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Aligning research assessment in the Humanities to the national Standard Evaluation Protocol Challenges and developments in the Dutch research landscape

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(Members of the Steering group for *Quality and Impact Indicators for the Humanities*, a project initiated by the Deans of Faculties of Humanities in the Netherlands)

ABSTRACT

Purpose and intended audience

The purpose of this session is a debate about innovation in comprehensive methods for the assessment of humanities research. Input will come from preliminary outcomes of an ongoing project in the Netherlands to find adequate indicators for humanities research that will fit in the national Standard Evaluation Protocol. The project includes processes of 'bottom up' data collection (that is, with input coming from the research community) and discussion with Humanities researchers, investigating the specific characteristics of publication and communication cultures in the Humanities, and the prospects for the use of quantitative and qualitative indicators.

The expected outcome is threefold, first we hope that the materials to be presented will enable a comparison with similar initiatives in the UK, Flanders and Norway. Second, we foresee that the session will strengthen the final outcomes of the Dutch project in view of the international feedback, and third, we hope to further the discussion about comprehensive assessment and the use of indicators in the Humanities.

Intended audiences are both users and producers of humanities research, that is researchers and stakeholders in both scientific communities and societal contexts.

Proposed activities

The session will entail three sections (1) presentation and discussion of the Dutch context of research evaluation, set by the national evaluation protocol (SEP 2015-2021), with a focus on possibilities and constraints for research evaluation in the Humanities. (2) Discussion about preliminary outcomes of the project, including information about publication cultures, discussion with the research community about pros and cons of particular indicators for quality and impact. (3) A discussion about the common ground in the different approaches in the Netherlands, Norway, Flanders and the UK, and possibly other countries.

We aim at organizing the session as a mini living lab, that is as an event where users and designers of evaluation processes co-create an outcome. We will invite attendees from different countries to prepare short comments on questions and issues that we will distribute in advance. Each of the three sub-sections will be 25 minutes, introductions to the sections will be 5-10 minutes, discussion time 15- 20 minutes per section. At the end there will be 10-

15 minutes times to go over the results of the whole session. We will prepare a report that will serve as input for the Dutch project, and will be distributed to attendees of the session for further comments. Further dissemination to those interested is also intended.

Relevance to the conference / significance to the field

Science and technology indicators in use today are predominantly based on publication and communication patterns in the STEM fields. Therefore, they are often not adequate for SSH fields, because the publication and communication patterns are different. This session explores new ways to work with indicators that are better representing communication and publication patterns in the Humanities, including new insights of bibliometric characteristics based on Google Scholar data.

Novelty

Our approach is user-oriented, that is, it is a bottom-up approach, it includes stakeholders (researchers and users) in designing new methods for quality and impact assessment in humanities research.

Length: 90 minutes

Preferred number of participants: 35

Requests: a projector

References

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Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (2011), *Quality Indicators for Research in the Humanities*, Amsterdam: KNAW

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PROPOSAL

In the Netherlands, since 2003 most publicly funded research is evaluated every six years according to the Standard Evaluation Protocol (SEP). After each six year cycle, the protocol is reviewed and updated where necessary. The SEP runs under the auspices of three organisations: the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU), the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO), and the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW). The current SEP was introduced in 2015 and will run up to 2021.

The Standard Evaluation Protocol (SEP) describes the methods used to assess research conducted in the Dutch universities and the research institutes of NWO and KNAW. Also, a number of independent publicly funded research institutes outside these three organisations, use the SEP to evaluate their work.

In the SEP 2015-2012 judgement is based on three assessment criteria: research quality, relevance to society, and “viability” (the extent to which the unit is equipped for the future). Assessment committees are international, and have to deliver a verdict both in text (qualitative) and in categories (quantitative). The four possible categories are “excellent”, “very good”, “good” and “unsatisfactory”. Two further aspects are to be considered: PhD programmes (including those at the national research schools) and research integrity. Here, the committee limits itself to a qualitative assessment.

Indications how to assess research quality are given in the SEP as follows: The committee assesses the quality of the unit’s research and the contribution that research makes to the body of scientific knowledge. The committee also assesses the scale of the unit’s research results (scientific publications, instruments and infrastructure developed by the unit, and other contributions to science).

regarding the relevance to society, the committee is asked to assess the quality, scale and relevance of contributions targeting specific economic, social or cultural target groups, of advisory reports for policy, of contributions to public debates, and so on. The point is to assess contributions in areas that the research unit has itself designated as target areas.

The research units to be evaluated are asked to deliver evidence of their performance in the last 6 years for the following six evaluation categories, divided over two main evaluation criteria: scientific quality and societal relevance, see schedule:

	Scientific quality	Relevance to society
Demonstrable output	Sc. articles (refereed vs. non-refereed) Sc. Books, classification of publishers Other research outputs (instruments, infrastructure, datasets, softwaretools, designs) Dissertations	(policy) reports Articles in professional journals Other output (instruments, infrastructure, datasets, softwaretools, designs) Outreach-activities, public lectures, exhibitions,
Demonstrable use	Citations Use of datasets, softwaretools, etc. by peers Use of research facilities by peers Reviews in scholarly journals	Patents/licences Use of research facilities by societal partners Projects with societal partners Contract research
Demonstrable recognition	Scientific prizes Personal sc. subsidies Invited lectures Membership of sc. committees, editorial boards, etc.	Public prizes Valorisation funding Positions paid for by public parties Memberships of public advisory bodies

The indicators mentioned in the table above are meant as examples. The basic idea of SEP is that it presents an overall framework, the six cells in the table, but that the indicators within the table are to be decided upon by the different fields of science. The social sciences might consider other indicators than for example the engineering fields.

For the humanities, the deans of all faculties in the Netherlands decided to start a project that aimed at developing indicators for all six categories that would be adequate for all or most subfields in the area of humanities. The project is conducted in the years 2015 and 2016. Our proposal is to present and discuss this project at the STI ENID conference.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF INDICATORS FOR HUMANITIES RESEARCH IN THE NETHERLANDS

The main goal of the project is to develop an assessment system that adequately represents scientific work done in the humanities and fits in the SEP framework. It is oriented towards both qualitative and quantitative indicators, and it considers the development of such systems in other European countries, in particular in Norway, Flanders and the UK. The project is conducted by a core group established by the deans, but as a rule it involves both the humanities faculties in the Netherlands and the research schools. The latter are national units in which research MA students are supervised, and PhD's are trained. Some of these national research schools have a broad orientation, and exist for a long time, others have been installed more recently. They operate within the university system in a semi-independent mode.

There are a number of challenges in this project. Firstly, since the humanities are a field with lots of different fields, ranging from the more classical disciplines of languages, history, philosophy, and theology to the more recent areas in culture and media studies, serious and fun gaming and since a few years also digital humanities, it will be difficult to come up with something that satisfies all these fields. Secondly, many fields in the humanities do not have publication traditions comparable with the so-called STEM fields, that are oriented towards a limited set of international journals. In many fields, publications of books, or book chapters, are more common. Thirdly, and connected to the previous one, the development of robust databases has not been as strong as in the case of STEM fields. An analysis of the ISI database or of google scholar supports this point. of the project is And finally, the kind of output of humanities research is overall less easy to catch in concrete terms, it is oriented more towards increasing knowledge, raising insight and awareness on certain topics or issues, than it is towards solving concrete questions.

A central question then is whether it is at all possible to develop a system that compares even to a certain extent to what has been developed for the STEM fields, or that the humanities want a completely different approach to evaluation.

Having said that, it is clear that humanities need a system that is as robust as possible, if only because the various funding systems work out negatively for those fields that are not able to deliver substantial evidence for their quality and relevance. And this is even more pressing since in various countries, like Japan or the USA, governments openly doubt the value of humanities research, and suggest dire consequences for the funding of these fields.

In all simplicity, the project entails two phases, one in which we review the publication (and other output) cultures in various humanities fields. In this we identify, together with the research communities, the most common communication channels for research output, whether this is through journal articles, books, or other forms of output. The second phase will be an analysis based on the results of the first phase of the possible quantitative and qualitative indicators. This analysis also entails an assay of a number of databases that might be relevant for the output of humanities research (such as google scholar, or specialised databases).

The projected outcome of the project is a model fit for the humanities that would

- value on a par scientific quality and societal value of research
- be multifunctional: it would serve not only to assess individual performance, but also the performance of groups and programs
- be useful to discuss research policy, including the improvement of societal relevance of research and career policy for young researchers;
- include suggestions for the role of altmetrics and of open access publications (P. Dávidházi (ed), *New Publication Cultures in the Humanities*, AUP 2014);