



Research Assessment Processes

Methodology of the Science Europe activity

July 2020

Development and Consultation Process

The Science Europe Task Force on Research Assessment

In February 2019, a Task Force (TF) on Research Assessment was set up to address a Science Europe Governing Board mandate to launch an activity under the priority area of 'Quality of Science'. This activity was to focus on the practices and processes of research assessment for funds allocation and career progression across Science Europe's members.

The TF incorporated representatives from both research performing organisations (RPOs) and research funding organisations (RFOs), as well as a representative from the Science Europe Governing Board.

Task Force on Research Assessment (February 2019–June 2020)

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The activity of the TF and the SE Office was carried out in two phases. The first phase consisted of an extensive knowledge-gathering exercise of the research assessment practices of research organisations. Out of then 37 Science Europe Member Organisations (SE MOs), 32 participated. The second phase was the development of policy recommendations on research assessment processes, based on the knowledge gathered during the 2019 Study and complemented by an extensive consultation process with SE MOs (within which nominated experts from 29 SE MOs contributed). An additional consultation with representatives of the broader research community was also conducted. The details of these two phases are expanded upon below.

2019 Study on Research Assessment Practices

Between February and June 2019, the TF and SE Office defined the terms of reference to conduct a study focusing on the 'Robustness of Selection Processes'. The objective was to investigate ways to find out how SE MO's processes for research assessment lead to selecting the best projects for funding and researchers for their career progression.

The specific parameters of the study were developed by the TF and Office, and a questionnaire was circulated among participant organisations.

Importantly, the study focussed on analysing the characteristics of existing 'generic' research assessment processes. Participating organisations were asked to respond in reference to a 'generic' scheme that they offer, defined as "a scheme that does not focus on specific research themes or specific research outputs (i.e. innovation) but has a broad scope". The decision obviated any complexities associated with (inter)disciplinary specificities or novel assessment methods in the processes, and was made to optimise the comparability of the data gathered from all participating organisations, including between RPOs and RFOs. The study aimed to elucidate commonalities, differences, challenges, and opportunities for improvement and mutual learning between the research assessment processes of research organisations. It did not intend to assess the scientific quality of researchers or research outcomes (ex-post evaluation).

In July 2019, after a competitive 'call for tender' process, a team from Technopolis Group Vienna were selected to implement and run the SE study on research assessment practices. After final adjustments to the questionnaire, the study began with the launch of an online survey on 30 July, which remained open until 20 September. This was followed by in-depth interviews between September and October 2019. The SE Office, TF, and Technopolis team worked closely together during the data analysis and report-writing phases. The study was completed in December 2019.

Of the 44 invited research organisations, 38 participated in the online survey, and 20 of these organisations were invited for further in-depth interviews. In total, 32 of the 37 SE MOs at the time participated, and 6 of 7 invited external organisation participated. Full details of the 2019 Study are available in [the final report of the study](#) (Technopolis Group 2019).

2020 Consultation phase and development of policy recommendations on research assessment processes

A first draft of policy recommendations, based on the knowledge gathered from the 2019 Study, was formulated by the SE Office and the TF in January 2020. An online consultation survey was run between 4 February and 11 March for all SE MOs, whether they had participated in the first phase or not. A remote video-conference workshop was held on 24 March for nominated experts from SE MOs to further discuss the recommendations and topics.

In the first consultation round, a total of 27 full responses were received, representing 75% of the SE membership. Of the 31 recommendations presented, 22 received agreement by over 85% of responding organisations, a further 5 received agreement of over 60%. The detailed comments provided by all respondents demonstrated many commonalities in SE MO responses to the recommendations. A number of divergences in SE MO strategies were also identified. These were the subject of a second virtual discussion during an SE MO consultation event on research assessment processes on 24 March. A total of 29 nominated experts from SE MOs participated in the meeting, and lively discussions resolved a number of key items ahead of the further development of recommendations.

In early April 2020, a first draft of the Position Statement on Research Assessment Processes, with the policy recommendations embedded within, was developed by the SE Office and TF. It was based on the feedback provided by SE MOs as described above. This draft was sent to SE MOs for a third and final written consultation, which closed on 4 May.

Further, a workshop for experts and researchers from different research disciplines, career stages and research associations was organised on 28 April. The overarching aim of the workshop was to provide active researchers and experts with the opportunity to reflect and discuss the policy recommendations proposed, with a view to their further refinement.

The Position Statement presented is based on the findings of the 2019 Science Europe Study on Research Assessment Processes, as well as on the input received through the extensive consultation process described above. It is in accordance with relevant previous Science Europe activities (Science Europe 2015, 2016, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c, 2018). It is to be noted, however, that this Position Statement reflects the membership of Science Europe and thus, in certain sections, reflects the predominance of research funding organisations within Science Europe. Every effort has been made to ensure that the recommendations are inclusive of all types of research organisation and different when required.

References

Science Europe (2015). Workshop Report on 'Career Pathways in Multidisciplinary Research: How to Assess the Contributions of Individual Members of Large Teams'

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<https://scieur.org/integrity-report>

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Science Europe (2018). Symposium Report on 'Interdisciplinarity'

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Technopolis Group (2019). Science Europe Study on Research Assessment Practices, Final Report

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