

Across the globe, publication remains the primary way in which the value of research is judged. Moreover, research tends to be judged not on whether it was published in the most appropriate place, to be most accessible to its intended readership, but on whether it was published in a 'top', 'high impact' or 'international' scientific journal.

Measuring the real-world impact of research is not easy. But it is easy (or at least easier) to quantifiably measure publications, and citations of those publications, constructing metrics and tracking readership digitally to show how papers and journals perform against each other. These then become convenient proxies for what we're really interested in – how much of a contribution is that research making in the world.

The problem is the influence that these systems of assessment have on what research is conducted.

All too often, excellence simply means what is produced by the elite centres of research and by the people who work within them.

They go further too – encouraging university leadership to invest in the things that are most likely to result in a better ranking, and not necessarily what will most benefit their staff, students and communities.

The problem is that Southern researchers and Southern institutions are being judged and are judging themselves against metrics and systems of assessment that have been developed in the North. Although they are claimed to be universal measures of quality and excellence, they are deeply rooted in the research economies of the North and reward institutions with the resources to invest in the types of research and knowledge that the North judges to be valuable.

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(F: J. Harle UWN 29.08.21)