



Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft

Introduction of a Standardised CV Template – Interim Report After One Year

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Foreword

In March 2023, the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) introduced the requirement of a standardised CV template for the first time. In doing so, it joined the ranks of a number of funding organisations worldwide that are endeavouring to contribute to a process of research assessment that is fairer in terms of equity and diversity and even more oriented towards substance.

The new CV template is designed to enable a holistic view of an applicant's academic career and achievements in the course of the review and evaluation process. Unlike some other international research funding organisations which use purely narrative CV templates, the DFG's CV template provides for a "hybrid" format, including tables, lists and narrative fields as required.

This interim report offers an initial overview of the use and impact of the new CV template one year after its introduction, thereby providing a basis for further analyses while also contributing to the international debate on the introduction of new CV formats.

1 Introduction: Change in the culture of assessment through modified CV formats

1.1 Introduction of new CV formats in the international context

For several years now, the responsible assessment of research activities has been the subject of international discussion, and there have been calls for a change in the culture of assessment towards an even more substance-oriented research assessment and further improvements in equity and diversity; examples here are the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment ([DORA](#)) and the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment ([CoARA](#)). In order to be able to assess a researcher's accomplishments in a more inclusive and holistic way, more comprehensive consideration should be given to a range of different success factors. In the context of research funding, reviewers and evaluating/decision-making bodies are to be given a broader overview of applicants' achievements and experience. At the same time, this could create incentives for researchers to expand their research output in a way that shifts away from the focus on publication metrics. In the spirit of equity and diversity, more consideration is to be given to non-linear career paths and to personal circumstances that may limit research activity.

As one approach to initiating such a change in the culture of assessment, there has been – and continues to be – an international debate on the subject of CV templates, assessment criteria and the way in which academic career paths and achievements are presented. One of the catalysts for this was a workshop initiated by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) in May 2019 and given by the “CV Harmonisation Group (H-Group)” – an initiative involving researchers, data infrastructure organisations and 15 research funding organisations in which the DFG participated (Strinzel, Brown, Kaltenbrunner, de Rijcke, & Hill, 2021). In addition, recommendations for the design of CVs are available from projects and various groups dedicated to this subject (Fritch, Hatch, Hazlett, & Vinkenburger, 2021; The Royal Society, 2019). In response, a number of international research funding organisations have adapted their CV templates or are working to develop their CV formats along these lines. For example, the Royal Society and UK Research and Innovation (UK), the Dutch Research Council (Netherlands), the Health Research Board Ireland, Luxembourg National Research Fund (FNR), the National Institutes of Health (USA), the Science Foundation Ireland (Ireland) and the SNSF (Switzerland) have introduced so-called narrative or semi-narrative CV templates (cf. Info Box 1). These CVs require full text descriptions to be provided which serve the purpose of contextualising the individual's achievements, in some cases supplemented with a publication list.

Infobox 1: Introduction of new CV templates by other funding organisations

2015

National Institutes of Health (NIH, USA)

Introduction of new CV format.

<https://nexus.od.nih.gov/all/2014/11/26/implementing-the-modified-nih-biosketch-format/>

2016

Health Research Board Ireland (HRB, Ireland)

Narrative elements were introduced to the CV template in 2016; evaluation in 2021 (DORA 2021).

www.hrb.ie/funding/funding-schemes/before-you-apply/how-we-assess-applications/career-track-cv/

2019

The Royal Society and since 2022 UK Research and Innovation (UKRI, UK)

Résumé for Researchers (R4R), introduced in 2019/2022.

<https://royalsociety.org/-/media/policy/projects/research-culture-images/2019-10-research-culture-resume-for-researchers-template.pdf>

2020

Swiss National Science Foundation (SNF, Switzerland)

Introduction of a narrative CV in a 2020 call for proposals by way of a test, evaluation in 2020 and 2021 (Strinzel, Kaltenbrunner, van der Weijden, von Arx, Hill, 2022); mandatory under all funding programmes since 2022.

www.snf.ch/en/wBR6E3emu8PP1ZSY/news/a-new-cv

Science Foundation Ireland (SFI, Ireland)

Semi-narrative CVs since 2020.

www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/narrative-cv-dora/

Dutch Research Council (NWO, Netherlands)

A narrative CV format has been introduced for the funding programme Vici.

www.nwo.nl/en/news/nwo-introduces-narrative-cv-format-2020-vici-round

2021

Luxembourg National Research Fund (FNR, Luxembourg)

Narrative CVs required under all programmes since 2021; Evaluation in 2022 (Fonds National de la Recherche, 2023).

www.fnr.lu/narrative-cv

(Websites accessed on 2 May 2024).

Some research funding organisations have already evaluated their narrative CV templates to see whether the new templates are having the intended effect – which is essentially to bring about improvements in the assessment of research activity – and how applicants, reviewers and committees rate the change and are dealing with it (e.g. practicability/user-friendliness). Various funding organisations have jointly published recommendations for the evaluation of CVs (Joint Funders Group, 2023). In these evaluations, applicants and reviewers were surveyed, in some cases text analyses were carried out, and application statistics were monitored over time. The surveys predominantly yielded positive results: reviewers and applicants alike welcomed the change and found the new narrative format useful despite the fact that it initially involved more work. No negative effects on the assessment of research activity were observed; however, the narrative CV templates alone are not considered sufficient to bring about a change in the culture of research assessment (Luxembourg National Research Fund, 2023; DORA, 2021; Meadmore, et al., 2022; Rockney, 2014; Strinzel, Kaltenbrunner, van der Weijden, von Arx, & Hill, 2022). What is more, the question of whether a narrative format is superior to other formats was not addressed. One overview article even concludes that the introduction of a new CV format – whether narrative or not – is primarily an opportunity to raise awareness, encouraging reviewers and applicants to question assessment practices per se, and work towards better practices (Bordignon, Chaignon, & Egret, 2023). No explicit attention was paid to whether or not writing narrative CVs may pose obstacles for non-native speakers and members of underrepresented groups, but this point cannot be ruled out (Fritch, Hatch, Hazlett, & Vinkenburg, 2021). For this reason, the recommendation is to take equity and diversity aspects into account in particular when introducing narrative CV formats (Fritch, et al., 2024).

1.2 The DFG's CV template

The DFG has likewise discussed how to handle CVs in the context of equity and diversity as well as developments in academic publishing. Up until 2022, there was no standard format for CVs; only a few guidelines were provided concerning the structure and the scope for the bibliography. With its “Package of Measures to Support a Shift in the Culture of Research Assessment”¹, the DFG announced various changes to the proposal submission process in September 2022 with a view to “initiating a cultural shift towards research assessment that is geared more towards equal opportunity and attaches even greater importance to the substance of research”. This also included the introduction of a standardised CV template (see Info Box 2)², which sought to improve equality in connection with the DFG's “Qualitative

1 www.dfg.de/en/research_funding/announcements_proposals/2022/info_wissenschaft_22_61/

2 www.dfg.de/formulare/53_200_elan

Infobox 2: The DFG's hybrid CV template

Not a purely narrative format: Tabular fields are supplemented with free text fields, whereby the free text fields can also be filled out with bullet points – a full-text narrative is not expected.

Standardised format: The use of a standardised format across all programmes is to facilitate comparison for reviewers and committee members, also making it easier for them to locate specific applicant details.

No photograph or date of birth: In order to counter implicit bias, the CV should not contain a photograph or the applicant's age.

Predefined structure: The purpose of the predefined fields is to encourage applicants to provide not only the obligatory information about themselves, their career and their publications, but also to optionally address broader dimensions of their output, such as their involvement in the research system, their supervision of researchers in early career phases, recognition they have gained within the research system, etc.

“Supplementary Career Information”: The purpose of this optional free text field is to encourage applicants to provide information on special personal circumstances where these are relevant in terms of contextualising and assessing the applicant's academic achievements.

Differentiation of academic publications into a Category A (articles in peer-reviewed journals, peer-reviewed contributions to conferences or anthology volumes, and book publications) and a Category B (any other form of published results). A new feature here is that only ten publications per category may be listed, i. e. a maximum of 20 in total. The aim here is to create more space for listing a wide range of output formats beyond traditional journal and book publications. In addition, wherever possible, the applicant's respective share of the published results is also to be stated, and/or an explanation is to be provided as to why the publication or scientific contribution is mentioned at this point.

No quantitative metrics: Details of quantitative metrics such as impact factors and h-indices are not required and are not considered as part of the review.

Link to the CV template: www.dfg.de/formulare/53_200_elan/

Gender Equality Strategy”.³ The new template has been available for voluntary use since September 2022. On 1 March 2023, the template was initially introduced as mandatory under the individual grants programmes, and it is to be gradually introduced for all other funding programmes.

Based on the recommendations of the Joint Funders Group on CV evaluations, the introduction of the new DFG CV template was accompanied by the evaluation of samples to see whether the new CV template was having the intended effect of promoting a more substance-oriented research assessment and further improvements in equity and diversity. Since due to its hybrid structure, the DFG’s CV template differs significantly from the narrative approaches adopted by other research funding organisations. It has rather more similarities to the previous “informal” type of academic CV submitted by applicants, so that a broad-based evaluation similar to those carried out by other funding organisations does not appear to be necessary. The results set out below provide an interim report one year after the introduction of the CV template.

3 www.dfg.de/en/service/press/press-releases/2017/press-release-no-24

2 Study on the introduction of the CV template: procedure and results

2.1 Text-based CV analysis

First, the use of the new CV template was investigated based on three random samples of CVs submitted since March 2023; there was a particular focus here on whether information was provided in the field “Supplementary Career Information”, and if so, which details were provided, and also whether Category B publications were listed and which if so, which ones. The **random samples** break down as follows, across all research areas:

- ▶ Individual grants programme: 164 CVs of individuals who were mainly in early career phases. Here, the sample was limited to proposals submitted by individuals aged 45 or younger. In the period from 3 to 14 April 2023, 164 individuals submitted a proposal for individual grants (mostly research grants, but some were submitted under the Walter Benjamin Programme and the Emmy Noether Programme; international projects are not included). 53 (32 percent) of the CVs were submitted by female researchers and 111 (68 percent) by male researchers.
- ▶ Clusters of Excellence (EXC): 559 CVs submitted by individuals who played a leading role in 23 EXC draft proposals under the 2023 round of calls. The EXC CVs were not analysed by age or gender.
- ▶ Research Impulses (FIP): 182 CVs of individuals who played a leading role in 20 FIP proposals under the first round of calls issued in 2023. The FIP CVs were not analysed by age or gender.

A text analysis of these samples indicated that applicants made very frequent use of the optional fields in the template to present their research achievements (“Activities in the Research System”, “Supervision of Researchers in Early Career Phases”, “Category B” under research results, “Academic Distinctions”).

The optional field “**Supplementary Career Information**” was filled out in a great many cases. From reading the information, the impression arises that applicants mainly mentioned review-related content in appropriate detail that had had an impact on their academic career and which should be taken into account in the review. In the individual grants group, the field was completed in 77 (47 percent) CVs, 48 times by men (62 percent) and 29 times by women (38 percent), which roughly corresponds to the gender distribution of the sample. In the case of the EXC CVs, information was provided in 222 (40 percent) CVs, whereas in the FIP CVs it was only provided in 32 (18 percent) cases.

The field “Supplementary Career Information” was analysed in greater detail in the individual grants sample (see Fig. 1). In 27 of the CVs, the field was filled out in complete sentences, while about 31 applicants filled it out in the form of bullet points or as a list, though there were sometimes no clear distinctions here, with both being combined at times (in seven CVs).

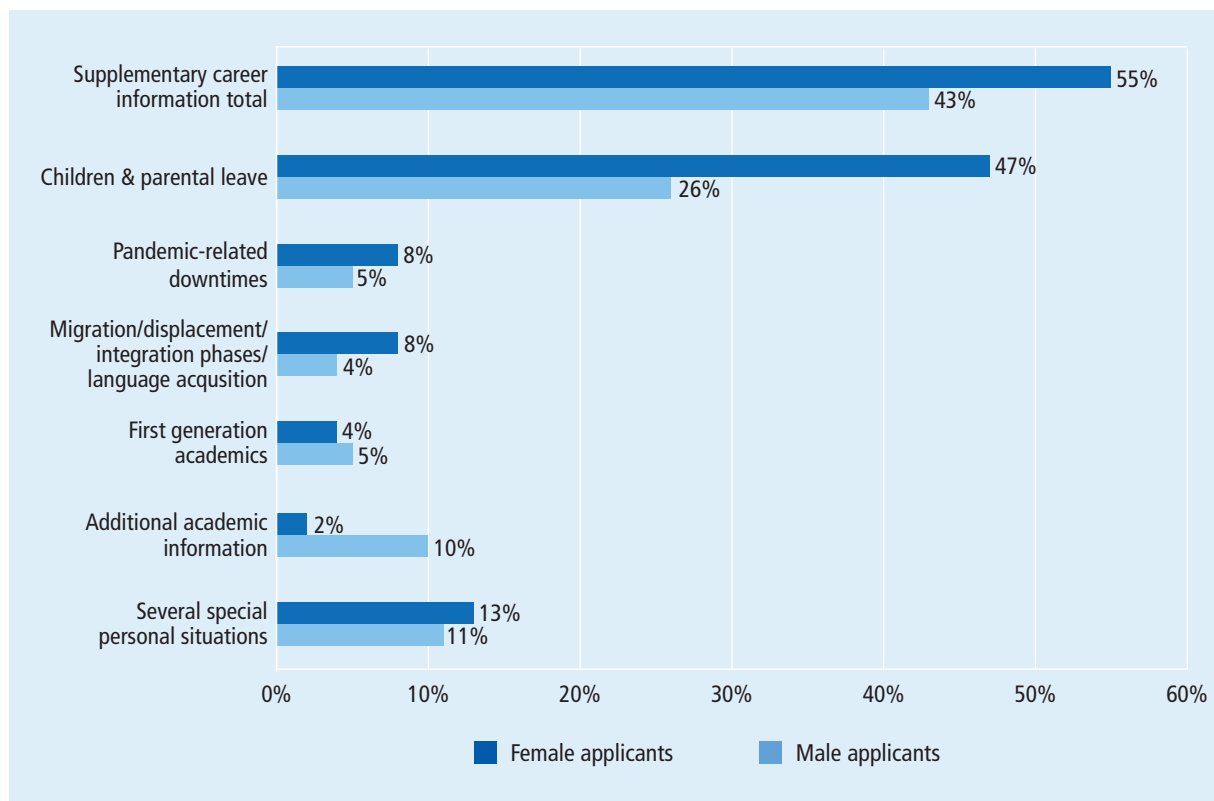
The field predominantly contained information on children and/or parental leave (29 times for male researchers and 25 times for female researchers). In relation to their share of the individual grants sample, 47 percent of female researchers describe children and/or parental leave as “special personal circumstances”; this is only the case with 26 percent of male researchers. Specific periods of absence due to maternity and/or parental leave were mentioned in just over half of the cases. The periods of absence vary greatly among both male and female researchers (between one month/maternity leave periods and two years). Around ten female researchers and one male researcher stated that they had taken part-time childcare leave. This indicates that male researchers also perceive the limitations of family commitments as being relevant to their assessment. However, female researchers are much more likely to mention care responsibilities, which often result in significant restrictions to their academic careers. It is therefore essential that such commitments are disclosed when applying for third-party funding in order for them to be adequately recognised. In summary, it is certainly possible to observe changes, but also a certain persistence of traditional roles in relation to caring responsibilities.

Furthermore, some individuals provided information on the effects of the coronavirus pandemic (five male researchers and four female researchers), on their experience of migration/displacement/integration/language acquisition (four male researchers and four female researchers), and on belonging to the “first generation of academics” (six male researchers and two female researchers). Where the effects of the coronavirus pandemic were described, these related to increased childcare responsibilities.

The following issues were only addressed in isolated cases: personal illness or disability, caring for relatives, a career bridging industry and academia, a dual career and – over and above children and/or parental leave – single parent status. In 19 CVs, two or more of the aforementioned details were provided (e.g. children/parenthood, flight, displacement, single parent status; intersectional background; 12 male researchers and seven female researchers). In addition, in 12 cases the field was incorrectly used in order to provide further information on academic career, qualifications, stays abroad, third-party funding acquired or the research profile.

In the “**Scientific Results**” field, 59 individuals (36 percent) from the individual grants sample commented on the publications listed (content/relation to the proposed project and/or individual contribution to the publication). There were isolated cases of information being provided on metrics such as the Journal Impact Factor (JIF) or h-index, but these tended to be rare.

Figure 1:
Frequency of mention of special personal details



Data basis and source:

CV sample under the individual grants programme, of which 53 CVs were submitted by female researchers and 111 by male researchers.

Specifically, information on JIF was found in only 11 (7 percent) CVs in the sample of individuals in early career phases. The CVs submitted under the EXC and FIP programmes were not analysed in detail in this regard, but here too, the impression was that metrics were only mentioned in isolated cases. 95 (58 percent) of the individual grants CVs and 352 (61 percent; EXC programme) and 142 (78 percent; FIP programme) of the CVs in coordinated programmes listed Category B publications (see Info Box 2), in particular patents, publications in non-peer-reviewed journals, pre-prints and contributions to science communication, in some cases also blog posts, software, data sets and contributions to information infrastructures. However, queries from applicants and complaints from the DFG Head Office during the formal review of the submitted CVs indicate that assigning publications to the respective category (A or B) was not always easy. In response to this, extensive FAQs on lists of publications have already been published on the DFG homepage.⁴ Furthermore, editorial changes to the CV template have already been initiated regarding the list of publications and a CV template is to be updated accordingly and published soon.

2.2 Analysis of review records

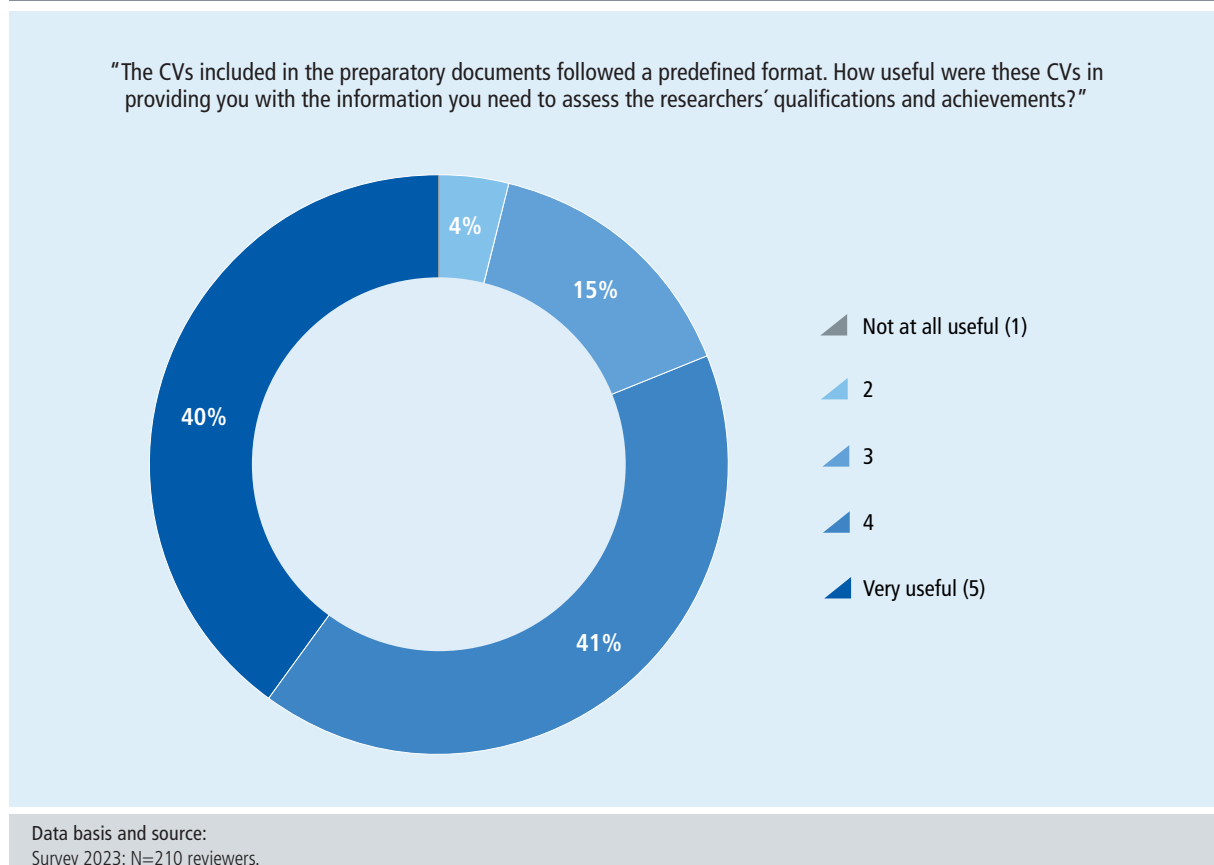
In addition to the CVs, a total of 54 review records were also evaluated. Consisting of the written external reviews and the statements issued by the responsible review boards, these were drawn from the individual grant programme samples for proposals submitted by 23 female researchers and 31 male researchers (only for CVs in which the field “Supplementary Career Information” was completed appropriately and for which reviews were available). An analysis was carried out as to whether and how the reviewers and the review boards took the “Supplementary Career Information” into account when assessing applicants’ qualifications. In about one-fifth of the cases in which supplementary career information was provided on the CV, this was also mentioned in the written reviews or in the statements issued by the review boards (concerning twelve CVs). In the majority of the CVs in question, the additional information was presented in narrative form (eight CVs, compared to two CVs in which the field was filled out in hybrid form or as a list). The analysis gave rise to the impression that reviewers and members of the review board were more likely to explicitly mention supplementary career information if it referred to events in the recent past (e.g. migration shortly before proposal submission; the mention of parental leave seemed to be more relevant to applicants in early career phases). The fact that the supplementary information was not explicitly referred to in the reviews and by the review boards in the remaining four-fifths of the cases does not mean, however, that it was not implicitly included in the overall assessment of the applicant’s qualifications (e.g. it may still have been reflected upon by the reviewers or discussed verbally at the review board meeting). It is also conceivable that the information was deliberately not picked up on because its impact on the person’s career was not presented in a sufficiently concrete way (e.g. only mentioning the number of children without mentioning the actual period of parental leave) or because the information seemed less relevant to the assessment of the individual’s qualifications in the sense of compensating for disadvantages (e.g. only short periods of absence or events that occurred several years ago). Further analysis would be needed to provide more specific feedback on how the supplementary career information is considered by reviewers and committee members.

2.3 Survey of reviewers

In order to determine whether the new CV template contributes to improved performance evaluation and therefore supports a change in the culture of assessment, the ideal option would be to interview those who carry out the subject-specific assessment. By way of an example, feedback on the new CV template was also collected as part of an online survey of reviewers under the EXC programme (draft proposal phase), since a survey was planned anyway. As the survey of EXC reviewers primarily focused on EXC programme specifics, however, it was not

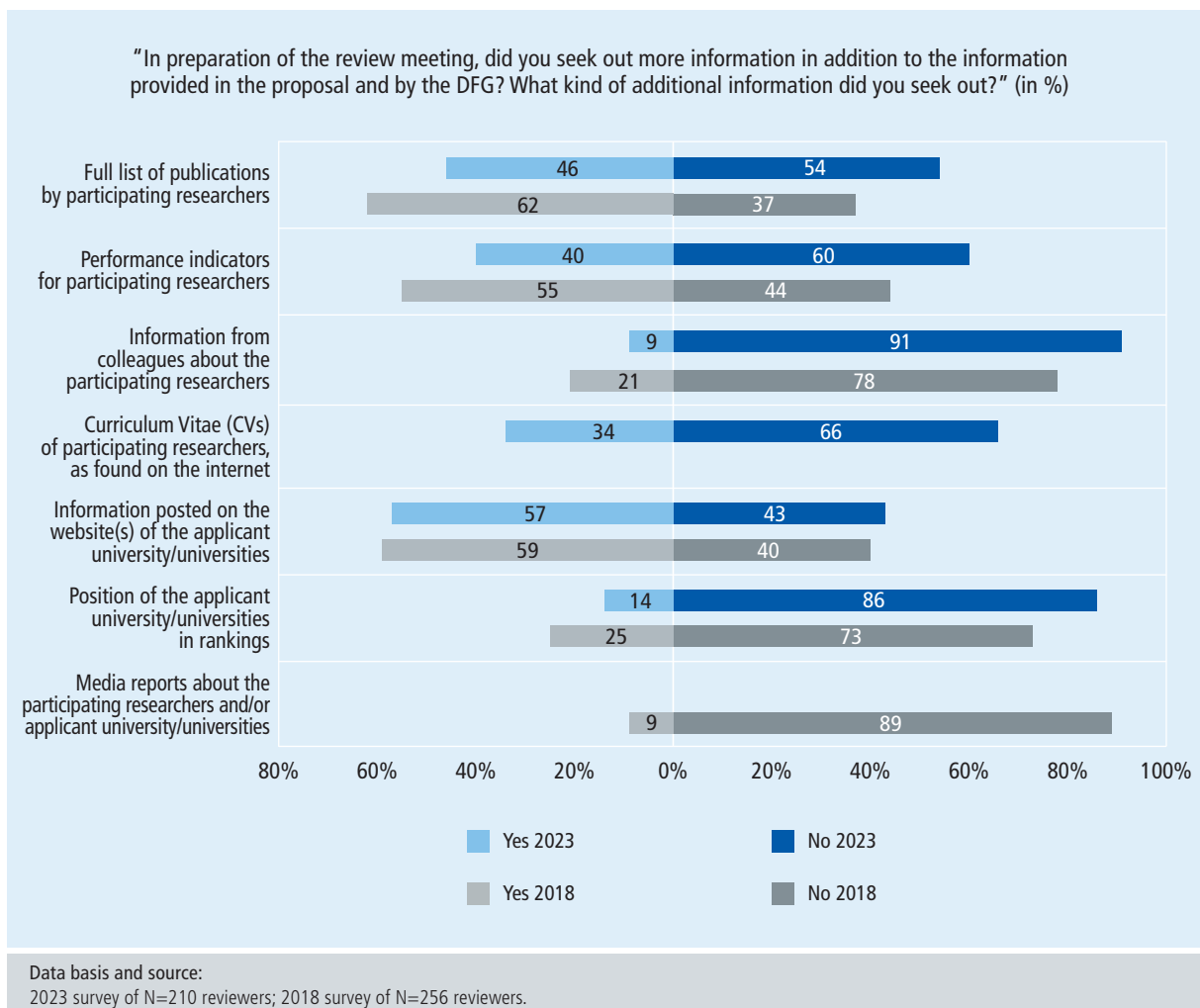
possible to ask any in-depth questions about the CV template due to the length of the questionnaire. When asked whether the CVs contained all the necessary information, a significant majority responded that the CVs were very helpful (40 percent) or helpful (41 percent) in assessing the qualifications of participating researchers (see Fig. 2).

Figure 2: Results of the survey of reviewers involved in the 2023 Cluster of Excellence draft proposal phase: Informational value of the CVs



At least one third of the reviewers stated that they also searched online for the CVs of the participating researchers in addition to the proposal documents provided by the DFG. In addition, other sources of information used to form an opinion included the applicants' websites, overall publication lists, performance indicators and university rankings (see Fig. 3). A similar survey of reviewers was conducted in the last round of the Excellence Strategy in the proposal phase, and questions were asked about additional sources of information here, too. One striking point here is that performance indicators of the participating researchers and university rankings appear to have become less important. In 2018, 55 percent of the reviewers said they had consulted performance indicators as a source of information. In the current survey, only 40 percent of the reviewers did so. Similarly, ranking positions of applicant universities appear to receive less attention in the review process at this stage: in 2018, 25 percent of the

Figure 3: Comparison of the results of the surveys of reviewers of Clusters of Excellence in 2018 (proposal phase) and in 2023 (draft proposal phase): Other sources of information beyond the proposal submission documents



reviewers obtained information about rankings, but in 2023 only 14 percent did so. In 2018, 62 percent of the reviewers researched the complete publication lists of the participating researchers, but in 2023 only 46 percent did so. Homepages remained a relevant source of information: in 2018, 59 percent drew on the websites of the applicant universities as a source of information, while 57 percent did so in 2023.

It is possible that the shift observed here among the reviewers of an excellence programme reflects a more fundamental change in the assessment culture within the research system: the reviewers surveyed placed noticeably less emphasis on metrics or the total number of publications than in 2018 – entirely in line with the DFG's philosophy and its efforts in the context of CoARA. It also emerges clearly that the proposal documents are not the only basis for forming an opinion, and that the effect of a standardised CV template is therefore limited.

3 Conclusion

The interim results one year after the introduction of the new CV template are positive. Analyses to date indicate that applicants are making active use of the optional fields in the CV template. Frequent use is made of the field “Supplementary Career Information”. This serves to sensitise applicants and reviewers to the relevance of periods of absence or other ways in which personal circumstances impact on a person’s research career. In the interests of equity and diversity, the Head Office should also continue to point out that only a concrete description of this impact – such as extended qualification periods or a reduction in research results, conference visits, stays abroad or similar – provides a basis for appropriate consideration in the review process. On the other hand, simply listing bullet points about personal circumstances – such as “children” or “first generation academic” – without explaining their impact on the research career can hardly be taken into account by the reviewers. The same seems to apply to periods of absence in the more distant past. The impact of these periods is no longer discernible at an advanced career stage. Therefore, this information could be omitted if it is no longer relevant to the review.

There were uncertainties among applicants when completing the list of publications (section “Scientific Results”). The DFG has already taken action here: in addition to providing extensive FAQs on the DFG homepage, it has also made editorial adjustments to the explanatory texts in the CV template, which is to be updated accordingly and published.

With regard to how the reviewers handle the CV template, analyses to date do indicate certain trends, e.g. with regard to the sufficient informational value of the CVs. Based on the data collected, however, it is not possible to draw any definitive conclusions about whether the CV template makes it easier for reviewers to locate information, make comparisons or save time; nor is it possible to identify common approaches of reviewers how to consider different dimensions of performance or information in the CV during the review process.

The DFG Head Office will continue to monitor the use of the CV template as a basis for improved performance evaluation in order to be able to make adjustments should further changes be required.

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