

Unsettling Research Quality

Call for abstracts to Oslo workshop 21-22 September 2022

When scholars in fields such as science policy studies, sociology of science, higher education studies and science and technology studies talk about research quality, more often than not they talk about quality management systems that, were ‘built as if it were possible to avoid actually engaging (for instance, reading the papers) with the things whose quality are supposedly assessed and managed.’ (Kreitner cited in Valuation Studies/Board of editors, 2022: 2). Many studies around research quality indeed primarily focus on the ways citation counts, rankings and other bibliometric indicators are used to allow for comparisons between institutions, journals and researchers. In such contexts quality is usually equated with ‘performance’ and/or ‘excellence’. Critical studies of such phenomena, their history and their consequences are plenty (e.g. Hammarfelt & Rushforth 2017; Wilbers & Brankovic, 2021; de Rijcke et al., 2016). However, in these studies research quality still remains a black box. A few studies have addressed the question of quality head on. Dahler-Larsen's (2019) ‘Quality: from Plato to Performance’ details the history of quality and its prominence since the 1980s as something to be actively managed. Lamont’s (2009) ‘How Professor Think’ investigates how research quality is identified and deliberated among academics from different fields in review committees, and Paradeise and Thoenig (2015) address two competing regimes of ‘quality’, that of ‘reputation’ and of ‘excellence’, that higher education institutions’ actively aspire to.

R-QUEST (Centre for Research Quality and Policy Impact Studies) has similarly put quality centre stage. We have developed a conceptual framework to understand interactions between quality notions that originate in knowledge communities and those that originate in science policy (Langfeldt et al., 2019), and we have sought to open-up approaches to the assessment of research quality for the concerns of non-academic stakeholders (Franssen, forthcoming). To investigate different notions of research quality in practice we have taken a comparative approach and studied quality in three fields of science, Cardiology, Economics and Physics (Langfeldt et al., 2021; Reymert et al., 2020; Steffy, 2021). Another line of research has addressed the relation between citation indicators and (dimensions of) research quality (Aksnes et al., 2019).

Given the importance of notions of research quality for the processes and outcomes of research assessments, this workshop invites scholars from all above-mentioned fields to collectively unsettle, interrogate and rework research quality. Contributions might include topics like:

- Research quality and (inter/trans)disciplinarity (incl. comparative perspectives)
- Research quality and grand societal challenges
- The history of research quality notions
- The governance of research quality
- Research quality and metrics
- Responsible research assessment and quality

Important dates

- Submission of abstract (500-750 words): May 6th 2022 by email to Thomas Franssen (t.p.franssen@cwts.leidenuniv.nl) and Siri Borlaug (siri.borlaug@nifu.no)
- Submission of paper (4000-8000 words): 22nd of August 2022
- Workshop: 21-22 September 2022

Location and host

The workshop will take place in Oslo. R-QUEST (www.r-quest.no) will host lunches and dinner.

Literature

- Aksnes, D., Langfeldt, L. & Wouters, P. (2019). Citations, citation indicators, and research quality: An overview of basic concepts and theories. *Sage Open*, 9(1):1–17.
- Dahler-Larsen, P. (2019). *Quality: From Plato to Performance*. Hasingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- de Rijcke, S., Wouters, P., Rushforth, A., Franssen, T. & Hammarfelt, B. (2016). Evaluation practices and effects of indicator use—a literature review. *Research evaluation*, 25(2), 161-169.
- Franssen, T. (Forthcoming). Enriching research quality: a proposition for stakeholder heterogeneity.
- Hammarfelt, B., & Rushforth, A. (2017). Indicators as judgment devices: An empirical study of citizen bibliometrics in research evaluation. *Research Evaluation*, 26(3): 169-180.
- Lamont, M. (2009). *How Professors Think. Inside the Curious World of Academic Judgment*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Langfeldt, L., Reymert, I & Aksnes, D. (2021). The role of metrics in peer assessments. *Research Evaluation*, 30(1): 112–126.
- Langfeldt, L., Nedeva, M., Sörlin, S. & Thomas, D. (2020). Co-existing Notions of Research Quality: A Framework to Study Context-specific Understandings of Good Research. *Minerva*, 58(1): 115–137.
- Paradeise, C. & Thoenig, J-C. (2015). *In Search of Academic Quality*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Reymert, I., Jungblut, J. & Borlaug, S. (2020). Are evaluative cultures national or global? A cross-national study on evaluative cultures in academic recruitment processes in Europe. *Higher Education*, 82: 823-843.
- Steffy, K. (2021). Gendered Patterns of Unmet Resource Need among Academic Researchers. *Socius* 7: 1–14
- Valuation Studies/Board of Editors (2022). Valuation Studies and the Drama of University Quality. *Valuation Studies*, 8(1): 1-4.
- Wilbers, S. & Brankovic, J. (2021). The emergence of university rankings: a historical-sociological account. *Higher Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-021-00776-7>