

# Responsible Research Assessment: Reviewers Guide

The University of Exeter is committed to ensuring the [responsible use of numerical indicators \(metrics\) in research assessment and management](#). As a signatory to the [San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment \(DORA\)](#) we aim to embed the responsible use of research metrics in our processes and decision making across the University. Examples of research metrics include Journal Impact Factors, h-indices and other measures of citation, publication Altmetric scores, and the number or value of research grant applications and awards.

Failure to use metrics responsibly has major implications for recruitment and promotion decisions: the irresponsible use of metrics not only contravenes our [guiding principles](#), DORA and [CoARA commitments](#), but negatively affects the careers of individuals and even the perceived value of different disciplines.

The guidance below aligns with the University's Exeter Academic promotions criteria. It is intended to assist assessors in making appropriate judgements on whether an applicant's research meets the standards expected by the University.

1. **Consider each research output on its own merit and avoid making judgements based on aggregate indicators (such as the perceived reputation of the journal or publisher of the work).** Judge the excellence of research based on its originality, significance and rigour. Note that quantitative metrics (such as citations) can only be interpreted as narrow proxies for research quality or impact. They should not be the sole form of evidence.

2. **Assess primarily based on your qualitative assessment of all evidence provided, using your expert judgement. Any quantitative indicators provided should be considered responsibly.**

**Any presentation of journal Impact Factors or the applicant's H-Index should be ignored.**

Evidence can go beyond publications, and may include actual or potential influence on policy, practice and communities, or the wider value to society and the economy. If relevant, consider non-traditional research outputs (such as software or datasets).

A holistic and qualitative approach to research assessment requires time and an openness about your knowledge as a peer in the discipline/research area of the applicant.

Any metrics presented by the applicant should be considered in the context of their research field(s) or discipline(s). Evidence provided by interdisciplinary researchers needs increased consideration/collaboration with experts from relevant disciplines.

3. **Assess the wider value and potential (or actual) impact of their research, and their significant contributions to the work and its outputs.** As much as possible, assess the specific contributions of the applicant to their most important or seminal research outputs.

**Consider and value behaviours which contribute to a thriving research culture** e.g. activity such as mentorship of other research staff, contributions to peer review processes, how their research complies with our Open Research policies, external citizenship roles etc.

## Additional Information

### Further REF (2021) guidance for judging the excellence of research

‘World-leading’, ‘internationally’ and ‘nationally’ in this context refer to *quality standards*.

They do not refer to the nature or geographical scope of particular subjects, nor to the locus of research, nor its place of dissemination. For example, research which is focused within one part of the UK might be of ‘world-leading’ standard. Equally, work with an international focus might not be of ‘world-leading, internationally excellent or internationally recognised’ standard. [Source: [REF 2021 Guidance on submissions](#)]

### CoARA commitments which are most relevant to recruitment and promotion decisions

1. Recognise the diversity of contributions to, and careers in, research in accordance with the needs and nature of the research.
2. Base research assessment primarily on qualitative evaluation for which peer review is central, supported by responsible use of quantitative indicators.
3. Abandon inappropriate uses in research assessment of journal- and publication-based metrics, in particular inappropriate uses of Journal Impact Factor (JIF) and h-index.

### Commitments within the DORA declaration that are most relevant to recruitment and promotion decisions

#### **For research institutions:**

4. Be explicit about the criteria used to reach hiring, tenure, and promotion decisions, clearly highlighting, especially for early-stage investigators, that the scientific content of a paper is much more important than publication metrics or the identity of the journal in which it was published.
5. For the purposes of research assessment, consider the value and impact of all research outputs (including datasets and software) in addition to research publications, and consider a broad range of impact measures including qualitative indicators of research impact, such as influence on policy and practice.

#### **For researchers:**

15. When involved in committees making decisions about funding, hiring, tenure, or promotion, make assessments based on scientific content rather than publication metrics.
17. Use a range of article metrics and indicators on personal/supporting statements, as evidence of the impact of individual published articles and other research outputs.
18. Challenge research assessment practices that rely inappropriately on Journal Impact Factors and promote and teach best practice that focuses on the value and influence of specific research outputs.

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