in Australia to consider workloads, policies and procedures relating to grants and publication management. The mandates were also greeted throughout 2012 with much enthusiasm by supporters of open access as they represented high level support for the movement. Both mandates were quite emphatic in what they demanded, i.e. “… it is expected that any material published in respect of an ARC-funded research activity will be included in the institutional repository.” Unfortunately the precise mechanisms for this were not forthcoming, and they did not override publisher copyright agreements. Therefore repository managers were left with a largely unchanged Sherpa / Oaklist copyright management regime in which to secure content according to the mandates.

Regardless of whether a research output was subject to a Gold, Green or some variant open access model, institutional staff responsible for management of research grants and research publications were nevertheless faced with implementing a framework to manage the new mandates and monitor the performance of those grants should it be called for by the issuing body. With the federal government one of the primary funders of the higher education sector in Australia, no university could afford to ignore the new NHMRC and ARC mandates. Like HERDC and ERA, it was up to implement them in a timely and efficient manner.

One element of this response was the CAUL / CAIRSS led initiative to create a standardised method of harvesting research grant publication outputs for the NHRC, utilising the ANDS database and ANDS generated PURLs. Whilst the University of Wollongong was keen to see implementation of research funding body monitoring of mandated outcomes, the precise details of the implementation of this regime raised questions both in regards to technological implications and workflows.

It was also realised early on this that was just one element of the research grant management process and there were a number of significant hurdles which needed to be dealt with before the
Unravelling the grants process

Following announcement of the NHMRC and ARC research grant publication mandates during the middle and latter stages of 2012, the UOW Library, in collaboration with the Research Services Office, began the process of developing procedures and workflows enabling compliance. The Library and Research Services Office would be primarily responsible for carriage and implementation of any new management regime. Numerous discussions were held to identify those processes already in place and those needing to be introduced in order for the mandates to work, and enable institutions to assess performance in regards to research grant outputs.

It soon became clear that linkages between specific research grants and their outputs did not readily exist, or were not necessarily accessible. The management of research grants as it stood in 2012 primarily focussed on attainment and the spending of funds in a manner most beneficial to the project and the institution, whilst also adhering to funding rules, guidelines and reporting frameworks and requirements. Expenditure was usually in the form of staff and equipment, though also included were publication support payments, such as article processing charges. Section 7.9 of the 2014 ARC funding agreement states: ‘Publication and dissemination of Project outputs and outreach activity costs may be supported at up to two per cent of the total non-salary ARC Funding awarded to the Project’ (Appendix 1).

At the University of Wollongong substantial effort by researchers and institutions is put into the preparation of research grant submissions, and, to a lesser extent, the completion of interim and final reports as required by the funding bodies. Within the final reports, for example, is found information on published outputs and outcomes such as patents. This is good news, however there was a problem in that the reports are often only received within the year after the end of the grant, and, as of 2012, either submitted online (ARC) or in Word/PDF form (NHMRC) and not easily integrated into UOW internal systems and reporting databases. In other words, those reports that are being produced are not, at present, accessible for interrogation and detailed reporting.

Timeliness is a major stumbling block in local compliance management. For example, a grant may be secured in 2013, with 5 year duration, meaning that the final report is not required until 2018-19. Publications arising from the grant may be produced throughout that period and also after 2018, due to the nature of the publication process. As such, the final report may or may not include all the published research outputs.

The ARC, for example, states in their Reporting Requirements website (ARC 2013), that the final report focuses on statistical analysis of the outputs and outcomes i.e. “the number and type of publications” - rather than the publications themselves.

Relying on the final reports is especially problematic in relation to implementation of the NHMRC and ARC mandates, as they both state that publications must be made available on open access within institutional repositories within 12 months of the date of publication, viz:
NHMRC: NHMRC requires that any publications arising from an NHMRC supported research project must be deposited into an open access institutional repository within a twelve month period from the date of publication (NHMRC Open Access Policy, February 2012).

ARC: The ARC has introduced a new open access policy for ARC funded research which takes effect from 1 January 2013. According to this new policy the ARC requires that any publications arising from an ARC supported research project must be deposited into an open access institutional repository within a twelve (12) month period from the date of publication. (ARC Open Access Policy, January 2013).

In addition, the ARC as of 2013 only requires the submission of annual progress reports by exception, and even then the information to be submitted would not identify individual publications with their corresponding grant or grants. On the other hand the NHMRC requires the submission of annual program reports and, under Section D: Performance Measures and Outcomes, there is a requirement to list “all publications arising from research enabled by the facility / activity”. Furthermore, the user guide for the NHMRC’s Research Grants Management System (RGMS) states that the researcher’s online CV loaded to RGMS must be “updated to reflect all current publications associated with this research activity.” They must also ensure that “all publications contain the relevant Grant ID number.” (NHMRC 2012, section 5.6). Similarly, in the United States during 2012 the National Institute of Health implemented an annual progress report regime in which publications linked to grants were to be reported via the online submission database (National Institute of Health 2013).

In managing the mandates, UOW Library and Research Office staff could therefore not rely on the final reports to ensure compliance because if, for example, a publication arising from a 2013 research grant occurred during 2014 then, theoretically, it would need to be made available on open access during 2014-15, even though the University may not receive official notification of it via the final report until 2018-19. And of course publications released after the completion of a final report would not be discoverable through this process. A means of identifying research grant publications closer to the time of initial publication was required. How could this be achieved?

**Identifying research grant publications**

When it was realised that there were shortcomings in relying on the final report to identify research grant publications in a timely manner and to ensure compliance with NHMRC and ARC mandates, other avenues were sought. The annual progress report was an obvious source of information. Unfortunately, as noted above, only the NHMRC deemed these compulsory. Where else could we look?

Perhaps the researcher could provide the information at the time of publication? Yes, this was a possibility, though there is no system currently in place at UOW for this to occur, and experience had shown that relying on academics and researchers to report such information was not reliable. In fact, during 2012 the UOW Library took control of sourcing publication information away from the faculties and individual academics, to release the administrative burden on faculties, especially academics. The library also has the necessary skills base to source publications.
A substantial amount of HERDC high quality publications could be sourced from citation databases such as Web of Science and Scopus, and the data then harvested in a systematic and regular basis by university systems. To go back to seeking information from academics and researchers on a regular basis would conflict with the publication management strategy adopted in 2012. Was there another option?

Ongoing discussions between the research grants section, IT and library staff revealed that a great deal of information on research grant related publications could also be found in research grant submissions. For example, academic Professor A, in preparing a research grant proposal, might include a detailed list of publications arising from their previous grants. This was significant, as it was a rare example of the publication and research grant numbers being linked in a single location. Once again, while this information was useful in a broader context, it was not timely and was also difficult to access and not necessarily comprehensive. The Library found that it could make use of this information in building up a database of linkages between grants and publications, though only as a legacy project. It would have to look elsewhere for up-to-date information, obtainable on a regular and systematic basis.

The final publications themselves were in some instances useful, where they recorded specific grant details as a footnote or within the acknowledgements. Publication agreements are increasingly requiring this. For example, submission guidelines for the *Journal of Quaternary Science*, published by John Wiley & Sons, state: ‘The name(s) of any sponsor(s) of the research contained in the paper, along with grant number(s) should be placed later in the Acknowledgements section before the Reference list’ (Wiley 2013). The data is not reported systematically and consistently, an is dependent on what information is input by the author which can be inadvertently inaccurate where grants are concerned.

While we are seeing a marked increase in instances of grant citations there remains limitations here, as the information is scattered, not reliable and in some instances only the granting body is referred to and no specific grant number or numbers identified. For example, the publication may merely state words to the effect: “We acknowledge funding from the [granting body]”. In such cases Library staff were forced to use alternate methods to work out precisely what grant was relevant and correct. This could involve contacting the author / researcher at the first instance, or sourcing summary reports from the funding bodies and university administration. Needless to say, such a process is time consuming.

It became clear as our investigations progressed that both the granting institution and specific grant number were vital pieces of information required for all publications, and that in the first instance researchers needed to identify both pieces of data in order for the Library and Research Services Office to prepare their reports. The linkage could not be done by anyone other than those involved in the research project. Any sustainable, seamless, interoperable process would be reliant up the initial provision of accurate data associating the publication with the relevant grant or grants. From this all else would flow.
Harvesting grant numbers

With a number of obstacles identified in sourcing grant numbers and related publications, an interoperable, semi-automatic process appeared to exist in the fact that the citation database Web of Science (WoS) contained research grant data extracted from individual publication records. During the middle of 2013 the other large citation database – Scopus – also began to provide this information. This provided a partial solution to the problem of locating linked data. Harvestable, timely data was available, though it was then necessary to pull out UOW managed grants, a process which in and of itself was problematic.

What was a UOW grant? Was it one involving UOW researchers, or managed by UOW administration, or both? It was eventually agreed that a UOW grant was one which at some point was administered by UOW on behalf of a UOW employee – this could occur for the entire length of the grant, or for part of its duration. For example, a grant may have been secured by a researcher whilst employed at the University of Sydney. When that researcher subsequently moved institutions to the University of Wollongong, the grant moved with them – or, at least, that part which had not up to that point in time been spent. The grant now became a UOW grant and UOW would be responsible for management of relevant published outputs, according to the various mandates.

As a result of the increasing complexities of grants publication management, the Library proceeded to develop a process whereby publication data from both WoS and Scopus was harvested on a weekly basis and imported into the local Research Information System (RIS). Special fields were added to RIS during 2013 to accommodate research grant numbers and support the CAIRSS initiative. The bibliographic information and digital objects (where copyright allowed) were then exported from RIS into the University of Wollongong open access repository Research Online (ro.uow.edu.au). This latter database had also been modified to include a specific research grant number in a simple free-text DC-relation field open to harvesting under the CAIRSS proposed scheme. Consideration of splitting the field into two – one for the granting body and the other for the grant number – was rejected due to technical issues, along with a lack of extensive knowledge of the process as it would eventual appear, and the possible implications of such a split.

The University Library began harvesting WoS for research grant publication data during the first half of 2013. Scopus harvesting commenced in September 2013.

Dyslectic digits

Reliance upon researchers recording the correct grant publication identifier as part of the publication process is not without its challenges. Whilst this harvested data as it appears in WoS and Scopus will be the primary method of monitoring the performance of grants, it is contingent upon the accuracy of the information provided, and cannot always be relied upon. For example, the following publication as viewed in WoS contains an incorrect grant number:

Within the *Acknowledgements* section of the paper, the grant number is given as ARC/DP1092438, when the correct number is ARC/DP1092843. This error was only identified by Library staff through a quality checking process in which the ARC published list of ‘Discovery Projects – Queen Elizabeth II Fellows for funding commencing in 2010’ listed the UOW researcher associated with the relevant grant. Library staff then linked the grant to the publication and noticed the incorrect number.

Another published paper cited ‘ARC grant 228-37-1021’, when in fact the correct grant number, identified after consultation with the researcher, was ARC/DP1096001.

This process of discovery and correction of grant IDs can be a lengthy one and highlights the fact that in order to manage research grant publications at the local level, checking of information is required. Automatic harvesting of the information as found within the publication would have produced an erroneous result. The error is further compounded by the fact that it appears on the published paper, which is also harvested by search engines such as Google.

We can identify and correct most UOW grant number errors by reference to local Research Office spreadsheets and correspondence with authors. We cannot check the grant numbers for other universities in the same way, and even checking against web-based information would cause increased workload. This would lead to a certain level of dirty data appearing on the repository. Harvesting by funding bodies will presumably involve validation against known grant numbers and if the grant numbers are not located will generate errors that require investigation by authors and home institutions.

**The UOW Research Grants Publication Model**

As outlined above, the basic process of reporting on the outcomes on research grants in regards to publications is contingent upon linking individual publications with individual grants or groups of grants. Once this is done – by whoever – the discovery of this linked information and its harvesting for import in local databases such as RIS and Research Online is achievable. The process of cross-checking and requesting, or otherwise sourcing copies of the publications for placement on open access repositories where mandated or otherwise allowable, is likewise facilitated and aligned to similar processes for all UOW publications. What we are aiming to achieve is as follows:

1. **Source** the linked data i.e. publication citations with attached research grant information (granting body and grant number or numbers). This can be acquired from Web of Science and Scopus, research grant reports (progressive, annual and final), research grant submissions (successful and unsuccessful) and from individual researchers when no information is available or clarification is needed. Research funding bodies may also provide online information about grants, along with the ANDS database.

2. **Import** linked data into local research information system. Transfer of data from WoS or Scopus in a semi-automated batch process is carried out on a weekly basis. Data can also be added manually upon sourcing from non-harvestable resources.
3. **Check** linked data – this is a complex process which aims to ensure that the correct information is provided to the institution and for placement on openly accessible websites. The checking of the data can include:

   a. **Identify** UOW grants, for which UOW has responsibility according to relevant mandates. Information will be received from the Research Office on a regular basis in regards to new and current grants administered locally.

   b. **Ensure** that the grant number is correct by cross-checking with, for example, the ANDS database and internal documentation.

   c. **Contact** the principal investigator or individual researchers to secure mandated digital objects and associated data.

4. **Export** the data to the open access repository. Excel or XML files can be generated from the research information system and the data imported into the repository.

5. **Monitor** the performance via the UOW Performance Indicators Portal (PIP). Monitoring of the research grant outputs via internal statistical systems and through the generation of publication reports which are forwarded to faculties for review will ensure that researchers will have a vested interest in reporting their publishing details accurately and comprehensively.

UOW has developed a Performance Indicators Portal (PIP) which extracts data from various internal systems and presents a statistical dashboard enabling timely analysis of that data. For example, PIP currently provides information on the percentage of full-text content in the UOW institutional repository for HERDC publications post 2004. Development of PIP is currently underway to enable reporting of research grant published outputs. This is in line with the recent comments by CEOs of both the ARC and NHMRC at the ANU Open Access Week forum in which they encouraged institutions to “come up with smart ways to implement the policy” and monitor its performance, in light of their own “softly, softly” approach to the role out.

The model as outlined above is evolutionary, as is the process of managing research grant publications in the Australian higher education sector. Related issues such as author disambiguation remain a major stumbling block, and will only be resolved when an ORCHID-based identifier regime is universally applied. Standardisation of grant numbers outside of the NHMRC and ARC, plus integration within the ANDS PURL-based system is also still an evolving process. The aforementioned model is, at present, labour intensive and its sustainability is contingent upon improved technological solutions and awareness by the local research community.

The message is slowly filtering out to the faculties in regards to the importance of monitoring research grant outputs and including them within the various metrics by which their performance is measured. For example, the Australian Institute for Innovative Materials (AIIM) at UOW requests that all users of its Electron Microscopy Centre (EMC) acknowledge it in all publications in the following terms:
This research used equipment funded by the Australian Research Council (ARC) – Linkage, Infrastructure, Equipment and Facilities (LIEF) grant ... (ARC-LEIF Grant number) ... located at the UOW Electron Microscopy Centre. (Source: http://aiim.uow.edu.au/acknowledgeus/index.html).

In addition, all supervisors, project leaders and staff using the facilities are required to send a complete list of their publications to the Director of the EMC at the end of each calendar year.

As of 1 October 2013 approximately 1150 items in UOW Research Online have been tagged with ARC and NHMRC research grants numbers. In some instances up to four research grants have been identified with individual publications, e.g.


In other cases the associated grant numbers are from a mixture of funding bodies, e.g.


Library staff experiences with UOW academics and researchers in seeking grant publications have, in general, been positive. We have found that authors, on the whole, respond promptly to requests for post-prints/final manuscripts. Grant recipients are also generally helpful in identifying or correcting grant numbers. Direct contact with academics and researchers in relation to grant publications has led to the unanticipated benefit of allowing the Library’s Scholarly Content Team to build stronger relationships with this community. Some researchers have become proactive partners in this process and have gone so far as to volunteer papers, actively identifying grants and associated publications for loading to Research Online. This emerging synergy clearly has the potential to raise the profile, status and impact of the repository within the university.

Addressing the gap

The seemingly simple task of linking research publications with their associated grants has been shown to be challenging yet redolent with opportunity. In seeking to link publications and grants, and report in a timely fashion on the outcomes of those grants, universities and funding bodies such as the ARC and NHMRC have discovered that the processes that were in place – primarily in the form of the final report – were not sufficient robust, interoperable or usable. The reliance on fulsome reporting after the grant had ended also meant that by their very nature they were incompatible with mandates which required research grant publications to be made available on open access within 12 months of publication. As a result, institutions such as the University of Wollongong have been forced to develop a new suite of processes and procedures, along with various technological updates, to enable timely reporting and adherence to the mandates. What was seemingly an impossible task in ensuring that researchers linked grants and publications at the time of publication
required nothing less than a culture change. That change is yet to occur on a widespread, systematic basis. If it does, the impossible will become possible.

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Appendix 1: ARC and NHMRC policy and funding agreement extracts regarding grant related publications

NHMRC Open Access Policy

NHMRC therefore requires that any publications arising from an NHMRC supported research project must be deposited into an open access institutional repository within a twelve month period from the date of publication.

Compliance with the policy is a matter for the Administering Institution to discuss with the NHMRC... The Chief Investigator A (CIA) on any given grant will be responsible for providing the publication metadata and... the appropriate copy of the publication to the institutional repository (although this may be managed via the institutional research administration office).

2013 NHMRC Funding Agreement:

12.9 If required by an NHMRC policy about the dissemination of research findings the Administering Institution must deposit any publications resulting from a Research Activity and its related data in an appropriate... open access repository... in accordance with the timeframe and other requirements set out in that policy.

12.10 Any research outputs from a Research activity that have been or will be deposited in such a repository by the due date for the Final Report must be identified in that Final Report.

ARC Open Access Policy

Compliance with the policy is a matter for the Administering Institution to discuss with the ARC—the ARC will not routinely check compliance with individual Chief Investigators (CIs). The Chief Investigator (CI) on any given grant will be responsible for providing the publication metadata (i.e. journal name, title, author list, volume, issue, page numbers and such like.) and, as and when it becomes available, the appropriate copy of the publication to the institutional repository (although this may be managed via the institutional research administration office).

2014 ARC Funding Agreement

21.1 The Administering Organisation must establish and comply with its own procedures and arrangements for the ownership of all Material produced as a result of any Project funded under this Agreement.

21.2 For any Material produced under this Agreement, the Administering Organisation must ensure that all Specified Personnel (Chief Investigators and Partner Investigators):

(a) take reasonable care of, and safely store, any data or specimens or samples collected during, or resulting from, the conduct of their Project;

(b) make arrangements acceptable to the ARC for lodgement with an appropriate museum or archive in Australia of data or specimens or samples collected during, or resulting from, their Project; and
(c) include details of the lodgement or reasons for non-lodgement in the Progress Reports and the Final Report for the Project.

ARC Support for Publications Costs

2014 ARC Funding Agreement

7.9 Publication and dissemination of Project outputs and outreach activity costs may be supported at up to two per cent of the total non-salary ARC Funding awarded to the Project. This excludes fees for patent application and holding.

And

21.3 The ARC will support publication and dissemination costs as per clause 7.9 of this Agreement.