Oxford Brookes University and Responsible Metrics

Background

The University's Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee (RKEC), chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Research and Global Partnerships, considered a briefing paper on responsible metrics in 2019 and requested that a Task and Finish Group be set up to facilitate the University signing the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA).

The Task and Finish Group is chaired by Professor David Evans, the Associate Dean Research and Knowledge Exchange for the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences. The Group has academic membership from all four faculties and the Unions, from Directorates including the Library, Human Resources and the Research and Business Development Office and from academics at various stages in their career.

The Group met for the first time in February 2020 and at its initial meeting agreed to recommend that the University work towards signing DORA and aligning with the Leiden Manifesto but that review of processes and documentation was needed before signing to see where issues lay that needed to be reviewed. The Group will continue to meet until it is able to report to the University's RKEC actions it wishes the University to endorse.

The University's position with regard to responsible metrics

The University continues to invest in creating a vibrant, inclusive and ambitious environment in which it strives for internationally excellent and world-leading research. It aims to double the contribution of Research, Knowledge Exchange and Innovation (RIKE) activities to 20% of University turnover by 2035 (taking financial year 18-19 as the benchmark). Amongst other actions, in order to achieve this growth, the University will continue to appoint, nurture and reward/retain excellent researchers and those with proven potential for research excellence, innovation or knowledge exchange and will put in place a biennial quality review system to assess progress against RIKE objectives and targets and inform future investment plans. Research Institutes/ Centres/Units of Assessment will be reviewed on a rolling basis and in line with the principles of DORA.

The University's REF 2021 Code of Practice on the fair and transparent identification of staff with significant responsibility for research; determining who is an independent researcher; and the selection of outputs specifies (para 19, third bullet) '...Faculties were asked to prepare for a full REF audit. This included the setting up of UoA Internal Review Panels, with internal readers and using external readers to verify and validate assessments of quality. Internal Review Panels used the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment and/or the Leiden Manifesto for Research Metrics to inform their assessment processes'.

The University recognises that the responsible and ethical use of metrics, in helping to drive forward world-leading research, has the potential to help improve the visibility and the impact of its research. But it also recognises that the use of metrics can be complex and that utility varies greatly across disciplines, and even sub-disciplines. Not all staff are clear on the underlying principles on how metrics are calculated and where bias or skewing can occur. There are, therefore, serious limitations in relying on quantitative data or indicators thereof in a manner that is not reflective of disciplinary considerations or close understanding of the metrics themselves. Inappropriate use of metrics can reinforce existing biases and it is important that they are used with due awareness of their limitations.

The Task and Finish Group assessed processes and documentation relating to:

i) Hiring, promotion and funding - in particular: paperwork on hiring and promotion and decision-making in allocating workload planning time. Specifically, the Group has reviewed the extent to which University requests and uses metrics and other quality indicators, including narrative,

   a) in the recruitment and appointment of staff to posts involving research and knowledge exchange (job descriptions, reference requests etc)
   b) in Performance and Development Review (PDR) paperwork, including Personal Research Plans and in workload planning allocation
   c) in the allocation of internal funding
   d) in the Senior Academic Promotions Committee (SAPC) processes ii) The extent to which the

   University provides:

   a) Training and clarity on criteria and process for those involved in decision-making processes impacting on researcher careers, including those involved in appointments; Research Leads in supporting researchers and allocating WLP; members of the SAPC and those involved in making decisions on funding allocations.
   b) Transparency of process for appointment, funding, WLP/ PDR/ PRP and promotion for all staff
   c) Available metrics and other data (eg repository (Radar), management information systems (Converis) etc) to enable a balanced and unbiased approach.
   d) Other records - including the extent to which they are kept systematically rather than by individual (eg Impact Tracker).
   e) Clarity to all staff about what metrics measure, how they are calculated and their known flaws.

The Task and Finish Group reported to RKEC in Semester 2, academic year 2019-2020 for confirmation of its recommendations. It was noted that the work of the Group had been somewhat impacted by the COVID-19 situation- which had affected the ability of some staff to review certain documentation, as their efforts had been required urgently elsewhere.

The following actions have been agreed:

That the University agrees to the following statement on research assessment and the use of metrics: (Appendix 1)

That the University should sign up to DORA. This to be done by the Chair of the Task and Finish Group as soon after approval by RKEC as is practicable

That the University statement (Appendix 1) be posted on the University's internet site and its presence alerted to Faculties. This to be done by the Research Support Director by the end of September 2020

That HR pages referring to recruitment and/or promotion of academic staff cross-refer to this statement. This to be taken forward by Hanna Czarnecka-Nagy through HR by the end of September 2020

That the Task and Finish Group be disbanded and the work of monitoring compliance with this statement be passed to the Research Integrity Group (name TBC) which was in place from the beginning of Semester 1, 2020-2021. That this Group - which reports to RKEC - recommends a process of monitoring and benchmarking to confirm compliance with this Statement. This to be done by the end of Semester 2, 2020-2021

That a small working group be set up comprising a representative group of Research Leads to discuss ways to improve the support available for Research Leads generally in the assessment of research and researchers and on processes impacting on their personal development, including allocating workload planning time and their personal research plans. It will include use of indicators of research quality,

good practice in supporting researcher development and will seek to improve consistency across Faculties. This group will report to the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Research and Global Partnerships by the end of Semester 2, 20202021 to establish processes for agreement and roll-out of processes and training in academic year 2021-2022

That resources be prepared that guide academic staff through the more commonly used metrics so that it was clear how those metrics worked, what they measured and issues associated with their use. This to be drafted for comment by the Scholarly Communications Team in the Library by the end of Semester 2 2020-2021

Professor David Evans, Chair DORA Task and Finish Group
25-03-2020

Agreed RKEC April 2020

Revised May 2022 - change approved by Open Research Integrity and Governance Improvement Nexus Steering Group (ORIGIN) and Chair of RKEC

Appendix 1

Oxford Brookes University Statement of the Assessment of Research and Researchers and the responsible use of metrics

Oxford Brookes University will use the best principles of expert assessment of research. The University commits to expert peer assessment. It recognises the value of quantitative indicators (where available) to support qualitative assessment, but these indicators will not supplant expert peer assessment of research outputs, research applications and awards, PGR supervisions, or any other research activity. Expert peer assessment will guide the interpretation of qualitative indicators for all processes including individual promotion and allocation of workload plan and the assessment of research from groups and units to the institution as a whole.

The University will evaluate research performance against the strategy of the Institution, Faculty, Research Centre, Group, Unit of Assessment or individual. Where research assessment is carried out as part of the appraisal or promotion process for contract research staff, the principle of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers will be applied, to "recognise the full range of researchers' contributions, and the diversity of personal circumstances" and to acknowledge the researcher's career stage.

The University will keep data collection and analytical processes open, transparent and simple and will make clear the source and limitations of any indices used. It recognises the variation in indices between disciplines and sub-disciplines. The University will allow those evaluated to verify data and analysis. It will seek to avoid misplaced concreteness and false precision.

The University recognizes the systemic effects of assessment indicators and will regularly review their use and consider any unintended consequences. A suite of indicators will be used to mitigate negative impacts wherever practical.

The University will ensure those who evaluate research are equipped to do so in line with this statement. To achieve this, training in research assessment, including in the responsible use of metrics, will be provided to all staff engaged in the assessment of research and researchers including those being assessed.