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Stepping Out of the Rat Race

Saying it wants to "again become a place where talent feels valued and nurtured," Ghent University overhauls its system for faculty evaluation to de-emphasize quantitative metrics and annual progress reports. Professors will be asked about their goals and what they are proud of.

By [Elizabeth Redden](#) // January 23, 2019

3 COMMENTS 💬

It was an unusual press release, to say the least, framed more as a call to arms than a communiqué about a new personnel policy.

"Ghent University is deliberately choosing to step out of the rat race between individuals, departments and universities. We no longer wish to participate in the ranking of people," said [the press release](#) announcing the Ghent's new policy for evaluating faculty performance, including for tenure.



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Ghent University

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<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2019/01/23/ghent-university-belgium-embraces-new-approach-faculty-evaluation-less-focused>

"It is a common complaint among academic staff that the mountain of paperwork, the cumbersome procedures and the administrative burden have grown to proportions that are barely controllable," the release from Ghent, which is located in the Flemish region of Belgium, continued. "Furthermore, the academic staff is increasingly put under pressure to count publications, citations and doctorates, on the basis of which funds are being allocated. The intense competition for funding often prevails over any possible collaboration across the boundaries of research groups, faculties and -- why not -- universities. With a new evaluation policy, Ghent University wants to address these concerns and at the same time breathe new life into its career guidance policy. Thus, the university can again become a place where talent feels valued and nurtured."

The release clearly struck a chord with many international academics and was shared widely on social media. *Inside Higher Ed* spoke with Ghent's rector, Rik Van de Walle, about what is changing and why.

Van de Walle said the university is moving from a primarily quantitative system for evaluating faculty performance to a more holistic model. The university has done away with annual task reports in which faculty had to report on plans for the coming year and what they did the year before. And it has moved from conducting evaluations of faculty every two to four years, depending on their rank, to every five years, to create an "evaluation break."

At the beginning of the five-year period, faculty will have to explain what their goals are, Van de Walle explained, "but we don't tell them which type of ambition they should go forth with. It's up to the professors themselves to let us know what they want to do not for the next year but for the next five years. That's the first major change."

The second major change, Van de Walle said, is an increased emphasis on coaching. "Every professor

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“The third thing we changed – in the past our evaluations were based very, very strongly on outputs metrics, while now the evaluation will be based on a feedback report coming from professors. So, the professors will have to write down at the end of the five-year period what they are proud of, what they believed they realized during the last five years, and we will not force them to report the number of publications or the number of Ph.Ds. [they supervise] or so on. Just like they had at the beginning, once again they will have the freedom to explain, to tell us what they believe are their major contributions they came up with during the last five years, so it’s really what you could call professor-driven, so to speak. It’s the ambition of the professor that is put on paper at the beginning of the five-year period and it’s the view of the professor at the end of that period on what happened in the last five years that will drive the evaluation at the end.”

The same committee that did the coaching will be doing the evaluating, sending its assessment of faculty performance to the Faculty Board. If the Faculty Board’s assessment is positive, the evaluation process ends there; if it is negative, it goes to university management for a final decision. For tenure-track faculty, the tenure decision will be made at the end of the first five-year evaluation period. For professors who already have tenure, a negative evaluation at a five-year mark will trigger a second evaluation two years later; after two successive negative evaluations, termination is possible (though not automatic).

“I really think it will change the culture in a really drastic way,” Van de Walle said of the new policy. “I think the pressure that people feel, the pressure towards slicing their publications, trying to get five publications out of a bunch of results instead of one major publication – this is something we really see in practice – this will disappear, at least partially because it’s not in their interest anymore.”

Before, he said, professors who went up for promotion were expected to deliver minimum numbers of

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The European University Association and Science Europe Join Efforts to Improve Scholarly Research Assessment Methodologies

14 May 2019

<https://www.scienceeurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Joint-Statement-EUA-SE-on-Research-Assessment.pdf>

Evaluating research and assessing researchers is fundamental to the research enterprise and core to the activities of research funders and research performing organisations, as well as universities. The European University Association (EUA) and Science Europe are committed to building a strong dialogue between their members, who share the responsibility of developing and implementing more accurate, open, transparent and responsible approaches, that better reflect the evolution of research activity in the digital era.

Today, the outcomes of scholarly research are often measured through methods based on quantitative, albeit approximate, indicators such as the journal impact factor. There is a need to move away from reductionist ways of assessing research, as well as to establish systems that better assess research potential. Universities, research funders and research performing organisations are well-placed to explore new and improved research assessment approaches, while also being indispensable in turning these innovations into systemic reforms.

EUA and Science Europe are committed to working together on building a strong dialogue between their members, with a view

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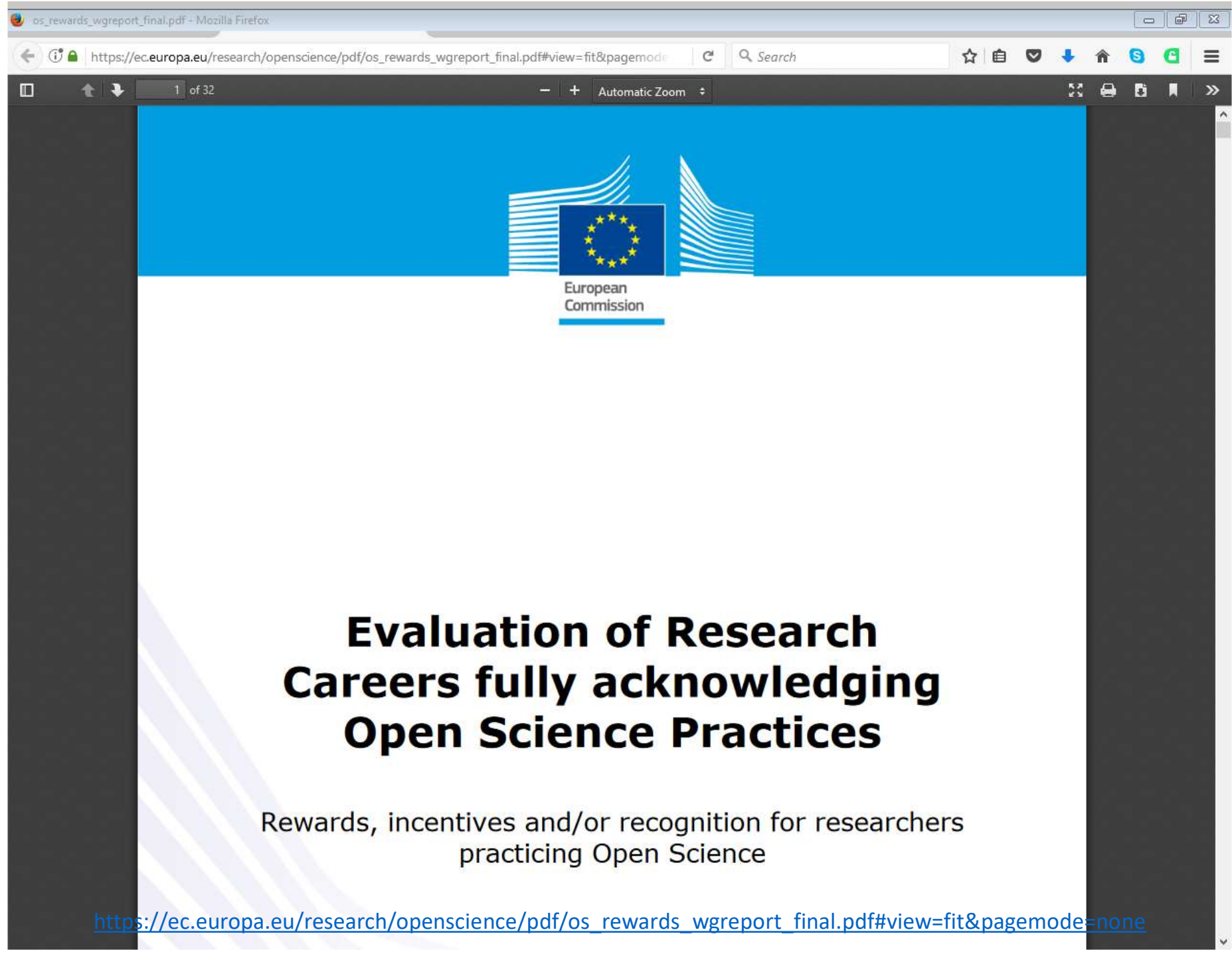
support necessary changes for a better balance between qualitative and quantitative research assessment approaches, aiming at evaluating the merits of scholarly research. Furthermore, novel criteria and methods need to be developed towards a **fairer and more transparent assessment of research, researchers and research teams**, conducive to selecting excellent proposals and researchers.

EUA and Science Europe are committed to working together on building a strong dialogue between their members, with a view to: (2)

recognise the diversity of research outputs and other relevant academic activities and their value in a manner that is appropriate to each research field and that challenges the overreliance on journal-based metrics.

EUA and Science Europe are committed to working together on building a strong dialogue between their members, with a view to: (3)

consider a broad range of criteria to reward and incentivise research quality as the fundamental principle of scholarly research, and ascertain assessment processes and methods that accurately reflect the vast dimensions of research quality and credit all scientific contributions appropriately



Evaluation of Research Careers fully acknowledging Open Science Practices

Rewards, incentives and/or recognition for researchers practicing Open Science

Open Science Career Assessment Matrix (OS-CAM)

Open Science activities

Possible evaluation criteria

RESEARCH OUTPUT

Research activity Pushing forward the boundaries of open science as a research topic

Publications Publishing in open access journals
Self-archiving in open access repositories

Datasets and research results Using the FAIR data principles
Adopting quality standards in open data management and open datasets
Making use of open data from other researchers

Open source Using open source software and other open tools
Developing new software and tools that are open to other users

Funding Securing funding for open science activities

RESEARCH PROCESS

Stakeholder engagement / citizen science Actively engaging society and research users in the research process
Sharing provisional research results with stakeholders through open platforms (e.g. Arxiv, Figshare)
Involving stakeholders in peer review processes

Collaboration and Interdisciplinarity Widening participation in research through open collaborative projects
Engaging in team science through diverse cross-disciplinary teams

Research integrity Being aware of the ethical and legal issues relating to data sharing, confidentiality, attribution and environmental impact of open science activities
Fully recognizing the contribution of others in research projects, including collaborators, co-authors, citizens, open data providers

Risk management Taking account of the risks involved in open science

SERVICE AND LEADERSHIP

Leadership Developing a vision and strategy on how to integrate OS practices in the normal practice of doing research
Driving policy and practice in open science
Being a role model in practicing open science

Academic standing Developing an international or national profile for open science activities
Contributing as editor or advisor for open science journals or bodies

Peer review Contributing to open peer review processes
Examining or assessing open research

Networking Participating in national and international networks relating to open

San Francisco Declaration on ...

www.ascb.org/dora/

San Francisco
DORA
Declaration on Research Assessment

HOME SIGN THE DECLARATION INSPIRATION AND GOOD PRACTICES A LETTER TO THOMSON REUTERS

The San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA), initiated by the American Society for Cell Biology (ASCB) together with a group of editors and publishers of scholarly journals, recognizes the need to improve the ways in which the outputs of scientific research are evaluated. The group met in December 2012 during the ASCB Annual Meeting in San Francisco and subsequently circulated a draft declaration among various stakeholders. DORA as it now stands has benefited from input by many of the original signers listed below. It is a worldwide initiative covering all scholarly disciplines. We encourage individuals and organizations who are concerned about the appropriate assessment of scientific research to sign DORA.

Download the Declaration (PDF) Download the DORA Logo (ZIP) Download the DORA Poster (PDF)

San Francisco DORA
Declaration on Research Assessment

San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment

Putting science into the assessment of research

There is a pressing need to improve the ways in which the output of scientific research is evaluated by funding agencies, academic institutions, and other parties.

To address this issue, a group of editors and publishers of scholarly journals met during the Annual Meeting of The American Society for Cell Biology (ASCB) in San Francisco, CA, on December 16, 2012. The group developed a set of recommendations, referred to as the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment. We invite interested parties across all scientific disciplines to indicate their support by adding their names to this Declaration.

The outputs from scientific research are many and varied, including: research articles reporting new knowledge,

IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTS
The conversation about research assessment continues....

Inspiration and Good Practices on Research Assessment

<http://www.ascb.org/dora>

1. Do not use journal-based metrics, such as Journal Impact Factors, as a surrogate measure of the quality of individual research articles, to assess an individual scientist's contributions, or in hiring, promotion, or funding decisions.

The San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA): <http://am.ascb.org/dora/>

<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/staff/staff-news/0115/16012015-ucl-signs-declaration-on-research-assessment>

“...for the purposes of research assessment, **consider the value & impact of all research outputs (including datasets and software) in addition to research publications, & consider a broad range of impact measures** including qualitative indicators of research impact, such as influence on policy & practice. Researchers should: “**...use a range of article metrics & indicators** on personal/supporting statements, as evidence of the impact of individual published articles & other research outputs”