17.07.2025

Research assessment and its reform

CoARA and the DFG

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Today’s session

9:00 Overview presentation

Research assessment and its reform

9:30 Group discussions

Table A: Applicant’s perspective

Table B: Reviewer’s perspective

Table C: The science system under review

10:00 Collecting inputs, final discussion

Overview presentation Contents

1. A need for reform
2. CoARA & Co.: reform initiatives
3. Some recent changes at DFG
4. What (else) can we (all) do?

A need for **reform**

Research Assessment

Manuscripts for submission

Institutional reviews (MPI, Leibniz etc.)

Hiring, applications for positions

Academic prizes

Tenure Review

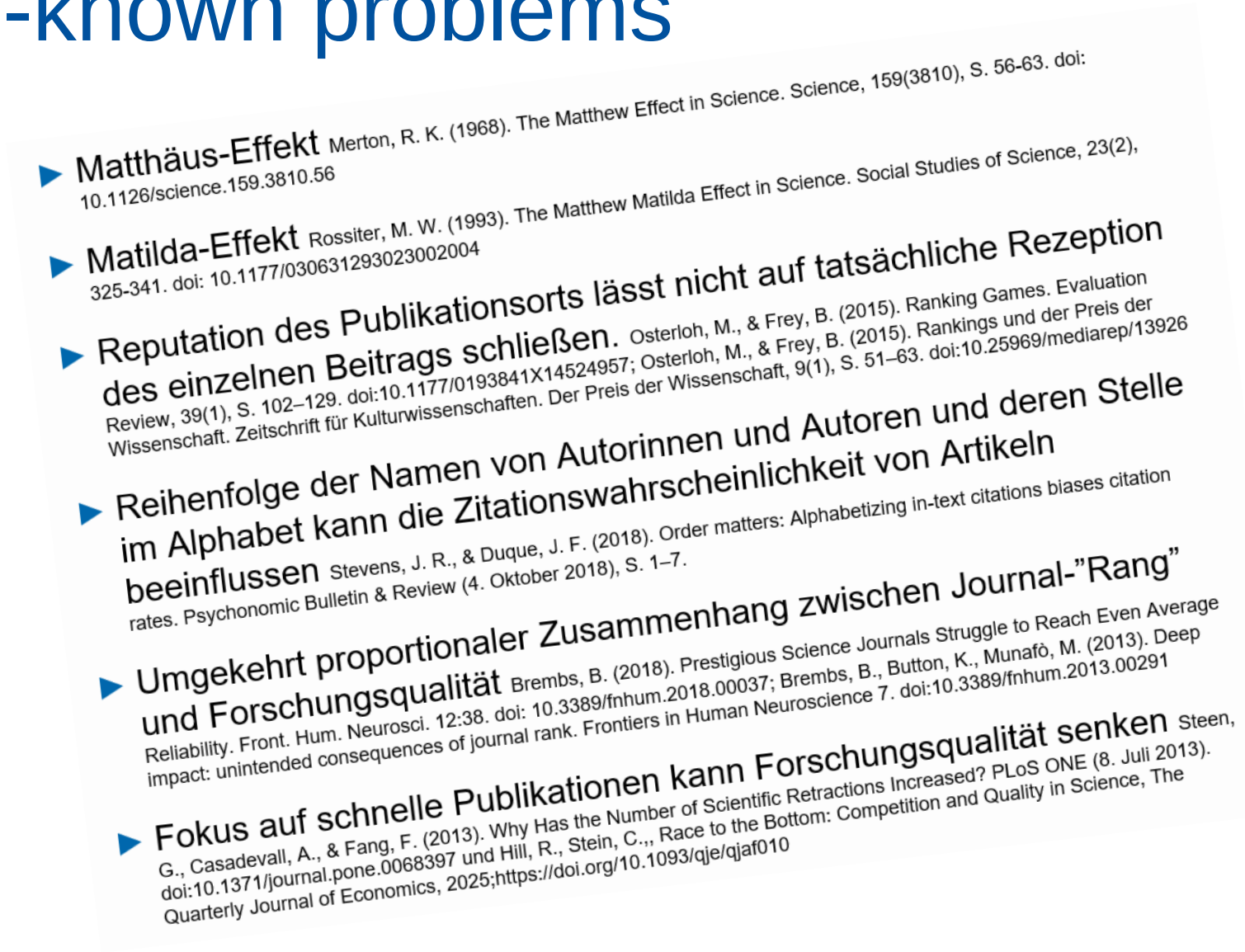
Grant applications

A lot of reviewing… a lot of incentives to „cut corners“

Research Assessment
(Increasingly) well-known problems

- Inappropriate use of (quantitative and journal-centric) proxies **lowers the quality of research assessment**…

  …and is (therefore) **detrimental to science itself**.



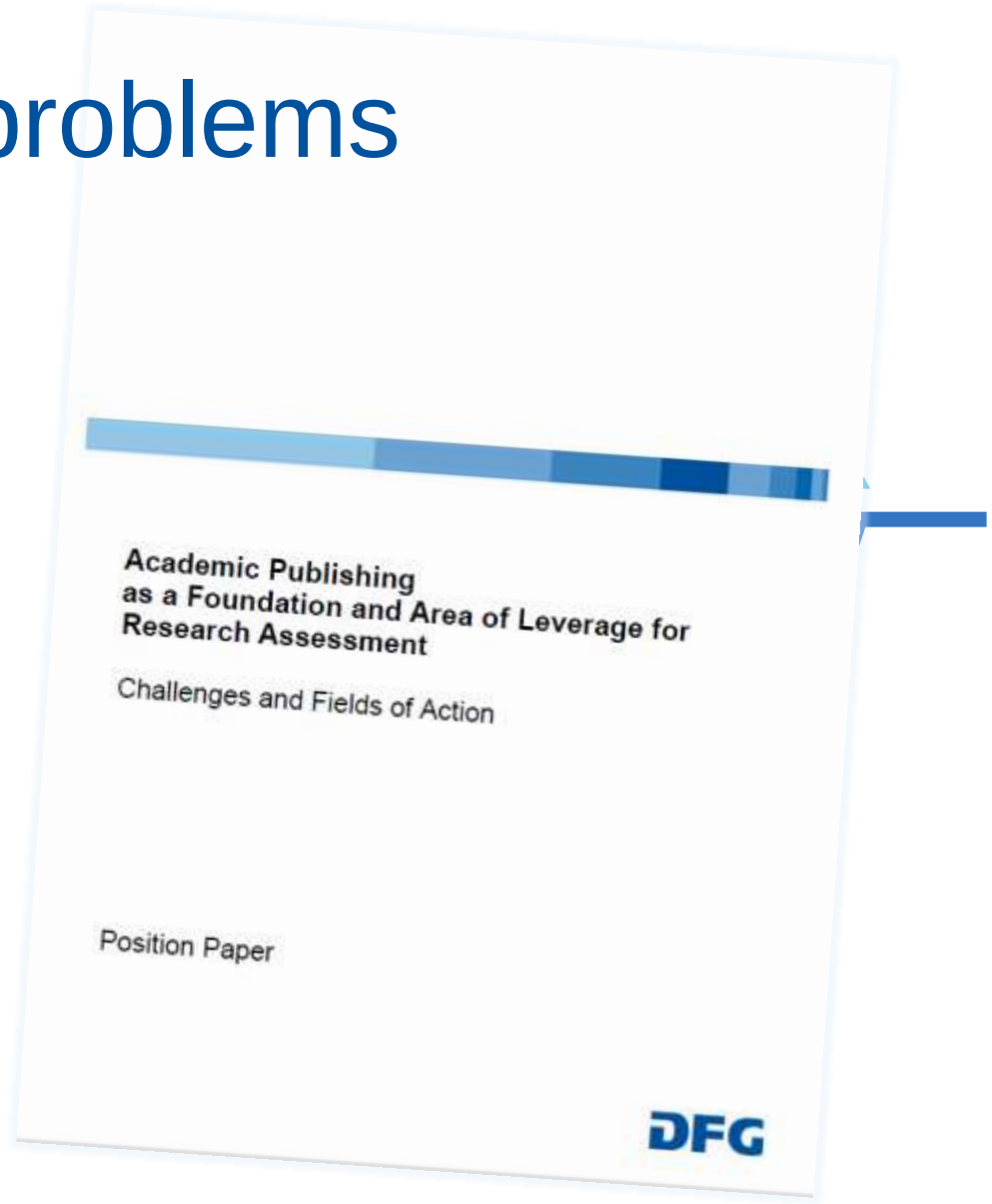
Research Assessment
(Increasingly) well-known problems

- Inappropriate use of (quantitative and journal-centric) proxies **lowers the quality of research assessment**…

  …and is (therefore) **detrimental to science itself**.

- It also contributes to an **unhealthy research culture** and to a **cost explosion** in the publication sector.

  This is also **detrimental to science**.



https://www.dfg.de/en/basics-topics/developments-within-the-research-system/publishing

Disadvantages of a (mostly) **prestige-driven, commercialized, journal-based** publication culture

- **Delay** between conclusion of research and publication
- **Reduced public awareness,** visibility, findability of topics which are (currently) not „marketable“
- **Insufficient recognition** of scientific output of the non-prestigious kinds

Impediments to the flow of (new) knowledge

- **Incentives for cutting corners** in research process and hasty publication
- Incentives for **violations of good scientific practice**

Loss of scientific quality

- **High cost of publication** (money for prestige)

Rising costs

Advancing publication culture: **needs and ideas**

- Establish and support **fast, open publication formats** (e.g. preprints)
- **Equal access for all topics** in reaching the academic public
- **Scientific community as owner** of data, publications and publication venues
- Recognition of **all forms of scientific output**

Improve the flow of scientific knowledge

→**Open Science position paper:** https://zenodo.org/record/7193838#.Y3zS6qSZNaT

→**DFG code:** https://wissenschaftliche-integritaet.de/er

- Incentivize **quality control in the entire cycle of research**
- Incentivize **good scientific practice** (e.g. via recognition for Open Science adherence)

Increase quality

→ Action Plan for Diamond Open Access: https://www.dfg.de/foerderung/info_wissenschaft/2022/info_wissenschaft_22_26/index.html https://zenodo.org/record/6282403#.Y3zTr6SZNaQ

- Establish and support **science-driven, affordable publication venues**

Lower the cost

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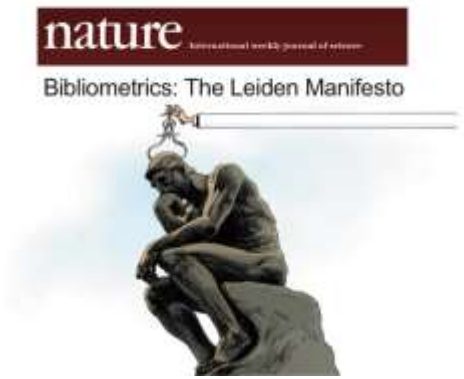
Lower the cost

Requires a reform of research assessment:

- **Ideas not metrics**
- **Recognition of broad variety of outputs**

CoARA & Co. – Reform initiatives



San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment
(DORA, 2012, https://sfdora.org/)

- Declaration originating from the Annual Meeting of the American Society for Cell Biology
- 18 proposals, directed at different groups (funders, institutions, publishers, data service providers, researchers etc.)

Leiden Manifesto for Research Metrics
(2015, http://www.leidenmanifesto.org/)

- 10 proposals against inappropriate uses of quantitative (mainly bibliometrical) data for purposes of research assessment (on different levels)

Hong Kong Principles for Assessing Researchers
(2019, https://www.wcrif.org/guidance/hong-kong-principles)

- Adopted at the 6th World Conference on Research Integrity

Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment
(CoARA, 2022, www.coara.eu)

Convergence on **two main demands**:

For purposes of research assessment (esp. of research proposals and indvidual achievements, e.g. in tenure review) **qualitative approaches should be prioritized** over quantitative proxies like JIF, h index etc.

For purposes of research assessment (esp. of research proposals and individual achievements), a **broader variety of practices and contributions to science should count** (not just journal articles)

Ideas and contents instead of mere numbers

Diversity of research practices and types of contributions

The Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment

► Core Commitments

1. Recognise the **diversity of contributions to, and careers in, research** in accordance with the needs and nature of the research
2. Base research assessment primarily on **qualitative evaluation** for which peer review is central, supported by responsible use of quantitative indicators
3. **Abandon inappropriate uses in research assessment of journal- and publication-based metrics**, in particular inappropriate uses of Journal Impact Factor (JIF) and h-index
4. **Avoid the use of rankings of research organisations** in research assessment

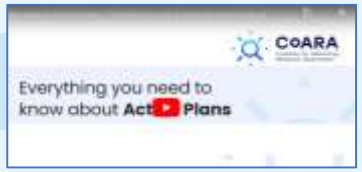
…an organisation with over 700 institutional members

Organisations from further countries have joined the coalition since June 2024:

- *Kenya*
- *Mexico*
- *Tanzania*

CoARA as an organisation of committed institutions

Commitments reflected in action plans



- ✓ Established corpus
- ✓ Webinar and other support mechanisms
- ✓ National level discourse

Active Working Groups

- ✓ Consultations and events
- ✓ First outputs
- ✓ Regular updates via the website and newsletter

Growing number of National Chapters

- ✓ 16 National Chapters
- ✓ Local implementation communities
- ✓ Liaising with ministries, outreach work, support to action plans

Cascade Funding

- ✓ Grants for institutions to implement the ARRA
- ✓ 80+ applications received for the first round and 25 projects selected

CoARA Events

- ✓ Online and hybrid
- ✓ Call for hosting events for CoARA members

Funded by the European Union

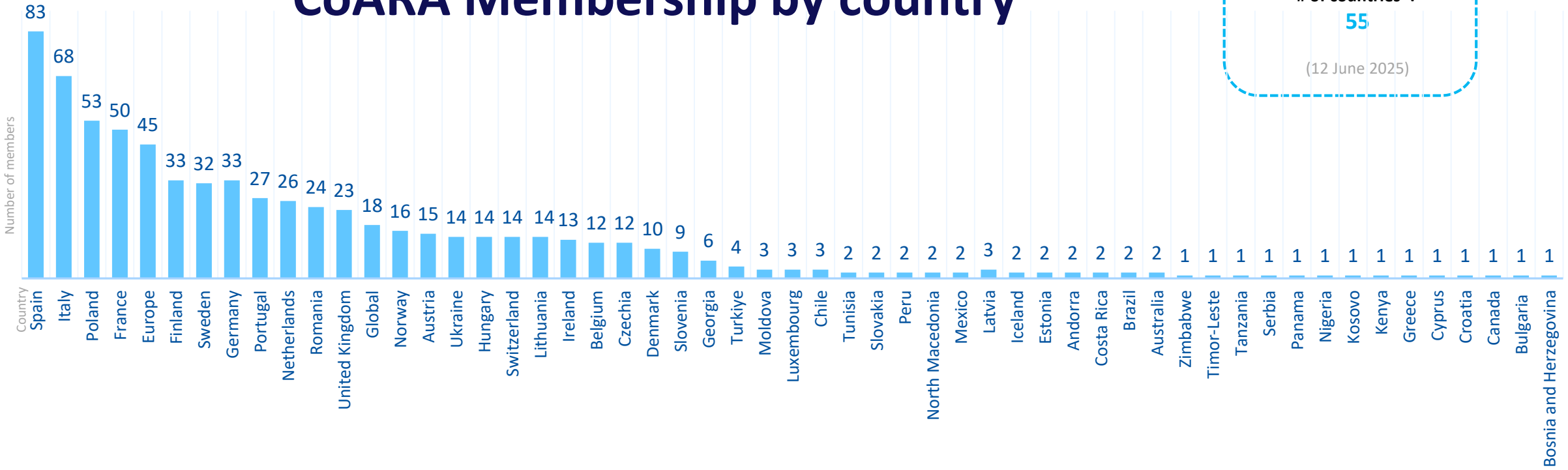
CoARA Boost

CoARA Membership by country

Membership total:
742

# of countries*:
55

(12 June 2025)



*excl. pan-European and global organisations

Overview of the CoARA Working Groups

- Reforming Academic Career Assessment
- Multilingualism and Language Biases in Research Assessment
- Towards Open Infrastructure for Responsible Research Assessment
- Recognizing and Rewarding Peer Review
- Global Framework for Research Evaluation in the Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH)
- Experiments in Assessment – Idea Generation, Co-Creation, and Piloting
- Responsible Metrics and Indicators
- Improving Practices in the Assessment of Research Proposals
- Towards Transformation, Transdisciplinarity, Applied/Practice-Based Research, and Impacts
- Ethics and Research Integrity Policy in Responsible Research Assessment for Data and Artificial Intelligence
- Early-and-Mid-Career Researchers (EMCRs) – Assessment and Research Culture
- TIER – Towards an Inclusive Evaluation of Research
- Supporting the Alignment of Research Assessment Systems with CoARA in Biomedical Disciplines Through Administrative Reforms and Governance

1st WGs Co-Chair meeting
17 November 2023

Some topics discussed in the CoARA Funders‘ Working Group

The **areas** of discussion include:

- What information to request from applicants (includes: format of CVs)
- Recruiting and guiding reviewers
- Structuring panel or review board sessions
- The roles of science officers and panel rapporteurs
- Formulating panel or board votes

among others.

Reports planned for autumn of 2025

With **discussion foci** such as the following:

- Balancing applicant expertise and project idea *(main target of review is likelihood of valuable results – applicant’s expertise is subservient to that)*
- Countering mainstream bias *(panel discussion rules in controversial cases, including “wild cards” e.g.)*
- Designing programmes and competition spaces to allow for diverse projects *(protected spaces for specific project types, other ways of supporting diverse projects e.g.)*
- Improving clarity in criteria and processes *(in programme descriptions and review guidelines, explicit leeway in interpreting and weighting of criteria e.g.)*
- Recognizing diverse and non-linear career paths *(sensitizing and training reviewers, role of chair e.g.)*

among others.

Some recent **changes at the DFG**

A tradition of qualitative assessment

1998 Memorandum „Safeguarding Good Scientific Practice“:

„Universities and research institutes shall always give originality and quality precedence over quantity in their criteria for performance evaluation“ (Recommendation 6)

on **risks and downsides of quantitative modes of assessment** (S. 73f)

2004 Senate Commission for Clinical Resarch DFG on performance-based funding („Leistungsorientierte Mittelvergabe“, LOM):

emphasizes the value of a **qualitative assessment** of proposals and of the performance of individual researchers

2010 „Quality before Quantity“ regarding cited or mentioned previous works in applications: maximum of ten entries

Continuing the tradition of qualitative assessment

2022 Policy package supporting qualitative mode of assessment:

- **Novel CV template** with optional narrative elements (on biography, activities in the research system e.g.)

  Separate spaces for **different types of published scientific results** (category A for peer reviewed journal or book publications; category B for other forms of published results)

- Previous work mentioned in application must be **explicitly summarized and linked to current proposal**

DFG Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft

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Information for Researchers, No. 61 | September 1, 2022

Package of Measures to Support a Shift in the Culture of Research Assessment

DFG changes proposal forms and introduces mandatory CV template / The aim is to support a shift in the culture of research assessment / Improvement of equal opportunity practices

Successful science and research require suitable framework conditions. The Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) ensures these conditions by regularly conducting analyses, providing the relevant information and adapting its procedures accordingly. The DFG set out the challenges and fields of action in a position paper on academic publishing published in May of this year: it sees both the academic community as a whole and itself as a funding organisation as being responsible for initiating a cultural shift towards research assessment that is geared more towards equal opportunity and attaches even greater importance to the substance of research. In the interests of bringing about such a shift, it is up to research funding organisations to broaden the spectrum of accepted publication formats, to attach greater value to content-based evidence of achievement and to strengthen the recipient side of publishing. The DFG has launched a comprehensive and far-reaching package of measures in order to fulfil this mandate.

Binding CV template across all funding programmes

For this reason, the assessment of a researcher's accomplishments must be holistic and based on substantive qualitative criteria. In order to strengthen qualitative evaluation criteria over quantitative indicators, the DFG will be introducing a curriculum vitae template that will be mandatory across all programmes from 1 March 2023 (the template will be adapted shortly for proposals under the Collaborative Research Centre and Research Training Group programmes; information will be provided separately in this regard). The template adopted by the DFG Senate allows applicants to provide both narrative and tabular information, thereby facilitating a holistic view of the applicant's academic career in the review and evaluation process.

In addition to the mandatory information required in order to assess eligibility, applicants may also provide details of special circumstances or additional services to scholarship such as committee activities or the establishment of research infrastructures. As such, the template provides the basis for a qualitatively sound assessment of academic performance that takes greater account of the respective stage of the individual's life and career. Accordingly, reviewers are now instructed to consider applicants' academic performance in the context of their individual curriculum vitae and career stage.

Publication details in proposals and CVs

Performance assessment based on content-related qualitative criteria also explicitly includes ensuring that the entire

see https://www.dfg.de/en/news/news-topics/announcements proposals/2022/info-wissenschaft-22-61

New CV templates (since September 2022)

Supplementary Career Information *optional; free text*

[free text, please overwrite]

Activities in the Research System *optional, free text*

Here you can provide information on other activities you have pursued within the research system. This includes committee involvement, activities in the field of academic self-governance, organisation of academic events, activities in teaching and mentoring.

[free text, please overwrite]

Supervision of Researchers in Early Career Phases *optional, free text*

Curriculum Vitae [09/22]:
https://www.dfg.de/formulare/53_200_elan/53_200_de_elan.rtf

New CV templates (since September 2022)

Two categories of scientific results
… to ensure that „non-classical“ contributions are visible

Scientific Results *Part A required, Part B optional; free text*

Please indicate here your most important published scientific results (see also "Guidelines for Preparing Publication Lists", DFG form 1.91. If available, please also provide persistent identifiers (e.g. DOI/Digital Object Identifier), preferably by stating the number, otherwise by naming the URL. Open access publications should be designated accordingly.
Details of quantitative metrics such as impact factors and h-indices are not required and are not considered as part of the review.
Please also explain – where possible – how you were involved in the published findings and/or explain why you have listed the publication or the academic contribution here.

These details fall into two categories:

Category A *required, free text*

In this category please enter articles in peer-reviewed journals, peer-reviewed contributions to conferences or anthology volumes, and book publications (see also DFG form 1.91). A ***maximum of ten items*** *may be listed.*

[free text, please overwrite]

Category B *optional, free text*

Here you can cite any other form of published research results. This might include articles on preprint servers and non-peer-reviewed contributions to conferences or anthology volumes, data sets, protocols of clinical trials, software packages, patents applied for and granted, blog contributions, infrastructures or transfer. You may also indicate other forms of academic output here, such as contributions to the (technical) infrastructure of an academic community (including in an international context) and contributions to science communication. ***This second category is also restricted to a maximum of ten items.***

[free text, please overwrite]

Curriculum Vitae [09/22]:
https://www.dfg.de/formulare/53_200_elan/53_200_de_elan.rtf

Applicants are asked to discuss their previous work / publications – not just list them

1 Starting point

State of the art and preliminary work

For new proposals please explain briefly and precisely the state of the art in your field in its direct relationship to your project. This description should make clear in which context you situate your own research and in what areas you intend to make a unique, innovative, promising contribution. Indicate the current state of your preliminary work. This description must be concise and understandable without referring to additional literature.

Proposal preparation instructions [03/24] („Leitfaden“)
https://www.dfg.de/formulare/54_01/54_01_en.pdf

Changes to DFG proposals and their review (September 2022)

Reviewers asked to recognize full breadth of scientific contributions, avoid metrics

Assessment of the achievement of a researcher must be carried out in its entirety and based on **substantive qualitative criteria**. In addition to the publication of articles, books, data and software, other dimensions can be taken into account, such as involvement in teaching, academic self-administration, public relations or knowledge and technology transfer. Details of quantitative metrics such as impact factors and h-indices are not required and are not to be considered as part of the review.

General Guidelines for Reviews [09/24]:
https://www.dfg.de/formulare/10_20/10_20_en.pdf

CoARA and the DFG – connecting the discussions

…stay tuned for further developments!

Feeding ideas from CoARA back into the DFG

Do you have any **questions or suggestions?**

What (else) **can we all do?**

Group discussions until 10.00

Change tables as you like (e.g. after 10 or 15 minutes)

10.00 collecting inputs, final round

A

The applicant‘s perspective

How should funders like the DFG (and other institutions?) change their assessment practices / procedures?

B

The reviewer‘s perspective

How can reviewers be motivated / incentivized / trained / informed to review in a broad and qualitative way?

C

The science system under review

If you could change fundamental aspects of the science system, what would that be? (Unrealistic answers allowed!)

Further information:

www.dfg.de

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