

Council of the School of Technology: Implementation of DORA

Background

The Council of the School considered the consultation on the implementation of the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) and the University's draft implementation guidance. The School was asked to consider the draft guidance and provide the Implementation Group with comments and feedback to the Research Strategy Office by the end of Lent Term 2021.

Discussion

The following points were raised:

1. The Council is fully supportive of the key principles of (i) transparency, (ii) integrity, (iii) fairness and (iv) diversity in the evaluation of researchers in the various promotion and appointment processes used across the Departments of the School. In fact, given the need in academic promotion processes to compare individuals fairly across the diverse subject areas within the major academic disciplines embraced by the School, employment of these principles has been ingrained in operations for many years.
2. The background to the specific measure within the guidelines on avoiding the use of journal metrics as a proxy for quality of a research output was discussed. Primarily, this was aimed at solving issues originating from the evaluation of academics in the biological sciences where publication in a relatively narrow range of journals of high impact factor had become the *sine qua non* for evaluation of research quality and, hence, access to promotion or appointment. The Council of the School was strongly of the opinion that this is not an issue in its technological areas, owing to a wide range of well-recognised, accessible and quality journals catering for specific technologies.
3. The School does not use *h*-factors or similar metrics in its evaluation of candidates.
4. Diversity of research output and contribution is allowed within the School insofar as it affects different disciplinary norms and is within the rules of the Academic Careers Pathway documentation.
5. The Council is of the unanimous opinion that promotion and appointments panels in the School already consider candidates in a "rounded" way, taking into account narrative comments from referees and a wide variety of other information, structured so as to address any potential unconscious bias. Sources of information used in evaluations for promotion are made explicit in the School's Academic Careers Pathway (ACP) documentation. Some of the proposed measures, such as expecting review panels to make judgements on outputs outside their areas of expertise, use of narrative CVs and

DOI-based publication lists could risk introducing less impartiality, more unconscious bias of candidate's outputs and lead to less transparency.

6. The School relies heavily on external, internationally-recognised experts to referee cases for promotion. Introducing DOI-based publication lists places an extra burden on busy referees and might be discouraging. It should be noted that promotion panels expect referees to explain in detail why particular research outputs are significant, given their expertise in the field. Referees might inevitably comment on quality of journal or its impact factor but School committees will concentrate on the expert opinion, not the metrics.
7. The proposed measures of not taking into account the quality of journals in which outputs have been published clashes with the standard international practice in business schools of recognising that outputs need to be published in internationally-recognised A-grade journals. There is no solution to this requirement presently within the international environment within which CJBS must operate to maintain its international status. However, promotions within CJBS are predicated on both (i) having published outputs in a relevant A-grade journal plus (ii) an evaluation of the body of work that has been published by international expert referees. Thus, the quality of the output is, indeed, examined, and narrow publication metrics are not used as proxies of quality.

Conclusion

On the strength of the above points, the Council is of the opinion that the School adheres to the principles of DORA. The School believes that it should continue to direct its efforts in encouraging and mentoring all its staff to apply for promotion processes so that the diversity in its early-career academics remains as they progress to higher grades. At the same time, all necessary training, including refreshment training, will continue to be given to those judging research quality to raise awareness of, and to minimise, unconscious bias and other factors affecting impartiality.

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11th May, 2021.