The role of research and research assessment in higher education

CGHE 2020-23

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Meet the team...

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Levels of analysis

I. Systems: research assessment

II. Organisations: role and value of academic research in HEIs (institutional case studies)

III. People: perspectives on the importance and recognition of research (academics, management, policy actors and publishers)

IV. Further research: [global] survey development

Q I. What are the purposes, features, mechanisms, governance, embeddedness, buy-in, use, outcomes and challenges of research assessment frameworks used in performance-related research funding in six countries/regions?

- How have research assessment frameworks developed internationally?
- How does research assessment relate to system-level priorities and definitions of research excellence?

SYSTEMS

- Q II. What are the factors, pressures and incentives that shape organisational structures, policies and practices concerning the role and value given to academic research?
  - How does research relate to other functions of higher education internationally?
  - What role does research play in the relationships between universities and other sectors, including industry, in selected countries/regions?
  - What are the patterns of productivity and authorship, collaboration and citation; and the features of engagement networks in the research units under study?

ORGANISATIONS

Q III. How do stakeholders describe and evaluate the importance given to research in HE in the six countries/regions, particularly in relation to: individual careers; organizational environments; the functions of higher education; and sectoral policy?

- What are the organisational practices involved in ascribing importance to, incentivising and recognising research in HEIs; and how do stakeholders experience them?
- How do these perspectives and experiences vary across career stages, disciplines, types of institutions, systems, and sectors?
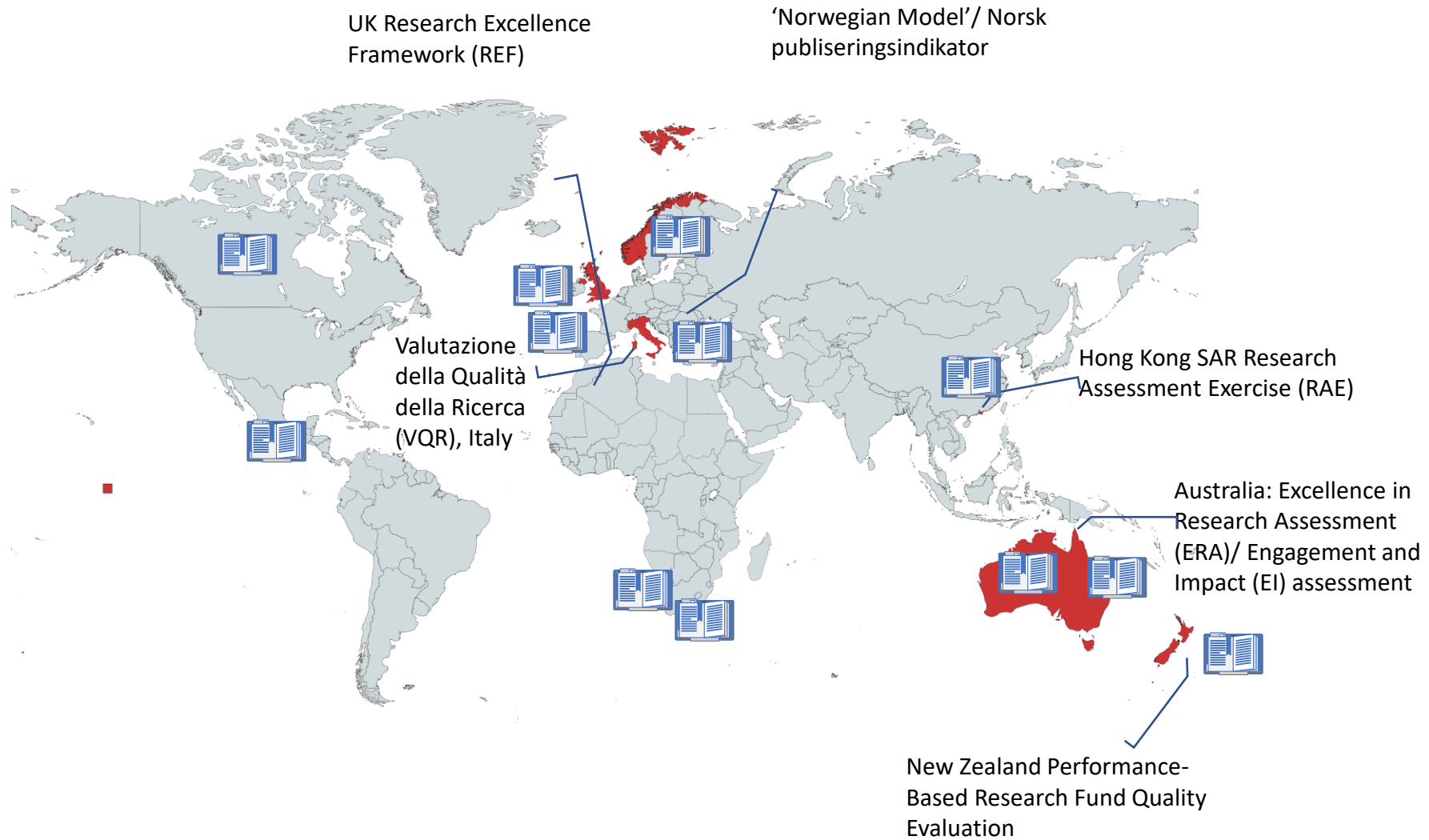
PEOPLE

Study design

Phase 1:   Comparative mapping and analysis

- Policy analysis
- Interviews: key stakeholders in the 6 systems and internationally
- Analysis of outcomes from system-level assessments

Phase 2: Institutional case studies – 2 per country/region

- Documentary and digital profile analysis
- Interviews leadership, administration, academics, ECRs x clusters of disciplines
- Observations (pandemic dependent)
- Network mapping
- Independent bibliometric analysis

Phase 3: global survey and global dialogue

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UK Research Excellence Framework (REF)

'Norwegian Model'/ Norsk publiseringsindikator

Valutazione della Qualità della Ricerca (VQR), Italy

Hong Kong SAR Research Assessment Exercise (RAE)

Australia: Excellence in Research Assessment (ERA)/ Engagement and Impact (EI) assessment

New Zealand Performance-Based Research Fund Quality Evaluation

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Participants to date - summary

n=59 individual participants (to date)

46 hours of interview time (to date)

Systems	Number of participants
Australia	6
England / Scotland / Wales	22
Hong Kong	5
Italy	8
Norway	11
New Zealand	4
International / transnational	12

Sector	Number of participants
Representative body	12
RoR Institute	9
Funding body	8
Evaluation agency	7
Review panel	7
Government department	6
Library, digital services and scholarly communications	6
Wider research ecosystem	5
Publishers	4
Academies and learned societies	4
Advisory	3
Government agency	2
Other research providers	1
International organisation	1
Total (with overlaps)	75

Some emerging themes

- Diversity in definitions of research, researchers and good research
- Epistemic hegemonies and diversity of worldviews
- Cultural rootedness of research cultures, practices, policy and governance
- Overlapping disciplinary communities, inter- and multi-disciplinarity
- Persistent multiple inequalities - across and within systems
- Trans-sectoral, regional and trans-border ecosystems for research
- Positionality in interpreting the 'global'
- The mixed impacts of COVID on research - COVID response, disruption, 'recovery' and reimagining

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Diverse definitions of research

'What is <u>your</u> definition of "research"?'

Types of definitions	Example interview quotes
Descriptive/ lexical definition	'I define it very loosely, I define it as **a systematic way of collecting information** that is used within a known framework.' (New Zealand)
Persuasive definition	'**Humanity** is where it is today because we have **research as our superpower**.' (Australia)
Operational definition	'We define research and innovation broadly, **we don't impose a definition on it** because we think it's for our partners and our institutions that we serve and funders to really understand what that is.' (England) 'The definition of a research in Italy is **up to the disciplinary community**; there is not a general definition.' (Italy)
Stipulative definition	'I suppose we tend to just **fall back on the Frascati definition**. We tend to use a fairly broad definition **… in that anybody who's engaged in the process of doing research, so we would like to see it more than just academic researchers doing research**. ' (England) 'We use **the definition from the Frascati Manual**, I have it in front of me, we've just had the meetings…' (Norway)
Ostensive definition	'Research is definitely, I think, **across all those broad areas, anything where we are trying to endeavour**… even in understanding **English literature**. Studying, I don't know, **Jane Austen**, in my view, can be just as important as understanding **quantum physics**.' (Australia) 'Research could mean **academic research or secret, private industrial research**. And it is not obvious that these different and legitimate modes of knowledge production have the same normative foundation.' (Norway)

Diverse focuses in the definition

Examples
Drivers and Process

e.g. 'Research, in my view, is having **a question or a curiosity**. We want to seek information to either answer that question or explore that curiosity, and in order to do that, you need to be able to **design a process** to be able to do that.' (Australia)

Drivers of research

- Curiosity, problems, challenges, etc.

Outcomes of research

- Original knowledge, advancement, betterment, impacts, application, etc.

Processes of research

- Systematic inquiry, discovery, investigation, behaviours, etc.

Examples
Drivers, process, outcomes

e.g. 'Research and development is **creative work undertaking systematically** to **achieve increased knowledge** including knowledge of humans, culture, and society, and also includes **the use of this knowledge to find new uses**.' (Norway)

'Basic - applied research' spectrum

- basic research, 'blue-sky' research, fundamental research, curiosity-driven research, practice-based research, practitioner research, applied research, innovative research, industry-based research, etc.
- 'I have since long argued for that **the division between applied and basic research is flawed, is not useful**.' (Norway)
- 'The language I'm going to use **isn't right** – so the language I found myself using today was **a distinction between academic research, practitioner research and institutional research**. Now, the language **is not right.**' (New Zealand)

Different disciplinary communities and inter/multi-disciplinarity

- medical research, arts and humanities research, STEM research, etc.

Different sectors

- university research, academic research, industrial research, etc.
- 'Research could mean **academic research** or **secret, private industrial research**.' (Norway)
- 'If you talk about **research in universities**, in most cases, it's all about the citation ... but at the same time, you need to encourage scientists and professors to think about turning some dissertation, the science, the research into commercialisation.' (Hong Kong)

Different ontological, epistemological, and methodological bases

- empirical, conceptual, theoretical, etc.
- 'The building of that knowledge will often be **collaborative** although not necessarily so and it **may be empirical or it may be theoretical in nature**.' (England)

- Relevant concepts and terminologies
  - 'Science'
  - 'Innovation'
  - 'Impact'
  - 'R&D' (Research and Development)
  - 'Research integrity'
  - 'Research quality'
  - 'Research excellence'
  - 'Researchers'
  - 'Research community'
  - 'Research ecosystem'

  ...

- 'Science simply means knowledge, I think. The two things are so closely related. Science is the body of knowledge, research is the quest for it.' (Australia)
- 'I see that science is one aspect of research.' (Australia)
- 'I think integrity is all about behaviours, quality is all about process, and actions and excellence is all about the outcomes of research.' (Australia)
- 'Innovation is more developing ideas for the betterment of systems or you're making things that are new that can help in one way or another. … But the research [is] exploring, looking at topics that you need more knowledge about.' (Norway)
- 'Innovation and research have to go together because I think there's a sense in which you could almost view all research as potentially definitely impactful but potentially commercialisable.' (England)
- 'Connecting the basic research to the application, the end user application is most critical. And this is, in my opinion, what innovation is all about; we're not about invention or discovery, we're talking about innovation.' (Hong Kong)
- 'There's a whole ecosystem around the research endeavour that needs to be recognised and valued, so that would include technicians, research managers, research officers, even researcher developers, those that are developing the skills of researchers, knowledge exchange, IPR, commercialisation officers; the whole system has to work well for the whole function of research to work well.' (England)

Overlapping disciplinary communities,
inter- and multi-disciplinarity

- Funding orientation towards interdisciplinary, challenge-based research
  - "my view is that [public funding] should be supporting team science. I think that is the way we're going to go across all the disciplines." (Funder 1, England)
  - "…mission-driven research… Basically what it means is [the] government would like researchers to go away and tackle big problems in multidisciplinary teams, come up with some… useful answers, and **that's the future of research…** (Funder 1, England)

- Implications for interdisciplinary relationships
  - "I think there's a very specific issue around challenge-led funding, which is that the challenges will almost always be decided or defined in quite scientific terms. Very rarely going to be something which foregrounds history, or literature, or philosophy, or whatever it might be… you'll bring a historian on halfway through… [but] you're missing the dialogue… and you need to build in that team right at the outset…I think we're at risk is actually not being able to make the argument for arts and humanities inside some of these challenges at sufficient scale…
  - the assumption is that let's phone a philosopher and say is this okay, is the answer to the role of arts, humanities and challenge led funding and we've got to get past that."
- Implications for disciplinary and organisational structures?
  - "I actually think in the long term there's a real question about what departments are going to be for. They might be useful for undergraduate and masters teaching, I don't think they've necessarily got a future in terms of research."

Broader considerations

- Relationship between funding mechanisms and disciplinary structures
- Top-down vs bottom-up drivers of inter- and multidisciplinary working
- Structures for research assessment
- Research/academic careers and individual disciplinary identities

- **Next steps:**
- Further cross-system analysis
- Exploration of understandings of inter- and multi-disciplinary working in case studies
- Further bibliometric analysis to examine disciplinary structures and identities

The mixed impacts of COVID on research systems and institutions

The mixed impacts of COVID on research systems and institutions

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Disruption

- Acknowledging a change from 'normal' on research & practitioners, but not all negative.

- *"Surprise, surprise, the people who do really badly are the women who stay at home and look after the kids … and their publishing behaviour changed whereas men were very productive". Stakeholder_AU*
- *"Yeah, so COVID hasn't been as bad, and in some areas has stimulated a lot of new activity. That being said, I think I would still have preferred not to have had it." Stakeholder_UK*

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Response

- What was done in the immediate aftermath of COVID (until Dec 2020) and in short-term (until Dec 2021).

- *"We also made the decision to try to keep things running as normally as possible, rather than to divert our funding into extending existing grants, or doing something very different because of COVID. We just tried to maintain some stability. " Stakeholder_AU*
- *"What we are now seeing is the… longer effects of COVID on staff morale and also staff energy levels, and my sense is that the research vitality of individuals is beginning to be sapped a little bit by the stresses of life." Stakeholder_UK*

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Recovery

- Long term institutional or system-based reimaging of research because on COVID-disruption

- *"…the world didn't fall apart when you put stuff out without peer review and I think that although it's really clear that some people, you know, the role of peer review I think is something that has been challenged during the pandemic … a…. think that's something that has changed people's behaviour." Stakeholder_AU*

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Preliminary findings….

- Among stakeholders there was a confounding of the Response (short -term) with Recovery (long term)

    - Acknowledged that a change had occurred in EDI stakes but limited vision as to how to proceed

    - Short-term*ism* - focused on maintaining the status quo in *Response* stage and frames approach to *Recovery*

- Desire for long term change related to Open research

    - *I think we're at the point now where, you know, everybody recognises that open science and open access is a good thing, that we need it to happen. I mean, the pandemic has just, you know, finally laid that to rest."* Stakeholder_AUS

- Research culture norms will prevail regardless

    - *"Higher education generally snaps back to the shape it was in before, so my suspicion is that research will do pretty much the same. Hopefully COVID will just be a bad memory. I hope so.."* Stakeholder_UK

Next steps

- Cross country comparison
  - COVID-19 disruption varied in severity and length between countries.
    - e.g. New Zealand vs. Hong Kong vs. UK
  - Differing effect on H.E systems based on reliance on international markets
    - *"COVID, we thought COVID was going to be a real disaster, so we thought we would lose international students and we would lose students. None of that happened. Actually, financially we did better during COVID years than normal."* Stakeholder_UK
  - Comparison with case-study experiences
    - Research policy and researcher practices

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Explore the gallery of doctoral research

- **Antonin Charret** - European Universities: Building the future of higher education in the European Union through university alliances

- **Elena Tsvetkova** - The Impacts of the Academic Excellence Initiative on Russian Higher Education: Perspectives on the Future Development of Doctoral Education

- **Julie Chia-Yi Lin** - Higher Education administration and professionalisation in Singapore and Taiwan: Case studies of research and international offices

- **Kexin Yu** - International Research Collaborations: The practices and values of China-based social science researchers

- **Minto Felix** - Research culture(s) in Indian higher education: perspectives about disciplines, institutions, systems

- **Maria-Rucsandra Stan** - Insights into evaluation of research "quality": what role for the researcher?

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