This week THE brings us the results of Australia’s first ever national research assessment, which found research in the sciences stronger than in the humanities and social sciences.

The Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) ranked biotechnology, earth sciences, physical sciences, chemical sciences, and environmental sciences as the top 5 fields of disciplines; history was the only humanities or social sciences discipline to crack the top 10. The national report outlines the indicators used; a mix of ranked outlets, citation analysis, research outputs, commercialization income and ‘esteem measures,’ however the executive director of the Australian Academy of the Humanities believes that the sciences drew more heavily on quantitative metrics while the social sciences and humanities drew upon peer review, which generate ‘generally more conservative’ outcomes. The Australian newspaper has produced a league table based on an average of each university’s scores, available here.

Critics argue that the assessment and rankings unfairly favour the prestigious Group of 8 universities and is distorted by the much greater proportion of funding the Australian Research Council allocates to physical sciences.

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