

Centre for Research Quality and Policy Impact Studies (R-QUEST)

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Website: www.r-quest.no

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Research partners

- NIFU, Nordic Institute for Studies in Innovation, Research and Education (host institution)
- Danish Centre for Studies in Research and Research Policy/CFA, Aarhus University
- Department of Political Science, University of Oslo
- Centre for Science and Technology Studies (CWTS), Leiden University
- Division of History of Science, Technology and Environment, KTH, Stockholm
- The Manchester Institute of Innovation Research (MIIoR), University of Manchester

User partners

- DNVA – The Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters
- UHR - The Norwegian Association of Higher Education Institutions
- FFA - Association of Norwegian Research Institutes
- NHO - Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise
- OUS - Oslo University Hospital
- UiO - University of Oslo
- SINTEF

Aims

The aim of R-QUEST is to enable research organisations and policy actors to understand and tackle issues around the effectiveness and efficiency of excellence policy, including key issues in current policy debates such as:

- how to create or identify frontier/ground-breaking science and world-leading research groups
- link between scientific excellence and societal impact
- policies for providing resilient research environments/critical mass, including the structure and size of research organisations, as well as how to balance funding for excellence initiatives and for generally good research environments
- demands for responsible and confidence-building research related to grand societal challenges
- concerns about the workings of the quality assurance systems in research in the contexts of scholarly publishing, research evaluation and performance-based funding
- the potential and limitations, and the use and abuse, of metrics for the measurement and stimulation of research quality.

Research questions and strands

The centre addresses three closely related questions:

1. *What is research quality? How are notions of research quality negotiated, established and practiced, and what are the mechanisms through which these notions affect policy?*
2. *What are the drivers of high quality research, and what is the role of policy in developing outstanding research?*
3. *What are the effects of high quality research on the society?*

We explore these questions through three interrelated research stands:

1) Understanding high research quality

Since the mid-1980ies, negotiating and establishing notions of research quality has shifted from being the domain of specialised knowledge communities, to become a complex process involving negotiating the interests of the research policy environments and funding agencies (policy dominated research spaces) on the one hand, and the knowledge communities/research organisations (science oriented research fields) on the other. This implies that e.g. considerations for 'accountability' and 'usefulness' are permeating the process of establishing and maintaining notions of research quality. We see increased emphasis on the importance of research for the society at large, as well as on 'excellence' and 'path-breaking research'.

In this strand we will study the notion of quality in different domains – including national and European policy arenas/funding agencies, interdisciplinary, applied and disciplinary research communities – as well as the interactions between them. The aim is to better understand the foundations and politics of the notion of research quality.

2) Conditions for high research quality

Changing governance regimes (from academic oligarchy to New Public Management) including changes in regulatory framework conditions and funding rationales are influencing the institutional and organizational conditions of research organizations. This has however developed differently in different countries, generating different conditions for research. Studies addressing these issues have so far primarily focused on explaining differences on the i) macro-level, e.g. issues pertaining to the national innovation systems, and ii) differences on the micro-level, while few have combined the micro, meso and macro-level. We will link these three levels and enhance our understanding of the individual, local, organizational, institutional and national factors contributing to high research performance:

2a) Country level studies

How do we understand and explain national research performance? What are the links between national policy configurations and performance at the systemic level? To what extent do database-changes, increased internationalisation, preferential attachment mechanisms etc. influence our measurements? These are central research questions in this Strand, which in different national contexts will examine the long-term relationships between changes in policy (including changes in the funding mechanisms, funding volume, governance mechanisms, training- and recruitment mechanisms etc.) and changes in in research performance measured on various publication- and citation indicators.

2b) Research groups and organisations

How is quality negotiated between researchers (representing different research fields) and the university management? How do local organisational capabilities (e.g. internal policies, career systems, allocation of resources) and the institutional environment make a difference for the conditions of high quality research? How do different mechanisms for evaluating research quality (e.g. indicators, peer review) affect the practices of the organisation and the researchers? This strand will explore the role of the research organisations (universities, university hospitals, public research institutes) in developing and facilitating high quality research. We will do this through surveys and case studies of research groups in different research organisations, different fields and in different national contexts.

3) Effects on society and economy

What is the relation between scientific and societal impact? To what degree can societal impact be documented and measured? And how is societal value created in various fields of research? Can interacting with society and creating societal value be regarded as an aspect of research quality, or is societal impact independent of research quality? Can societal impact be hampered or enhanced by how it is organized and funded? Does mission-oriented research generally have more societal relevance and impact than academic research?

These are some of the research questions that we will explore in this strand, where the relation between research quality and societal impact will have the main focus. We will collect international experiences from documenting and evaluating societal impact, and we will design and perform our own empirical projects. Studies of societal impact of research is a relatively new field that also depends on the development of concepts. From different perspectives, societal impact can be seen as a result or a process, as an end product or as an interaction, as an external or internal value in research, as something helpful, but also as possibly harmful to society.