A Statement on the Responsible Use of Research Metrics at DCU

A core element of DCU's Vision is to be a globally-significant university that is renowned for its discovery and translation of knowledge to advance society. This commitment to world-class research is central to our strategic plan and to having our research globally recognised for both its excellence and its focus on societal needs.

A key requirement for research excellence is a culture that supports excellent research. DCU is committed to being a place that nurtures discovery and to having a research culture which reflects our values of research integrity, research excellence, creativity, collegiality, diversity, collaboration and openness.

Aligned to these values is the commitment to open, transparent, merit-based assessment of research across the university and the implementation of this guiding statement on the responsible use of research metrics. This statement serves to illuminate current positive practices in terms of responsible use of metrics in the assessment and analysis of research whilst also offering guidance on the responsible use of research metrics at all levels within DCU.

DCU values and celebrates the diversity of excellent research and the multiplicity of research output being produced across the breadth of disciplines which comprise the five Faculties in our University. It is therefore vital that assessment of research is fair and respectful and that metrics relating to research activity are used appropriately within the University.

Context

Research metrics, i.e. quantitative indicators of research performance, are used in research assessment and as proxy measurements of research quality both nationally and internationally. Research metrics can include bibliometrics (publication metrics), research income metrics and research supervision metrics.

The wealth of data now available on research outputs can often be very useful. In DCU, research metrics are currently utilised for a variety of reasons, such as, enabling peer-performance analysis at institutional or disciplinary level, assessing progress towards strategic goals, monitoring research performance against KPIs, informing publication strategies for individuals and units, and providing evidence of visibility and reach of research. External bodies such as ranking agencies also use them as part of their assessment of institutions.

However, with this proliferation of metrics comes an obligation on those using them to do so appropriately and fairly. There is no 'bad' metric per se, but there is potential for mis-use of metrics (e.g. the use of non-normalised metrics when comparing across disciplines, or the use of a single metric to evaluate an individual's impact). Metrics do have their limitations and must be considered in fitting contexts in order to make their contribution accurate and meaningful. For example, they are limited to the dataset from which they are drawn and disciplinary publication patterns should be considered when comparing across disciplines.

Research metrics can be used (alongside qualitative inputs) to evidence performance and impact at a variety of levels, e.g. the combined efforts of groups of researchers (of various sizes and experience),

of Schools, Centres, Faculties and the University as a whole. The more granular the assessment the greater the requirement for a nuanced and balanced approach to the use of metrics. This is the most apparent at the level of the individual, e.g. in the case of assessment for recruitment or promotional purposes. In these processes, a transparent array of both qualitative and quantitative information should be used to support and inform expert academic judgement.

A substantial international debate has ensued over the last decade or so attempting to define the responsible use of research metrics by institutions, funders, and publishers amongst others. Key documents emerging from this debate include the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA), the Leiden Manifesto, and the Metric Tide.

These documents have informed the principles outlined below.

DCU Guiding Principles:

This statement agrees a set of principles on the use of quantitative data/metrics on the evaluation and assessment of research activity at the University.

DCU will:

1. Be open, transparent and explicit about the criteria used to assess research performance in the University.
2. Ensure research metrics will be used to support but not supplant qualitative expert judgement and review.
3. Refrain from the use of venue-based metrics, such as JIF, in assessing the merits of a particular research output.
4. Ensure recruitment/promotion processes assess candidates across multiple research performance indicators. Clear guidelines on assessment procedures and criteria will be provided to candidates *and* reviewers.
5. Take into account disciplinary diversity in research output types (examples include, where relevant for each discipline, journal articles, monographs, edited collections, creative works, datasets, software, commissioned reports and in languages other than English).
6. Recognise research contributions in the form of impacts on wider society (e.g. impact on policy).
7. Ensure that assessment of performance at an individual level fully takes into consideration the circumstances of an individuals' career path (e.g. maternity leave, career break etc.) specifically incorporating principles enshrined in DCU Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Policies.

The Responsible Research Metrics Working Group, reporting to SMG, will have oversight of the implementation of these principles across university processes, embedding these principles in practice, and in raising awareness for all staff using metrics, ensuring those who utilise metrics do so in line with this statement.

Ongoing review and monitoring will take place to ensure our practices and processes align with these core principles.