

# UK Forum for Responsible Research Metrics— revised terms of reference (November 2018)

## Background

In July 2015, the Independent Review of the Role of Metrics in Research Assessment and Management published its final report, *The Metric Tide*.<sup>1</sup>

The report's central observation was that the metrics agenda is growing in importance in the UK and globally, with increased pressure on HEIs, researchers, funders and policymakers to develop effective and appropriate strategies for using metrics in the management and assessment of research. Alongside this, the report found widespread evidence that the description, production and consumption of metrics remains contested and open to misunderstandings, with a wide mixture of positive and negative effects noted. There were legitimate concerns raised over gaming of metrics and a lack of transparent, open and interoperable data infrastructure to support existing and new metrics systems.

As a way forward, the report proposed a new agenda for **responsible metrics** as the basis for developing appropriate and intelligent uses of quantitative indicators in the governance, management and assessment of research. Responsible metrics can be understood in terms of the following dimensions:

**Robustness:** basing metrics on the best possible data in terms of accuracy and scope;

**Humility:** recognising that quantitative evaluation should support – but not supplant – qualitative, expert assessment;

**Transparency:** keeping data collection and analytical processes open and transparent, so that those being evaluated can test and verify the results;

**Diversity:** accounting for variation by field, and using a range of indicators to reflect and support a plurality of research and researcher career paths across the system;

**Reflexivity:** recognising and anticipating the systemic and potential effects of indicators, and updating them in response.

In support of this agenda, the report recommended that the UK research community establish a Forum for Responsible Research Metrics, bringing together research funders, HEIs and their representative bodies, publishers, data providers and others to

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<sup>1</sup> Wilsdon, J., et al. (2015). *The Metric Tide: Report of the Independent Review of the Role of Metrics in Research Assessment and Management*. DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.1.4929.1363  
<https://re.ukri.org/news-events-publications/publications/metric-tide/>

take forward the recommendations in the report. The Forum for Responsible Research Metrics was established in December 2016.

## Terms of reference (updated November 2018)

The Forum for Responsible Research Metrics continue to use the recommendations in The Metric Tide to inform their work packages, which are framed using the following objectives:

- Advocate, lead, and where appropriate provide support on developing a positive research culture which facilitates the responsible use of research metrics across all stakeholders in the research system. Stakeholders include (not an exhaustive list) HE leaders, research managers, research funders, metrics providers, publishers, producers of university rankings, and researchers;
- Identify and promote communities of practice to facilitate discussion regarding the existing research metrics landscape, to establish evidence on what works, and provide guidance on the use of metrics responsibly;
- Provide advice to the UK HE Funding Bodies regarding the use of metrics in the next Research Excellence Framework (REF 2021), and make recommendations for future research assessment exercises;
- Provide advice and guidance on improving the data infrastructure that supports research information management;
- Where relevant, provide expertise and advice regarding the use of metrics across the research and knowledge exchange landscape;
- Develop strong international links, raising the profile of the responsible research metrics agenda globally.

To deliver on the terms of reference the Forum will need to:

- Gain the support of senior sector leaders and managers, within HEIs and among research funders, to commit to making real and meaningful progress on the responsible metrics agenda across the breadth of the UK research base;
- Work as consensually and consultatively as possible in support of the responsible metrics agenda, drawing together a wide group of stakeholders as appropriate to build support;
- Be connected to, and mindful of, existing work programmes in this area, formalising links to ongoing agendas and adapting its objectives and membership as appropriate;
- Operate openly and transparently, where possible.

The objectives of the Forum will be flexible to take account of the fast-changing nature of the metrics landscape and the work being undertaken by others. It is proposed that good links could be maintained with other relevant groups through regular information sharing and through common membership. This will help to identify areas of specific

relevance to research metrics and the responsible metrics agenda and to provide advice, expertise and other input as appropriate.

## Membership

Membership of the Forum is mainly drawn from research funders, HEI senior managers, and metrics academics/experts. A senior figure from the HE sector has been identified to chair the Forum. Representatives from UK Research and Innovation and the Wellcome Trust provide funder presence. Representatives from UUK, research intensive universities, research active universities, mission groups, and professional organisations provide an HEI presence. Membership from Jisc ensures appropriate technical expertise. Academics and experts in research metrics, infrastructure and science policy, and data experts, librarians, metrics providers and others with a direct interest in metrics, would be invited to participate on a semi-regular basis e.g. where specific issues were planned for discussion.

Research England will provide the secretariat for the Forum. The Forum meet twice per calendar year, and members are expected to take part and lead on other activity throughout the year.

## Further information

The Forum for Responsible Metrics have a presence on the Universities UK website.<sup>2</sup> Further information can be requested from Claire Fraser [Claire.fraser@re.ukri.org](mailto:Claire.fraser@re.ukri.org).

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/research-policy/open-science/Pages/forum-for-responsible-research-metrics.aspx>