



The EERQI Project: Bibliometrics as a basis for research quality assessment

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Colleagues will be aware that even before the 2008 RAE is complete, HEFCE is busy devising a new form of torture as a basis for future research quality assessment based more substantially – though to a degree that is still under discussion – on metrics. Central among the metrics under discussion are those provided by research citation indices.

Among the concerns expressed about the use of such metrics are those which draw attention to the inadequacy of existing citation indices, especially in the humanities and social sciences. Critics have pointed to the unrepresentativeness of the selection of journals which appear in the indices; the overwhelming domination of US publications; the absence of books (and especially single authored books); as well as more fundamental questions about the validity of citation as an indicator of quality. These criticisms raise, among others, the question as to whether a better (in particular a more comprehensive) citation index might be developed.

In parallel with these discussions, the European Educational Research Association (EERA) has itself taken an initiative to research the possibilities for bibliometric approaches to the assessment of research quality with a view to developing – among other things – a European Educational Research Quality Index (EERQI). EERA has of course an additional concern about existing citation indices to those listed above in so far as they are based almost exclusively on journals published in English. The EERQI focus is primarily on the idea of a multilingual citation index but the project will also explore what semantic analysis may (or, as I am inclined to believe, may not) reveal about research quality.

This work is led by the current Chair of EERA, Professor Ingrid Gogolin of the University of Hamburg, and is funded for three years under Framework Seven of EC research funding. The work is being conducted under a partnership agreement with a number of European educational research associations (EERA, BERA, EARLI and the Swiss Society for Educational Research), leading publishing houses (Wiley-Blackwell, Routledge Taylor and Francis,

Symposium, VS-Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften) and specialist research institutions (Xerox Research Centre Europe, Humboldt University Institute of Library and Information Science, Umeå University Faculty of Teacher Education, University of Lund University Libraries, Institut de Recherche et de Documentation Pédagogique, Neuchatel and the German Institute for International Educational Research at Frankfurt) – among others.

Framework Seven funding is hugely competitive and it is significant that the EERQI proposal has been successful. The early stages of the collaboration have been dominated by the bureaucratic requirements of the EC and establishing the terms of engagement of the different partners, but we hope to be moving quickly to the substantive tasks. A kick-off meeting was held at the University of Hamburg on 4-5 April 2008 and future meetings are planned around various aspects of the project. BERA will be participating primarily in the following areas:

- Specification of new scientific quality assessment indicators and methods for educational research;
- Verification of project results by scientific [academic] community;
- Final conference workshop for researchers and funding agencies and demonstration of the project results.

Jeremy Hoad and I are representing BERA in the collaboration and we shall do our best to keep BERA membership informed of developments. We would also be very pleased to hear from any BERA member who would like to contribute to the thinking in particular on the basis of insight into the processes of assessment of the quality of research publications. I should emphasise that though I am sympathetic to a European challenge to a US dominated instrument and while I think the research side of the project could be intriguing, I remain deeply sceptical of reliance on bibliometrics as a basis for research quality assessment. In particular I am anxious to anticipate the damaging consequences of such reliance in a UK context.

If you have any research or ideas you would like to contribute, please e-mail them to David at (d.bridges@uea.ac.uk). You may also, of course, contact Jeremy (jeremy.hoad@bera.ac.uk).