

## **Title**

### Practice supporting research in Australian academic libraries

The relationship between research and practice operates in both directions. Ideally, research informs practice, but equally important is the communication to research from practice. This presentation explores the relationship from the practitioner perspective. It does so through the findings of a nation-wide study into Australian academic libraries' capacity to provide research metrics support and factors that affect the effectiveness of that support.

Australian academics have experienced major changes to the way their research is assessed with the introduction, in 2010, of a national research evaluation exercise, Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA). With the purpose to assess the quality of research across all disciplines, the ERA uses citation numbers as a proxy for quality in the sciences. Although citations are not a new measure of research impact, their application in the ERA has intensified academics' interest in bibliometrics. The same period has seen rapid growth in social media use by researchers to disseminate their work. Altmetrics, the tools that collect data from social media, have the potential to quantify research impact for the disciplines unsuited to citation measures (Hammarfelt, 2014). Now available in numerous forms, altmetrics have attracted the attention of researchers wishing to demonstrate the quality of their research. In 2018 Australian research will also be assessed for engagement and impact and this is likely to increase researchers' interest in altmetrics.

The information sources and tools used in bibliometrics and altmetrics are closely associated with academic librarians' knowledge and skills. In addition, the support role performed by academic librarians is perfectly suited to the activities involved in informing researchers about bibliometric and altmetrics tools and assisting in the interpretation of data generated by research metrics tools. The questions this presentation addresses is whether academic libraries have the capacity to embrace this opportunity to build on their relationship with researchers and what challenges are faced in seeking to do so.

Using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, the study distributed an online questionnaire to research support librarians at all Australian universities. The questionnaire was adapted from Corral, Kennan and Afzal (2013) to include altmetrics questions that mirrored the original bibliometrics questions. Together, the survey instruments gathered data about staff numbers and skills, relationships with other organisational units, barriers to the development and delivery of research metrics services, and the different research environments in which the libraries were operating.

In brief, the findings suggest that academic libraries have generally succeeded in bridging the gap to researchers in relation to bibliometrics. Altmetrics support, on the other hand, remains 'in development' for the most part. An important influence in achieving an effective relationship with researchers is the library's relationship with the institution's research office, which can have positive or negative impacts. However, the communication with researchers has resulted in

practitioners gaining a good understanding of the research environment, including the pressure to perform that the ERA has brought. Practitioners also recognise the problems inherent in ascribing meaning to data generated by the numerous research metrics tools.

Implications for practice:

- Professional development in altmetrics will provide academic librarians with an improved understanding of these new research metrics
- Building collaborative relationships with the institution's research office will increase the potential for an academic library to engage with its research community
- A good understanding of the research environment enables academic libraries to develop and deliver the most relevant services
- Research metrics will become increasingly complex and sophisticated and academic libraries need staff that are skilled in working with them

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