Building an academic career in times of research assessment reform: the perspective of a research funding agency

1. **FNRS**: 1928 – French speaking Belgium

- Basic and strategic research
- All fields of science

- **Fellowships and mandates**: ~ 2,000 researchers under FNRS employement contract, hosted in universities (~ 60% of FNRS’s annual resources)
2. Evaluation during an academic career at FNRS

FNRS PhD students → FNRS Young post-docs → FNRS Research associates

Recruitment → Recruitment → Recruitment

Main evaluation criteria

Excellence of the candidate
Excellence of the scientific project

Projects funding (also academics)

Promotion

Periodic assessment
3. Towards a reform of research assessment: perspectives for the FNRS

- FNRS and Open Science: signatory of DORA, Open Access mandates (green road), DMP for some funding instruments, gold road costs limited to 750 € per publication

- “Research assessment should rely primarily on qualitative assessment for which peer review is central, supported by responsively used quantitative indicators where appropriate”
3. Towards a reform of research assessment: evaluation criteria

- The “object” being evaluated: a full-time researcher or an academic?

- The purpose of evaluation: selection of a PhD, recruitment of a permanent researcher, promotion in the career, application for funding of a research project…?
3. Towards a reform of research assessment: some pending questions for a RFO employer of researchers (1)

CRITERIA FOR EVALUATING A RESEARCHER

Research output and publications, international recognition

- Q1: to broaden the spectrum of what we value in research?

  ✓ to reward research behavior underpinning open science practices?
  ✓ to acknowledge and valorize the diversity in research roles and careers, including roles outside academia?
  ✓ does the criterion of excellence remain a key criterion with a widening?
3. Towards a reform of research assessment: some pending questions for a RFO employer of researchers (2)

IMPACTS OF ADAPTING THE EVALUATION CRITERIA

Publish or Perish issue… (Precarity of academic research careers)

- Q2: more freedom for **young researchers** in terms of the diversity of their contribution, but how will this be perceived by **established researchers** with prestigious publication records?

- Q3: in a period of **transition**, **reviewers** may be confronted with files with different profiles that are difficult to compare? **Weight of criteria?**
3. Towards a reform of research assessment: some pending questions for a RFO employer of researchers (3)

IMPACTS OF ADAPTING THE EVALUATION CRITERIA

- Q4: will it increase the quality of research activity and scientific outputs?
  - will this lead to the recruitment of other researcher profiles for the benefit of excellence?
  - will it help to retain the best talents in academia? ("even high-profile scientists are struggling to recruit qualified postdoctoral researchers" – Nature, August 2022)