



Publication pays off

“Publish or perish” is the mantra that drives many researchers’ careers. Publication scores are becoming increasingly important as governmental tools to set basic funding levels for institutes and universities.

Norway has recently launched a new system of quality scoring for the applied research institutes, and Sweden will introduce a quality index for dispersing funds in 2010. Finland uses publication points in its funding from the Academy of Finland.

Norway

The Norwegian system of result- and quality-based funding for the applied research institutes will be introduced in stages, starting in 2009, and fully implemented in 2011. The new system will pose challenges for the Norwegian institutes since part of their basic funding will be directly affected by their results.

Institutes that mainly perform public administration-related tasks will not be included under this scheme, but all of the others (51) will be affected. The institutes will receive their funding in two parts: performance-based funding and strategic programme funding.

The strategic element will vary among institutes, accounting for up to 40% of their total funding.

The performance-based basic funding will be comprised of a fixed allocation and a variable portion (ca. 10%). The latter will be distributed according to:

- Publication points (weight: 30 %)
- New doctoral degrees (5 %)
- Positions at universities (5 %)
- Competitive grants awarded by the Research Council of Norway (10 %)
- Grants from international bodies, such as the EU (15 %)
- Income from commissions by

domestic consumers, such as industrial sponsors (35 %)

The scores for each institute will be based on results from the preceding three years. The institutes’ indicator scores will be adjusted by a “relevance component”, calculated according to the percentage of the institute’s R&D income that is subject to competition.

Publication points

Points will be awarded for peer-reviewed publications, hence (for instance) internal reports will not merit any points. Qualifying publications will also be assigned to one of two levels, the higher (level 2) being reserved for publications in high-impact media (as defined by boards to be established). One of the targeted aims for the policy is for about 20% of publications to warrant assignment to level 2.



The system will be new to the research institutes, but the Norwegian universities have been subject to a similar system since 2002. Their funding is divided into basic, education and research components. The research component comprises 15–16% of the total funding, and is dispersed according to almost identical quality criteria to those to be applied to the institutes.

Sweden

A Swedish government bill of 2008 presented a new model for distributing research and education funds amongst universities, based on quality indicators and numbers of full-time students. Basic funding, set according to the number of students hosted, will guarantee a minimum level of financing for all universities. However, quality indicators, such as levels of external

funding, publications and citations, will provide the basis for distributing further research funds. The publications and citations indicator will rely on information obtained from Web of Science. In order to treat different research areas equitably, the indicator will be more highly weighted for publications related to fields that traditionally generate fewer scientific publications, e.g. arts and social science.

Norwegian comments: Publications skills in focus

The new system was discussed at a meeting in Ås in October 2008. **Nils Vagstad**, research director at Bioforsk, stressed that there is no conflict between publishable scientific research and consultancy work. The institute is facing increased domestic and international competition. Thus, both the institute and affiliated researchers must raise their profiles.

Currently, the institute generates ca. 0.5 scientific publications per research man-year, but productivity in this respect varies substantially among the researchers (ca. 20% of the researchers contribute ca. 70% of the publication points).

Bioforsk is now raising the importance of publications in its strategic program via several measures, such as improving the writing skills of its researchers and

introducing internal referees. There will also be rewards for the research group that obtains the highest publication scores.

Arne Bardalen, director of Skog & Landskap, highlighted the importance of the applied institutes in providing knowledge, noting that if the government requires inputs for an investigation an institute may be asked to supply quality-assured information very rapidly. Thus, it is essential for the institutes' results to be regularly peer-reviewed.

Skog & Landskap currently generates 0.65 publications/research man-year, but the aim is to raise this output. The institute has started to formulate a new research strategy, and publication rates will be important considerations.

Arne Bardalen, director of Skog & Landskap, and Nils Vagstad, research director at Bioforsk, want to raise the production of scientific publications in their institutes.

Photo: Mats Hannerz



SNS board member honorary doctor

Professor Niels Ehlers Koch has been awarded a honorary doctorate at a ceremony at the Faculty of Forest Sciences, SLU, Uppsala, in October 2008. Prof. Koch was awarded for his extraordinary contribution to forest science, and his efforts to strengthen international and Nordic cooperation.

Prof. Koch, who has a research background in forest policy, has established a successful forestry research program in Denmark and has expanded the definition of forest research to include aspects of urban forestry and forest-based recreation. He has long been engaged in IUFRO (the International Union of Forest Research Organizations), of which he is currently vice-president.

He has also represented Denmark on the Board of SNS (Nordic Forest Research Committee) since 1991.