Edge Hill University statement on responsible metrics

# 1 Introduction

The use of metrics to measure research performance has grown considerably in recent years, as

have the types of citation tools and indicators. In September 2018, Edge Hill University signed DORA

([San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment](https://sfdora.org/)) to reflect our commitment to using metrics and

indicators in a fair and transparent way. Since then, we have been developing our own approach to

the responsible use of metrics, reflecting and building on the ten principles enshrined in the [Leiden](http://www.leidenmanifesto.org/)

[Manifesto](http://www.leidenmanifesto.org/). When using any indicators to measure research performance, we commit abiding by

these principles. We also recognise that bibliometrics is a field that is developing fast and that we

need to keep the principles under review to ensure that they are fit for purpose in the longer term.

2 Our approach to the ten Leiden Principles

# 2.1 Quantitative evaluation should support qualitative, expert assessment

Where quantitative indicators are used, these will only ever complement and not supplant peer

review which remains the gold standard for assessing research quality. This is particularly important

when assessing individual research performance where metrics are more problematic.

2.2 Measure performance against the research missions of the Institution, group or researcher

We commit to using metrics only that are relevant to the particular research mission of the

department, faculty or researchers recognising that there are differences which account for different

metrics. We will use a defined and balanced set of measures that are normalised by subject. We will

also take account of potential sources of bias and aim to reduce them: such a consideration applies,

for example, to the chosen source of assessment data, career stage and full-time equivalent (FTE)

status of the individual being assessed, or their race, gender or disability status. It is acknowledged,

for example, that the most widely used citation databases are not equally representative of all our

disciplines or output types (e.g. monographs), and that publishing practices vary by gender.

2.3 Protect excellence in locally relevant research

We recognise the bias towards English-language publications in many metrics and the tendency to

overplay international research, as opposed to national and local research that responds to specific

needs: e.g. the study of malaria in specific countries. If all researchers target English-language

journals with international reach, this can underplay the importance of local research which

addresses local needs.

2.4 Keep data collection and analytical processes open, transparent and simple

We commit to using indicators that are transparent and open so that individuals understand how

and why a metric was developed to foster appropriate scrutiny. While we believe simplicity is key to

developing useful metrics that are transparent, we acknowledge that simplistic methods can distort

the record.

2.5 Allow those evaluated to verify data and analysis

At present, Edge Hill does not use metrics and indicators to judge individual research performance:

e.g. for recruitment progression, or promotion. Should individuals wish to make statements about

their own performance when making a case, they should use metrics that are contextualised and

should make it clear to the reader how the metric is calculated and why it is a useful indicator in the

particular circumstances. Account for variation by field in publication and citation practices

We acknowledge that certain types of output are not well-served by many of the most commonly

cited metrics: for example, monographs will not to feature well in metrics that are largely based on

indexing journals. It is important, therefore, to be specific about the context to ensure the metrics

chosen provide a fair representation; so, for example, mathematicians are not compared with

theologians. Such an approach would preclude the use of crude of metrics such as the journal

impact factor that are unsuitable for cross-field comparison. Similarly, the journal impact factor (JIF)

is not used to indicate the quality of articles.

A standard normalising technique is to use percentiles: each paper is weighted on the basis of the

percentile to which it belongs in the citation distribution of its field (the top 1%, 10% or 20%, for

example – this is the method being used in REF2021 for a limited number of UOAs).

2.6 Base assessment of individual researchers on a qualitative judgement of their portfolio

Different indicators can give different outcomes; others are biased towards longer careers etc. It is

important, therefore, that assessment used for the purposes of recruitment and advancement is

peer review of the researcher’s work as a whole.

2.7 Avoid misplaced concreteness and false precision

Metrics and other indicators can give the impression of objectivity and simplicity, but we

acknowledge that they have different methodologies which are often contested. It is easy to believe

that they are robust and that the more decimal places the better but, in fact, it just highlights

insignificant differences: as such, we commit to using metrics to one decimal place only.

2.8 Recognise the systemic effects of assessment and indicators

Using metrics to measure performance can drive behaviour in a certain way with unintended

consequences. We will not use a single metric (or metrics alone) to measure performance of an

individual, department or faculty to ensure that a single metric does not drive behaviour.

2.9 Scrutinise indicators regularly and update them

We recognise that the field of bibliometrics is changing and the goals and research strategy of the

University, faculties and departments also change and develop. It is important, therefore, that the indicators we use and how we use them are reviewed regularly. We commit to a formal bi-annual

review by the University’s Research and Innovation Committee (URIC).

3 Research indicators at Edge Hill University

The University’s research strategy for 2021-2026 is currently under development. Key indicators will

be identified as performance targets for the institution and reviewed annually. These indicators will

not be disaggregated to targets for individual researchers. The environment today means that many

league tables include a range of metrics and indicators: we need to remain alert to how these are

being used and how best to engage with them.