

ARQM: A City UCU Comment

The ARQM requires every 'research active' member of staff to submit their 'best' four publications from the last four years. These are now being rated and assigned a score (supposedly equivalent to the REF star ratings) and each member of staff will receive an 'average' between 0 and 4. The scores are then being used in quite varied ways within the university. **There are a series of problems relating to the production and use of ARQM scores. These involve: validity of the scores; university (Senate/Union) oversight of the introduction of ARQM; use of the scores; and appeal of the scores.**

Validity of the Scores – do they measure 'quality'?

Even the REF panels do not provide marks for individuals because they acknowledge that at the individual level scores are not reliable. It is only the aggregate score in which the REF panel claims confidence. The ARQM therefore claims a level of accuracy that the (much criticised, but nonetheless as discussed below, more rigorous) REF process didn't claim.

During REF two experts, usually from a relevant disciplinary sub-field, review your publications. For ARQM one person (a 'senior member of staff') often entirely outside of your field or unversed in your research design or methods, assesses your work. They are being asked to make multiple assessments very quickly and not being granted additional support to do this. The validity of any assessments must therefore be extremely doubtful, something that we know has been raised by many senior staff involved in the rating process.

A rolling four year average is used. This means that if you published three great things in 2012 you only need one additional piece since then to have a 4* ARQM rating for the next two years. If you haven't published sufficient new 4* pieces by 2015, you may then plummet to 1* or 2*. This variability makes no sense; we don't suddenly become, or stop being, internationally excellent. Research is a process with publication peaks and troughs because research is cyclical. Moreover, so long as we publish four strong things within a REF cycle we will contribute to the University's research excellence. Because we know this, many of us who already have four good publications, use the later years of a REF cycle to publish things we think are socially useful, even 'impactful', but not perhaps very REF-able (reports, chapters, reviews of the field, textbooks). The imposition of ARQM, with its endlessly rolling cycle, does not match the REF cycle, does not allow for lulls and punishes us for being good academic citizens, and may even undermine attempts to achieve impact.

University oversight of the introduction of ARQM (Senate/Trade Unions)

Despite an attempt to show that ARQM was approved by Senate the UET has unearthed only a single paragraph about ARQM that was ever brought to Senate (the body responsible for assuring academic quality):

"The report to UET on the results of the first ARQM, which was subsequently seen by Council, was on the 10th November 2011 describing the Annual Research Quality Monitoring Exercise 2011. It was noted:

"the Annual Research Quality Monitoring (ARQM) exercise has been introduced to monitor the quality of the research outputs of our academic staff in between the external reviews provided by the

Research Assessment Exercise (RAE)/Research Excellence Framework (REF). The data produced are also useful for strategic planning purposes and in support of preparations for REF 2014."

"Senate received this as item 21 on the 14th December 2011 in a paper entitled *Preparations for the Research Excellence Framework 2014*. It was noted that the establishment of a Research Excellence Framework (REF) Steering Group and a timetable for REF preparations had been approved by UET and ExCo in August and September 2011. Senate approved the terms of reference and membership of the Steering Group. Following this, the Group held its first meeting in October 2011 and met again in December." [Senate Paper 15.1, May 2015, page 3]

The above clearly does not include any detail about how ARQM would be implemented and certainly does not say that it would produce individual scores, nor that these would be used in any way beyond assessing the University's preparedness for REF 2014. Since REF

2014 is now over, there is no ongoing agreement for

using ARQM and has never been an agreement by Senate to use it as an individual measure.

ARQM has never been discussed with the Trade Unions. It certainly has not been agreed. Therefore it should not be used for anything that affects our terms and conditions (see below for how it is being used).

Use of the ARQM Scores

We are aware that (at least in some schools) ARQM is now being employed, or being proposed to be employed in the following ways. We note that none of these have been negotiated with the Trade Unions. And only the use of ARQM with respect to PhD supervision has been discussed (although not agreed) at Senate:

- Promotions and progression;
- The hours of teaching staff do – workload distribution;
- The ability of staff to apply for sabbatical leave;
- The eligibility of staff to supervise PhD students.

Even if the ARQM accurately measures research outputs over the last four years (which as we note above is extremely doubtful), there is no reason to think that staff research will improve if those who performed at a lower level over the last few years now do *more* teaching and have *less* research time. On the other side, people who score highly will not continue to prosper if they are required to supervise all our research students (and of course there is no reason to believe that a higher ARQM score makes you a better supervisor). Surely it is in the University's and our interests if all staff experience the conditions to produce better research?

Appeal of an Individual ARQM Score

If individual ARQM scores are to be produced (notwithstanding the huge problems with validity described above), there must be a process by which staff can appeal their score. Where workload, sabbatical leave, promotions or progression and PhD supervision become dependent on ARQM scores the right to appeal is crucial.

It is also essential to ensure that the process is monitored for equality and diversity purposes.

In recognition of the well-recognised variability of academic judgement, and the difficulties non-experts face in assessing quality, any appeal would minimally require that staff work be assessed by at least two new independent experts within their sub-field, with appropriate substantive, methodological (or other relevant) expertise. To the extent that ARQM affects progression and promotion and other terms and Conditions an appeal process must be negotiated and agreed with the relevant Trade Union (UCU).

Whilst it may be arguable that some form of ARQM is desirable, and even relatively reliable, where it is measuring the collective state of play with regard to research, in order to allow university or school level planning. In its present form ARQM is being used on an individual basis that it was never designed for and never agreed to by either Senate or the UCU

We have already received feedback from several members on the ARQM process and we once again invite staff to feed their views to us.

The UCU will be having a meeting with Pro VC John Fothergill and HR on May 14th and we would be obliged if you would let us have your comments in advance of this important meeting.

Please send comments to K.Simpson@city.ac.uk