

Five arguments to persuade HE Leaders to evaluate research responsibly

Introduction

The International Network of Research Management Societies (INORMS) established a two-year Research Evaluation Working Group (REWG) in 2018 to work towards better, fairer and more meaningful research evaluation. One of the group's two areas of focus was the development of some briefing materials for senior managers around the importance of evaluating research responsibly. As part of this work, they have suggested five arguments that may be useful to persuade HE leaders to evaluate responsibly. Feel free to pick-and-mix, re-order, and reframe using either a formal and informal approach depending on your leader and your setting.

Maintain institutional autonomy

- INFORMAL: Control your own destiny
- External evaluations (e.g., University Rankings) are a fact of life but mission- and value-led organisations should consider carefully what those evaluations actually assess, and not seek to improve their performance against measures that are not aligned to their organisational mission or values.
- Campbell's Law tells us that we get what we measure. Institutions need to measure what matters to them, in order to generate outcomes that are aligned with their mission.

Make better decisions

- INFORMAL: Play stupid games win stupid prizes
- Evaluations that use indicators that are an inappropriate proxy for the things they seek to measure will lead to poor decision-making and unintended consequences.
- A combination of quantitative and qualitative (peer review) approaches usually provide better answers to our evaluation questions.
- There are many well-documented negative systemic effects of poor evaluation approaches, including short-termism, goal displacement, and discouraging initiative and innovation.

Ensure return on investment

- INFORMAL: Getting your money's worth
- Research evaluation costs money and institutions should weigh up the cost-benefit ratio of undertaking any assessment. It may be that their ends can be achieved another way.
- Institutions need to ensure they are investing wisely in meaningful evaluations that are actually going to give them valid answers to their questions, and not waste money on short-cuts that won't.

Establish operational readiness

- INFORMAL: Tick all the right boxes
- There is an increased focus on responsible research evaluation as a result of sector agendas including open research, improving research culture and responsible research and innovation.
- Responsible research evaluation is now a requirement of some research funder open access policies.
- The Global Research Council is taking an interest in this area and further funder expectations may follow.

Manage reputational risk and enhance staff well-being

- INFORMAL: Avoid bad press
- As a result of sector agendas, the misuse of research metrics is coming under increased scrutiny.
- The over-use of poor metrics has a negative impact on staff well-being and mental health.
- There have been some high-profile cases where poor evaluations have led to tragic consequences.

For more information on the INORMS Research Evaluation Working Group please visit:

<https://inorms.net/activities/research-evaluation-working-group/>

