

Responsible Research Assessment: Guidance for reviewers

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/value of research grant applications and awards.

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

The guidance below does not change the University's criteria. Rather, 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 research outputs on their own scientific and research merits, and avoid making judgements based on aggregate indicators (such as the perceived reputation of the journal or publisher of the work).** That is, judge the excellence of research outputs on the basis of the originality, significance and rigour of the output and its underlying work. Quantitative metrics (such as citations) can only be interpreted as narrow proxies for research quality or impact, and should not be used as the sole form of evidence.
- 2. Therefore, please use your expert judgement when making assessments.** This requires time and openness about your knowledge as a peer in the discipline/research area of the applicant. Any metrics presented by the applicant (in their CV or application form) should be considered in the context of the research field(s) or discipline(s) of the applicant. ***Any presentation of journal Impact Factors or the applicant's H-Index should be ignored.***
- 3. As much as possible consider a range of indicators of research quality, impact and performance – including qualitative evidence.** These should go beyond publications, and may include actual or potential influence on policy, practice and communities, in addition to the wider value to society and the economy. If relevant, consider non-traditional research outputs (such as software or datasets).
- 4. 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.
- 5. 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.

Further REF (2021) guidance for judging the excellence of research – please note that:

'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 Guidance on submissions](#)]

ANNEX

Commitments within the DORA declaration that are most relevant to 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.