

1. OVERVIEW OF MUSEUM STUDIES FIELD OF RESEARCH

What /who is the Museum Studies sector?

Museum Studies is an interdisciplinary and frequently applied field of study that incorporates theoretical analysis and practice-based research, and which encourages innovation and collaboration across the university, government, and industry sectors. It is a diverse and multi-disciplinary field that encompasses Heritage and Material Culture Studies, Interpretation, Curatorship, Education, and Conservation areas, as well as the more traditional Museum Studies, which itself has its roots in Sociology, Anthropology, and Art History.

Museum Studies is comprised of university-based researchers who publish in the area and teach in discipline-based or interdisciplinary areas on the subject of museums. Academics identify with the diverse areas and functions of museums and their role in society, and take individual approaches to the use of theory, methodology, and case study selection. Museum professionals come from a variety of cultural and collecting institutions and organisations, as well as government policy areas. Those from the professional museum sector also engage in research and publishing and contribute significantly to Museum Studies as a 'field of research'. The field works best when the viewpoints of each are brought into a three-way dialogue with other key stakeholders, be they museum constituents, audiences, or government funders.

International reputation

Internationally, Museum Studies is a high-impact field of research. This is evidenced by the fact that the leading department in the latest UK RAE exercise that included all disciplines across all universities was the School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester. A number of Australian academics are regarded as international leaders in the field (measured by international invitations, appointments, and keynotes), and each year academics in the field are regularly awarded ARC Fellowships as well as Discovery and Linkage Project Grants (with peers in the museum sector), and grants from other funding bodies in Australia and internationally.

2. ARGUMENT

Response to 2009 and 2010 ARC journal rankings

Although it is difficult to generalise on behalf of the heterogeneous Museum Studies sector, it is generally understood that the sector agreed with the overarching approach taken to ranking journals in the 2009 Pilot List. If there was a lack of feedback from the Museum Studies sector during the revision process last year it may, from what we have ascertained, be indicative of this general agreement with the Pilot List on the one hand and because scholars working in museums are less impacted by the ERA system than their colleagues based in universities, on the other. However, the Museum Studies sector was surprised and confused by the sharp and general drop in the ranking of journals across the Museum Studies field in the 2010 list.

Representing national, state and regional museums in Australia and New Zealand, CAMD disagrees with several of the new rankings which:

1. Do not reflect the rigor of the writing and publication processes in some of the journals in this sector.
 - Refer to our argument about *Museum and Society* below.
2. Will potentially have serious implications for the field:

CAMD Submission to ARC regarding ERA Ranking of Museum Studies Journals.
March 2010.

- Experience in the UK has shown that researchers avoid low-ranked journals. If there is only one *Museum Studies* journal ranked at 'A*', and no journals at all ranked at 'A' (as is the now the case), there are almost no options to conduct research in the field and have work published in high-ranked journals. Researchers will evacuate the field in favour of cognate areas that do have high-ranking journals (such as *Heritage Studies* and *Cultural Studies*).
- The extreme drop in this (and other) cases has caused serious concern for people who used the 2009 ranking as a guide to select 'A' journals to publish their work in and who now find the perceived quality of their work diminished because of the changed ranking.

3. PURPOSE OF THIS SUBMISSION

Rather than arguing for a complete reassessment of the field's rankings – which is, we concede, untenable at this stage of the process – the case of *Museum and Society* is being presented because its downgraded rank is alarming to the sector, and because it exemplifies the reasons why several other journal's rankings would ideally be reassessed and rated as 'A' (most notably *Museum Anthropology*, which similarly and inconceivably has been dropped from being ranked at 'A' to 'C').

We have additionally determined to make a case on behalf of *Museum and Society* because the inaccuracy of the 2010 ERA ranking can easily be assessed by its inconsistency with both the ARC's earlier ranking AND against equivalent international rankings.

4. MUSEUM AND SOCIETY ARC RANKING

Museum and Society:

2009 Rank – 'A'

2010 Rank – 'C'

Proposed Rank – 'A'

Museum and Society is an international and interdisciplinary refereed journal, and is widely regarded as the leading journal in the field of Museum Studies. *Museum and Society* is published by the University of Leicester's School of Museum Studies. This School is rated as having the highest proportion of world-leading rated research in any subject in any UK university in the 2008 RAE exercise. The journal commenced publication in March 2003 and publishes three issues per year. It attracts submissions from scholars in a range of disciplines concerned with Museum Studies, including Sociology, Anthropology, Art History and History. The journal has published work by leading scholars and early career researchers and is international in reputation and geographical scope. The editorial board includes global leaders in the field of Museum Studies and the other cognate disciplines mentioned above, and includes:

- Professor Tony Bennett, University of Western Sydney
- Professor Simon Knell, University of Leicester
- Professor Emerita Susan Pearce, University of Leicester
- Professor Ronald Frankenberg, Keele University
- Professor Volker Kirchberg, University of Lueneburg
- Dr Helen Rees Leahy, University of Manchester

- Professor Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, New York University
- Professor Bruce Robertson, University of California, Santa Barbara
- Professor Sharon Macdonald, University of Manchester
- Professor Sara Selwood, City University, London
- Professor Kevin Hetherington, The Open University
- Professor Vera Zolberg, New School for Social Research, New York

The journal's status is recognized by its current 'A' ranking by the European Science Foundation and by its previous 'A' ranking in the 2009 ARC pilot. According to the European Reference Index for the Humanities (ERIH), *Museum and Society* satisfies the criteria of a category 'A' journal in that it is a '...high-ranking international publication with a very strong reputation among researchers of the field in different countries, regularly cited all over the world'. It conducts a double to triple-fold blind-reviewing process for every article submitted, and its articles subsequently have a high impact and citation factor.

5. CONSULTATION AND ENDORSEMENT

CAMD has participated in a consultation process with museum practitioners and academics to canvas responses to the changed rankings. We have received 100% support for this submission from those we approached.

All correspondents agreed that the rankings in regard to the 2102 sector appear skewed, all recognise that the drop in rank from 'A' to 'C' of the journal *Museum and Society* is the most alarming indication that something erroneous has occurred in the ranking process; and all have registered shock and disbelief at a situation where a field of research in which Australians are acknowledged as world leaders – Professor Tony Bennett (UWS) and Professor Howard Morphy (ANU) to mention but two individuals whose work has contributed to shape the field internationally – has only one journal ranked at 'A*', none at 'A', very few at 'B' (six), and most at 'C'.

6. CONCLUSION

We recognise that little can be done at this stage of the ERA 2010 process, and that a stronger and more cohesive sectoral voice needs to come into play if change is to be achieved in the next round of rankings. Despite this, the strength of feeling of the responses to the 2010 rankings – both nationally and internationally – has compelled us to protest the serious error that has been made in relation to ranking a number of journals in the 2102 field of research category. Given these parameters (and our restrictions on time), the purpose of this submission has been to argue the case for an extreme 'obvious mistake' in journal rankings—*Museum and Society* from 'A' to 'C'—to illustrate the inconsistency in the ARC's ranking with similar international bodies. Ideally, we would like to see this journal, and others that suffered a similar fate, raised to the 2009 rank.

CAMD seeks an opportunity to engage further with the ranking process to ensure that knowledge of journals recognised within the museum and curatorial field are appropriately recognised. Without proper recognition of the rigor and international reputation of scholarship – and Australian publications – in this field, the discipline risks becoming seriously diminished as scholars look to other disciplines in which to frame and publish their work.