



ACADEMY OF FINLAND  
RESEARCH FUNDING AND SCIENCE POLICY

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**MAJOR OBSERVATIONS OF A STUDY ON FINAL REPORTING OF  
FUNDED RESEARCH**

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## ***Introduction***

During this summer I contacted your organisation to ask about your final reporting of funded research. The information was collected for a study that I carried out as a part of my University Traineeship in the Academy of Finland in summer 2004. It consisted of two parts: 1) the collection and the analysis of the report forms used in reporting the results of funded research and 2) a questionnaire on the utilization of the collected information. Participating organizations, their contact persons and the analysed report forms are listed in Appendix 1.

The objective of the study was to provide background for the development of the Academy's own reporting system. Special attention was given to the content of the report forms to answer the question: What relevant information could be asked from the project leaders and how? Emphasis was on quantitative indicators. Due to electronic reporting system they can be cost-effectively produced.

## ***Content of the Report Forms***

The most frequently asked questions are listed in Table 1. In general, the reports concentrated on the research results. By far the most emphasis was given to publications and scientific findings. Other categories considered relevant were financial reporting (accountability), education and students' involvement in the project, and the popularization of research results.

Question	Number of Occurrences	Number/Tot	Format of the questions <sup>1</sup>			
			O	N	B	G
Publications	<b>11</b>	100 %	10	3	0	7
Most important results	<b>9</b>	82 %	9	0	0	0
Description of Research Activities	<b>8</b>	73 %	8	0	0	0
Expenditure divided by category	<b>8</b>	73 %	3	7	1	3
Funding of the organisation in question	<b>6</b>	55 %	0	6	0	0
Other sources of funds	<b>6</b>	55 %	4	3	1	2
Synopsis of research suitable for non-specialist	<b>6</b>	55 %	6	0	0	0
Conferences attended	<b>6</b>	55 %	5	2	0	0
Patents issued or filed	<b>5</b>	45 %	3	1	2	1
Doctoral dissertations	<b>5</b>	45 %	4	1	0	0
Total funding	<b>5</b>	45 %	0	5	0	0
Dissemination of information outside the research community	<b>5</b>	45 %	4	2	0	1

**Table 1: The most frequently asked questions**

<sup>1</sup> O = open question, N = numeric value, B = binary, G = The question is divided in subgroups

### ***Utilization of the Collected Data***

Four of the organizations were currently reforming their process of final reporting. Generally the goal of the restructuring was to have the reporting done electronically and the data restored in a database. Thus, there was much interest in the topic but little to be said in terms of best practices.

The reports were viewed important mainly for two reasons: first accountability and second evaluation. General principle was to avoid extensive reporting to save the time of the researchers. The fact that many organizations gather detailed information of the project results without making much use of it contradicts this principle. In terms of accountability much less would probably be sufficient.

In the absence of relevant points of reference (for example nation-wide databases) there was little use of quantitative indicators. Publication counts were usually presented according to more or less elaborate categorization. Other less frequently used indicators were number of patents issued or filed, academic progress, and the participation of students in research activities. Usually no efficiency measures, such as publications /currency unit, were calculated but the counts were used as such or sometimes divided by the number of on-going research programs to reflect their scope and impact. In general, the evaluation of programs relied heavily on expert panels. Individual projects were rarely evaluated but only marginally reviewed.

In the use of quantitative indicators NWO (The Netherlands) stood out of the sample. The advantage of their process was not as much the originality of the set of indicators chosen as the nation wide consensus of using the same fixed set and the extreme minimalism of the reporting requirements. The indicators used are defined by the Standard Evaluation Protocol 2003-2009 For Public Research Organisations. The protocol defines the guidelines according to which the three main Dutch organisations responsible for publicly funded research perform their program and institution wide evaluations. The indicators are not used alone as an evaluative tool. Expert panels, internal every three years and external every six years, perform the evaluations using them as one critical input. The standardized protocol will further the comparability and accountability of the assessments performed in different organisations.

In addition to serving as a source of quantitative data the final reports were often used anecdotally in reporting to the host ministry. An extreme example of this is NSF (US) with their multilevel selection of “nuggets” for the annual evaluation of The Advisory Committee for GPRA Performance Assessment. While annual expert panel evaluation might be an ideal solution for performance assessment, it probably is something that can only be afforded due to the economies of scale. Related literature also claims that while quantitative measures can never replace an expert panel review they can supplement its inherent shortcomings. For these reasons quantitative indicators derived from final reports are worth further exploring.

To conclude, the ways of collecting data on the outputs and outcomes of funded research and the utilization of that data are at vast variety. Many organizations are pursuing to develop the final reporting process and, accordingly, no lone-standing best practice can be defined. However, it seems that electronic reporting is a feasible and reasonable tool for gathering and processing project information and the resulting performance indicators can significantly supplement expert evaluations.

## Appendix 1: Organisations, contact persons and report forms

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### **Nederlandse Organisatie voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek - Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO)**

Contact: Dr. K.M.H. Maessen, Policy Department and Mariette Blokhuis, International Relations Department  
Report form: Dutch Russian Research Co-operation

### **The Royal Society (RS), UK**

Contact: Dr John Hunt, Impact and Promotions Manager  
Report form: Survey about The Research Grants Scheme

### **The British Academy (BA)**

Contact: Secretary Mr. P W H Brown, Central Administration  
Report form: Larger Research Grant: Final Report (<http://www.britac.ac.uk/form/reports/index.html>)

### **Die Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG)**

Contact: Dr. C. Schneider, Department for Scientific Affairs and Dr. Jürgen Güdler, Leitung Bereich Informationsmanagement

Report form: Instructions for final reporting, Document 2.01, Verwendungsrichtlinien für Sachbeihilfen mit Leitfaden für Abschlussberichte und Regeln guter wissenschaftlicher Praxis, p. 19  
(<http://www.dfg.de/forschungsfoerderung/formulare/abschlussberichte.html>)

### **Norges Forskningsråd - The Research Council of Norway (FR)**

Contact: Svein Erik Høst, Director  
Report form: Sluttrapport - Oppdateringsskjema (<http://www.forskningsradet.no/CSStorage/Vedlegg/sluttrapport-vanlig-nynorsk,0.doc>)  
Included only in the analysis of the report forms, not in the questionnaire

### **Vetenskapsrådet (VR), Sweden**

Contact: Jonas Björck, The Scientific Council for Natural And Engineering Sciences, Teresa Karlsson, The Scientific Council for Medicine, Birgitta Mattsson and Barbro Hänström, The Committee for Educational Sciences  
Report form: Instructions for final reporting in the Council for Medical Sciences, provided by Ms. Teresa Karlsson.

### **The National Science And Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC)**

Contact: Chief Ginette Drouin, Program Operations Unit, Dr. Anne Alper, Manager, Research Partnership Programs (RPP) Planning and Budget  
Report form: Collaborative Research and Development Grants, Final Report and Form 300 (Financial Report)

### **National Science Foundation (NSF), USA**

Contact: Craig Robinson, Ph.D., Senior Advisor and Patricia Tsuchitani Ph. D., Senior Advisor  
Report form: Project Final Report, (A sample report (Final report 0000527) and the Help-browser of FastLane-service

### **Fonds National Suisse (FNS)**

Contact: Elisabeth Schenker, Administrative Offices, Controlling  
Report form: Wissenschaftlicher Bericht and Finanzieller Bericht, Free Research Div. I-III  
(<http://www.snf.ch/en/app/pfr/pfr.asp>)

### **The Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS)**

Contact: Yuriko Sawato, JSPS Stockholm Office  
Report form: The final report of Grants-in Aid -program  
Included only in the analysis of the report forms

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