

Statement of principles for the use of metrics in evaluating Nottingham Trent University's research

Background

In an increasingly competitive external environment, research assessment and management is a necessary activity. Performance metrics are increasingly used in UK universities and can provide a means of evaluating research activities; in particular, metrics are used in the Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings and some areas within the Research Excellence Framework (REF). It is within this external environment that NTU has taken the decision to utilise a range of metrics in conjunction with qualitative measures to evaluate research output at the university.

The University's position

This document outlines the University approach to metrics-based research assessment. These assessment and management activities require expert judgement and it is expected that indicators may inform but never replace this expert judgement.

The statement has been informed by, and closely aligns with, the Leiden Manifesto¹. The document is intended to act as an enabling code of good practice, to be used in conjunction with the NTU '[Menu of metrics](#)'. Following this approach, the University will adhere to the following principles:

1) Quantitative evaluation should support qualitative, expert assessment

Metrics may be used in a variety of processes at NTU; however, these will supplement rather than replace expert assessment of both research outputs and the context in which they sit, and are not regarded as a substitute for the peer review process.

2) Measure performance against the research missions of the institution, group or researcher

There will always be a clearly articulated rationale for the use of metrics, and this will align with relevant Departmental, School and University strategies. It is expected that this alignment will be specifically stated within any analysis undertaken.

3) Protect excellence in locally relevant research

It is acknowledged that the majority of citation databases are intrinsically biased towards English-language publications. NTU will ensure, therefore, that academics producing work in non-English languages will not be penalised as a result of this.

4) Keep data collection and analytical processes open, transparent and simple

NTU will endeavour to strike a balance between simple transparent metrics that may disadvantage certain subject areas, and more complex metrics that normalise for differences, but which may be more difficult for researchers to replicate. In accordance with this, assessors are able to select the metrics used to support evaluation at the individual and collective level from an NTU 'Menu of metrics' which includes information on their advantages, disadvantages and potential uses. When reporting quantitative data NTU will always:

- a. Identify the underlying metric data source (due to variance in coverage)

¹ <http://www.leidenmanifesto.org/>

- b. Show the period being considered (some metrics are vulnerable or incomplete outside of a full calendar year)
- c. Specify the currency of information, i.e. when it was last updated
- d. Include a link to the NTU 'Menu of metrics' in order to provide contextual information in relation to factors that could bias interpretation of the data

5) Allow those evaluated to verify data and analysis

Assessment criteria and any quantitative data used will be transparent and available (on request) to those being assessed. The citation tools used to collect and monitor research publication data will continue to be made openly available to ensure that researchers can review data about their work.

6) Account for variation by field in publication and citation practices

NTU recognises that research practices vary considerably by discipline (including by publication frequency, collaboration level and output type) and consequently some disciplines are better served by metrics. NTU will ensure that these are normalised where appropriate and not used in isolation or out of context.

7) Base assessment of individual researchers on a qualitative judgement of their portfolio

NTU recognises and takes into consideration the influence of discipline, age, gender, ethnicity and career stage on metrics. It is acknowledged that indicators do not accurately reflect the nuances of a research communication activity, many of which do not lend themselves to simple quantitative measures. Therefore, data collection, evaluation and use will always be undertaken in a manner consistent with the University's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy.

8) Avoid misplaced concreteness and false precision

NTU will utilise a selection of appropriate indicators accompanied by the contextual commentary included within the NTU 'Menu of metrics'; NTU will be vigilant to the effect of outliers and their potential to skew data.

9) Recognise the systemic effects of assessment and indicators

Metrics have the potential to pervert the system they are designed to assess, and so to minimise this effect a selection of indicators will be used.

10) Scrutinize indicators regularly and update them

As the research activity of the University develops and wider external proprieties and methods of assessments evolve, indicators used at NTU will be reviewed regularly and modified as appropriate. This statement will reviewed annually by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research and Innovation in consultation with the University Research Committee.