Responsible assessment in researcher evaluation
Practical guidance for hiring managers, reward panels, and HR advisors

The University of Oxford has approved principles to promote the responsible use of research metrics. Further information is on the next page.

To support the recruitment and reward of outstanding researchers, this guidance lists practices to avoid and suggests positive alternatives to promote the adoption of responsible evaluation practices.

Practices to avoid
These practices should not be included in selection criteria or recruitment decisions.
Judgements of quality based on narrow quantitative indicators, such as:

- Journal name and ranking
- Journal Impact Factor
- H-index or decontextualised citation data (e.g. raw citation counts)
- Number of publications

Poor practice
It is recommended that these practices are not used in recruitment processes.
Judgements of quality based on biased indicators, such as:

- Author position (desirable candidates may have made important contributions to research that are not reflected in the position of their name on an author list);
- Research group or university of provenance (e.g. based on position in university rankings).

Responsible practice
Consider including these practices in advertising job opportunities and in recruitment and reward processes.

- Judging quality based on a blend of informative quantitative and qualitative indicators, e.g.:
  o Asking applicants to describe a small number of their strongest research outputs, e.g. 100 words on the originality and rigour of the research, significance to the field, and the applicant's contribution;
  o Requesting a narrative on the reception that the papers have had, including who has cited them and why, rather than raw citation counts;
  o Considering a wider range of evidence of contributions (e.g. data, software, and preprints; a demonstrable commitment to open practices; contributions to the research and innovation community and to society; and, especially for senior roles, support for the careers of others).
- Using the job advert as an opportunity to describe your own group philosophy (e.g. approach to the early and wide sharing of data, code, or software; the use of preprints; adoption of reproducible methods; approach to determining authorship; and the criteria used to evaluate research quality).
- Considering adopting a narrative CV format, such as the Résumé for Researchers.
- Responsible assessment extends to shortlisting and selection, and transparency about the roles involved in the appointment process and the criteria used to select candidates.

Responsible assessment in researcher evaluation: background

Brief description: The strength of Oxford's research is founded on attracting excellent researchers who will contribute positively to the field and to the Oxford community. Using narrow or inappropriate metrics to judge research quality is now widely recognised in the sector as having negative effects on researchers and research. To support the recruitment and reward of outstanding researchers, this guidance includes practices to avoid and provides positive alternatives.

Sector context: Worldwide sector reports are documenting the effects that a hyper-competitive environment and an over-reliance on narrow indicators of quality are having on researcher wellbeing, on the quality of research, and on public trust in research institutions.

In response to these concerns, the UK has launched several initiatives to improve research assessment, with the aim of aligning what is good for research (such as collaboration, rigour, diversity, and openness) with what is good for researchers' careers. The aim is to help funders and higher education institutions to evolve their approach to research assessment to favour quality over quantity, value a wider range of contributions to research, and ensure that these contributions are evaluated fairly. (Examples include: San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA), Leiden Manifesto for Research Metrics, UK R&D People and Culture Strategy, national concordats and agreements, the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment, UK Government reviews of research integrity, reproducibility, and bureaucracy.)

Oxford context: Oxford is a signatory to DORA and, informed by the Leiden Manifesto, has approved principles to promote the responsible use of research metrics at Oxford.

In essence, these frameworks have a simple aim:

- to avoid the use of the Journal Impact Factor (JIF) as a measure of the quality of individual research contributions, or for hiring, promotion, or funding decisions;
- to judge a paper on its research content rather than on publication metrics or the identity of the journal in which it was published.

Applicants are increasingly aware of the commitments made by higher education institutions to responsible assessment. Disregarding the principles comes with reputational damage; conversely, actively embracing or going beyond them will attract positive attention and will help to invite a wider range of exceptional candidates.

Further reading

University of Oxford principles to promote responsible use of research metrics

San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) [external]

Leiden Manifesto for Research Metrics [external]

Commentary on adopting DORA in recruitment practices [external]

Commentary on articulating a lab/group 'philosophy' [external]

Royal Society Résumé for Researchers, example of narrative CV format [external]

To discuss this guidance or to learn more about research culture, please contact the Research Strategy & Policy Unit (Director, Tanita.Casci@admin.ox.ac.uk) or your divisional research support team.

To discuss recruitment practice, please contact your divisional HR team. A copy of this guidance can be found at: https://researchsupport.web.ox.ac.uk/information/principles