

ABS proposal to redevelop the Business Characteristics Survey – IRU Response

The IRU supports the ABS proposal to redevelop the Business Characteristics Survey (BCS). The goals of the proposal and the four drivers for change outlined in the ABS's proposal are sound.

1. User information requirements are not fully being met
2. International comparability is currently limited
3. There is increasing user demand for more granular information
4. Provider burden and cognitive load.

There is an increasing need for greater detail, granularity and international comparability on innovation metrics. For the higher education sector, this includes metrics that extend beyond the standard co-publishing, co-patenting and co-funding with industry partners. Specifically, this includes the potential to better utilise BCS data on universities and the public research sector as sources of ideas for innovation.

More granular information at a state/territory, region and industry (sub)division would be helpful, particularly if made publicly and easily available. Greater levels of granularity may allow universities to better understand the R&D intensity of industries in their locality, build up their absorptive capacity for ideas for innovation, and deepen universities' contributions to their local economies.

Improving international comparability is also important. Some BCS metrics feed into OECD data on university-industry collaboration which show Australia near or at the bottom of the OECD. However, if the BCS data is not internationally comparable (e.g. single year reference period versus two or three year reference periods in the EU's Community Innovation Survey), it distorts interpretations of Australia's performance. Greater granularity at an industry level would also facilitate more valid international comparisons, such as how Australia compares to other resource based economies for university-industry collaboration in the resources sector.

The IRU is not aware of the provider burden associated with the current survey due to its length or complexity, but minimising provider burden is likely to improve the quality of data gathered by ensuring the most relevant persons complete the survey.

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