Organised by EUA and hosted by the University Foundation on 14 May 2019 in Brussels, Belgium. Sponsored by the University of Lorraine (France), University of Liège (Belgium), Open University of Catalonia (Spain), Medical University of Graz (Austria) and University of Zurich (Switzerland)

The European University Association (EUA) organised its first workshop on research assessment in the transition to Open Science on 14 May 2019 in Brussels, Belgium. Focused on researcher recruitment and career progression, the event was attended by 131 academic leaders, researchers and professional staff attended the event from universities and partner organisations in 24 European countries.

The main objective of the workshop was to bring together universities that are interested in or actively taking steps to revisit their approach to research assessment. The programme encouraged participants to exchange views on current trends and innovative practices from across Europe, as well as start a dialogue on ways forward.

During the workshop, several key issues emerged from the presentations and the question and answer sessions with the audience.

Revisiting research assessment in the transition to Open Science

Workshop participants shared a consensus on the need to revisit research assessment approaches. Stephen Curry (Imperial College London, United Kingdom) set the stage for the day’s discussions by unpacking how “success” is currently defined and measured in academia, as well as making a compelling case for the need to improve our approaches on both fronts.

Especially, but not exclusively in the transition to Open Science, much remains to be done to provide researchers with the right incentives and rewards for their careers. Both Paul Wouters (Leiden University, Netherlands) and Sabina Leonelli (University of Exeter, United Kingdom) made this clear in their presentations of the latest efforts to develop more accurate, transparent and responsible approaches to research evaluation.

A practice-led approach for change

The workshop programme included discussions on a wide range of new and innovative approaches being developed and implemented already by universities across Europe. Rik Van de Walle (Ghent University, Belgium) presented his institution’s new evaluation and career promotion model for professorial staff. Importantly, Ghent is moving away from a quantitative assessment approach, replacing indicators with qualitative methods, to allow greater freedom and responsibility for its professors.

Other practices covered in the programme came from a Europe-wide call for contributions launched by EUA in the run-up to the workshop. Marta Aymerich (Open University of Catalonia, Spain), Tamara Antona Jimeno (International University of La Rioja, Spain) and Aurelio Ruiz (Pompeu Fabra University, Spain) presented practical examples of academic leadership providing a strategic direction and funding. Sarah Coombs (Saxion University of Applied Sciences, Netherlands), Rolf Hvidtfeldt (Aalborg University, Denmark) and Lorna Wildgaard (University of Copenhagen, Denmark) presented
contributions on the latest innovations related to scholarly metrics in the transition to Open Science.

A common theme throughout many presentations was the distinction between changing rules and procedures and bringing about a culture shift. Stephen Curry, Rik Van de Walle, Stephan Kuster (Science Europe) and Eva Méndez Rodríguez (Charles III University of Madrid, Spain) in particular pointed out the greater challenge of changing the way we think about and value “success” in research.

Towards a concerted approach

Revisiting research assessment procedures is a shared responsibility and requires a concerted approach uniting the main actors. Presentations and discussions during the workshop called for researchers, universities and other research performing organisations, research funders and policymakers to work together on developing and implementing more accurate, transparent and responsible approaches to research evaluation.

Clear communication and dialogue between actors were highlighted as key factors. Presentations by Eva Méndez Rodríguez and doctoral candidate Noémie Aubert Bonn (University of Hasselt, Belgium) in particular made this clear by stating: “(Darling), we need to talk!” While the workshop reflected a general consensus on the need for change, Noémie Aubert Bonn pointed out that individual actors have different priorities and often feel unable to act on their own. Starting a conversation is crucial to overcome both issues and to start building a shared agenda for change.

Taking a first step towards a concerted approach, EUA and Science Europe presented a joint statement on combining their efforts to improve scholarly research assessment methodologies. Martine Rahier, Vice-President of EUA, and Stephan Kuster, Secretary General of Science Europe, described it as a sign of their commitment to working together on building a strong dialogue between their members.

The workshop concluded with a panel discussion on how different actors can work together on rethinking the rewards given to researchers for past achievement and the incentives that shape their future careers. Representing the main actors, the panel consisted of Rene von Schomberg (European Commission), Noémie Aubert Bonn, John-Arne Røttingen (Research Council of Norway), Véronique Halloin (Fonds de la Recherche Scientifique (FRS-FNRS), Belgium), Catriona MacCallum (Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association (OASPA)) and Eva Méndez Rodríguez.

Take-home message

The workshop concluded with Bernard Rentier (University of Liège, Belgium) summarising the key issues that emerged during the day. The main take-home message was that the transition to Open Science will not be possible without a broad consensus on how research assessment practices can better reflect the changing landscape of research and innovation, especially the emergence of Open Science. This is a responsibility for the main actors who already share a broad consensus on the need for change, but must engage in further dialogue on a clear strategy on how to move forward.

EUA wishes to engage further with other actors and to join forces in revisiting research assessment procedures. In the second half of 2019, we will publish a comprehensive overview of research evaluation methods developed and implemented by European universities, based on a Europe-wide consultation of universities. The outcomes of this workshop, together with the reflections we published in our briefing on key concepts, issues and actors, will feed into this report and we encourage everyone to get in touch with us at research@eua.eu with further comments and suggestions.