

Recommendation

Specific Measures to Improve Research Assessment to Revitalize Research



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Science Council of Japan

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Executive Summary

I Background

This Recommendation analyzes structural issues that Japan's system for research assessment and evaluation encounters and puts forward specific reform measures to build a system that contributes to the promotion of science, the development of human resources, and collaboration with society.

When focusing on the assessment of individual researchers and research projects, the current assessment system tends to rely excessively on quantitative indicators such as the number of papers, citation counts, and Journal Impact Factors (JIF), and consequently fails to adequately recognize the inherent diversity and creativity of research activities. This situation constitutes a factor that hinders researchers' freedom of thought and willingness to take on challenges.

Internationally, since the 2010s, movements calling for a review of research assessment methods have progressed rapidly, triggered by proposals such as the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) and the Leiden Manifesto. In recent years, the "Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment", led by the European Commission and major scientific organizations, has been established, and under the shared concept of "Responsible Research Assessment (RRA)," discussions on concrete reforms of assessment systems have activated

As of August 2025, 3,486 institutions and 22,926 individuals worldwide have signed DORA. In Japan, major institutions had long been absent from the signatory list, but since 2023 organizations such as The University of Tokyo, RIKEN, and the Japan Science and Technology Agency (JST) have begun to sign the Agreement.

II Current Status and Issues

However, as research assessment in Japan still tends to place excessive emphasis on the use of quantitative indicators and on accountability, it has been pointed out that a fixation on numerical targets has a chilling effect on research fields. In addition, Japan faces increasing pressure due to its declining position in global rankings based on quantitative indicators such as the number of highly cited papers. This causes a contradictory situation in which the country is expected both to move away from quantitative indicators and, at the same time, to improve its performance in terms of those same indicators, which has been increasing the complexity of reforms.

The Science Council of Japan has continuously deliberated on research assessment and evaluation during its 24th and 25th terms. In 2021, it issued the Recommendation "Toward Research Evaluation that Contributes to the Promotion of Science—Challenges and

Prospects for Desirable Research Evaluation". It called for a review of excessive reliance on quantitative evaluation methods and set out six specific proposals from the perspectives of ensuring research diversity and securing transparency and reliability in evaluation. This can be positioned as an initial move to promote a qualitative transformation of research assessment and evaluation in Japan. Furthermore, in 2023, as a step toward putting this Recommendation into practice, SCJ compiled a report, "Social Impact of Research in Humanities and Social Sciences—Examining Evaluation Approaches Based on Case Studies," which discusses the potential and challenges of assessing and evaluating diverse social effects of research in the fields of the humanities and social sciences.

These discussions have made clear that the current research assessment system does not appropriately recognize aspects such as diversity and interdisciplinarity of researchers' activities and their social and economic impact, and that the way the assessment system is operated can itself cause negative effects on researchers' activities. Although there is broad, general agreement on the importance of research assessment reform and of qualitative assessment, progress in implementing reform has been limited. This is because, in actual assessment settings, it remains unclear what new assessment approaches could be adopted for which specific issues. In addition, because it is unclear how research assessment reform can contribute to strengthening research capabilities as an urgent issue, the importance of reform in research assessment has not been sufficiently shared. These circumstances indicate not merely a lack of policy measures, but also the challenge of first sharing core principles among stakeholders—universities and research institutions, funding agencies, and the government—and then converting them into forms that can be put into practice in the field.

III Recommendations

This Recommendation aims to fundamentally reconsider how individual researchers and research projects are assessed, in light of international trends represented by DORA and the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA), and the current stagnation of Japan's research capabilities and the prevailing emphasis on quantitative indicators, superficial assessments, and short-term results. In particular, the most serious issue is that superficial assessments arising from excessive reliance on quantitative indicators have been undermining the quality of research culture and personnel systems (recruitment, promotion, and allocation). On this basis, and to address issues such as the gap from research and social implementation and the lack of collaboration with industry as well, this Recommendation presents specific improvement measures through reform of the research assessment system.

It proposes fundamental improvements to the research assessment system in line with the following six pillars:

(1) Introduction of Narrative CVs

Move away from assessments biased toward conventional publication lists and appropriately recognize researchers' diverse contributions and activities through descriptive formats.

(2) Promotion of Responsible Peer Review

Realize highly reliable and transparent assessments, premised on improving the qualifications of reviewers and providing sufficient time and institutional support.

(3) Consideration and Support for Early Career Researchers

Establish systems that provide young researchers with diverse opportunities for growth and with support to take on challenges.

(4) Assessment of Social Impact and Engagement

Include contributions to outside of academia, such as collaboration with policy, industry, and local communities, within the scope of research assessment.

(5) Assessment for Promoting Open Science

Carry out appropriate evaluation for practices such as data sharing and preprints, with the aim of improving transparency and reproducibility.

(6) Phased Introduction and Empirical Development of System Reforms

Evolve the system after repeated trials and verification to realize sustainable assessment reform.

Through these improvements, the aim is to shift from mere measurement using quantitative indicators to multi-faceted assessment methods that emphasize the quality of research activities and diverse contributions. Research assessment exerts a powerful influence in shaping researcher behavior, institutional priorities, and research culture itself. Accordingly, this Recommendation positions research assessment system reform not merely as a revision of rules, but as a transformation of research culture and a reconstruction of an environment that enables researchers' free thinking and willingness to take on challenges. In this way, it seeks to redefine "research capability" not simply in terms of one-dimensional indicators such as the number of papers and citations, but as a multi-faceted and inclusive concept that encompasses research quality, academic contribution, and socio-economic ripple effects, with the aim of realizing the sustainable development of research in Japan and strengthening its international competitiveness.