Definition of Research

The Commonwealth Government provides a definition of research for the purpose of the Higher Education Research Data Collection (HERDC) of research income and publications. The full HERDC specifications are available at:


Research is defined as the creation of new knowledge and/or the use of existing knowledge in a new and creative way so as to generate new concepts, methodologies and understandings. This could include synthesis and analysis of previous research to the extent that it leads to new and creative outcomes.

This definition of research is consistent with a broad notion of research and experimental development (R&D) as comprising of creative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of humanity, culture and society, and the use of this stock of knowledge to devise new applications.

This definition of research encompasses pure and strategic basic research, applied research and experimental development. Applied research is original investigation undertaken to acquire new knowledge but directed towards a specific, practical aim or objective (including a client-driven purpose).

Activities that support the conduct of research and therefore meet the definition of research include:

- professional, technical, administrative or clerical support staff directly engaged in activities essential to the conduct of research;
- management of staff who are either directly engaged in the conduct of research or are providing professional, technical, administrative or clerical support or assistance to those staff;
- the activities and training of HDR students enrolled at the HEP;
- the development of HDR training and courses;
- the supervision of students enrolled at the HEP and undertaking HDR training and courses;
- research and experimental development into applications software, new programming languages and new operating systems (such R&D would normally meet the definition of research).

Activities that do not support the conduct of research include:

- scientific and technical information services;
- general purpose or routine data collection;
- standardisation and routine testing;
- feasibility studies (except into research and experimental development projects);
- specialised routine medical care;
- commercial, legal and administrative aspects of patenting, copyright or licensing activities;
- routine computer programming, systems work or software maintenance.

If you need any assistance in defining your consulting or contract research activity to comply with the definition of research, please contact the Research Partnerships Unit in the Division of Research.