Recognition & Rewards - Research

Introduction

This narrative describes the vision on how upward progress in an academic's career is possible while taking into account both quantitative and qualitative aspects of research. This narrative is a dynamic vision document, aimed at serving as a basis for further discussion.

This narrative gives both academic staff and their managers' guidance as to how to assess research in the wider frame of career development. In line with the VSNU position paper *Room for everyone's talent*, the narrative for research is part of a wider narrative focused on adjusting the balance in the recognition and rewarding of academics. We do not discuss whether the current assessment of research provides sufficient room for everyone's talent as this is most likely different from one faculty or discipline to another. What we do try to do, however, is to give concrete tools for assessment while recognising that a healthy academic community needs different types of researchers and academics.

We will first sketch the background of our committee's findings and then identify the general principles for research assessment which we recommend are adopted. Furthermore, we provide input on how to recognise and reward different types of research and researchers.

Why is a change in Recognition & Rewards needed?

In academic careers, many feel there is a one-sided emphasis on research performance which frequently leads to undervaluation of other key areas of academia such as education, impact and leadership (and for university medical centres, patient care).[1] Particularly in the earlier stages of their career, academics often experience heightened work-related pressure and job insecurity, and although competition may be stimulating it can – if excessive – be counterproductive. Overall assessment must be adapted and improved in each of the aforementioned areas and in the connections between these, while also taking account the international context in which different academics operate.

General principles for assessment of research

The general principles for assessment of research developed by our committee are as follows.

1. Value quality over quantity

We believe that the assessment of researchers should always be based on a combination of qualitative and quantitative criteria. Quantitative information such as metrics, citation analysis, rankings, etc. are embedded within a broader framework of assessing quality. Not all aspects of the quality of research or of an academic can be assessed by quantitative criteria. Societal impact, teamwork, the degree in which people actively participate in networks and even originality can, and sometimes must, be measured in different ways. In doing so, the specific academic discipline and the international context in which the academic operates should be taken into account.

Examples of quantitative criteria are:

- Output indicators: e.g., number of publications, journal impact factor, the h-index, Google Scholar, Web of Science
- Amount of external funding: e.g., number of applications, number of projects allocated, amounts obtained

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[1] VSNU Position Paper Room for everyone's talent.

- Number of supervised PhD students and/or postdocs

Examples of qualitative criteria are:

- Recognition of research: e.g., prizes won, organisation memberships, participation in committees, ability to obtain funding
- Research activities: e.g., design and/or control over a visible research line, actively participating in national and international research communities and/or partnerships, membership of a national research school, degree of influence within the institutional community and within national and international research communities
- Supervising PhD students and/or postdocs
- Scientific integrity
- National and international embedding: e.g., professional network, involvement in collaborative funding, sitting in editorial boards of journals

The above examples of qualitative and quantitative criteria should not be read as exhaustive, prescriptive or limiting.

2. Quality of research and researchers is multi-faceted; it can relate to academic excellence, but also to other aspects of quality.

The Recognition & Rewards programme should promote flexibility in how competence is demonstrated and should let individuals' strengths emerge. It should allow for the diversification and development of career paths.

We propose that each academic creates a long-term development plan, one that is applicable throughout their career and that changes depending on their career stage. A living document based on the following indicators:

- The assessment of quality starts with a well-defined **research line** or lines, by which a person can be known in their particular field. The academic is asked to develop a vision on their research lines and to give a rationale for their choice. More junior staff should answer the question, 'How will I distinguish my line from that of my (current or former) supervisor?' or 'How does my research line complement the work of my colleagues (within the environment of a department, school, etc.)?
- Following on this content-based vision on research, the researcher's **playing field** should be defined; what is the field, how fast or slowly does it develop, in which networks should the academic operate, etc.
- Related to this is the researcher's own narrative; what is, according to them, the most important research **output** and why? *Why* can be answered by referring to the different quality indicators mentioned above. How does this relate to the researcher's own ambitions? In what lies their development over time?
- Furthermore, what is the researcher's academic **impact**: how did or does their work change the state of the art in their field? Is this impact purely academic or also clinical and/or societal? What is their contribution to collective team-based impact? How do they (possibly as a leader) influence others and whom? Are they a role model? What is the one (or more) things they are trying to change for the greater good?
- The academic should describe their academic **profile**, including the main activities which define it: e.g., research grants applied for and obtained, nominations, scholarships and prizes, membership in councils and committees, supervision of others, but also the other aspects mentioned above.
- Based on this analysis, a quantitative **ambition** should be defined; what is ambitious and reasonable in terms of numbers of publication, expected impact in terms of citations and other means of quantitative output?

Additionally, we recommend that a broad evaluation committee should be set up which can assess the staff member as a whole, not only look at their CV, and which advises and helps the researcher in achieving their goals. The academic being evaluated should have a say in who is in the committee.

3. Set clear, fair and transparent appointment and assessment criteria and competencies and communicate these.

There is a need for employees to know what is expected from them, both in terms of research output and beyond. An often-heard complaint is that this is not always clear, making decisions about tenure or promotion insufficiently transparent. This calls not only for clear appointment criteria, but also for performance agreements based on the elements mentioned above.

4. Define and describe different career perspectives and make sure that diversity in this context is valued

It is necessary to develop different realistic options and define custom-made career paths, present them and discuss from the very early stages of an academic's career. It should be made clear that a career towards a full professor position is not the only option or the *holy grail*. There is no single path towards excellence. Increasingly, academia is a team endeavour and different career profiles are part of this. This requires a huge culture change. The Recognition & Rewards programme should therefore promote diverse profiles, whereby a manager can encourage staff to explore these in both informal and formal ways. Key is having minimum requirements in place that balance qualitative and quantitative indicators, while also taking into account the academic discipline and international context in which academics operate. Then setting and communicating clear, fair and transparent criteria must take place. The basic competencies do not change depending on the career stage, only the expectations for the evidence supporting them and the balance between them.

Further input for implementation

It is important to develop the talent pool at UM and not only periodically assess it. The Recognition & Rewards programme should therefore facilitate long-term academic development. A relevant example of a holistic assessment is the MERLN Tenure Track approach (see appendix). Our committee proposes to use this as an example.

To underline the recognition of career paths in which an academic specialises in one domain over another, the committee suggest working out a few typical career paths as an example together with presenting the narratives from each subcommittee.

At UM, the faculties should set clear, fair and transparent appointment and assessment criteria and competencies. It is necessary to apply this in a uniform matter in the appointment procedures university wide. Faculties, together with HR, must ensure this is implemented throughout the organisation and must communicate clearly and in a transparent manner.

Finally, our committee proposes that an UM-wide annual evaluation is conducted to gather experiences about procedures and decisions within faculty appointment committees and departments. In order to stimulate the desired culture change, training for employees, supervisors and assessment committees should be organised for informational purposes and to share both good and bad practices.