How can a central Research office evidence and demonstrate it's value to the institution?- Lessons from Oxford

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Universities are used to measuring performance!

Teaching and research have their own measures – individual academic performance is measured

Both quantitative and qualitative measures

Reasonable to expect administrative divisions to also be measured/assessed

A demonstration to the university management and academics that Research Office is serious about quality improvement
MORE BACKGROUND

- 2015 UK Study Tour
- A discussion paper
- The “Oxford brand”
- A series of administrative division reviews
- A “value for money” committee
- The task – produce a discussion paper on how a central Research Office can evidence and attest their value
THE EVIDENCE

What evidence have we used in the past?

- Research performance - if income goes up ..., if income goes down!
- Other volume measures – numbers of grant applications, ethics applications, clinical trials etc
- Quality measures – absence of technical disqualifications
- Negative measures – not being on the front page of the paper
- The “counterfactual” – close the office for a month and see what happens!
- Several attempts at process efficiency measures, eg balanced scorecard
BALANCED SCORECARD

- Universities of Auckland (2010/11), Sussex (2013), and UTS (2016)

- Summary of most relevant performance information

- Financial and non-financial, human and physical

- Inputs, throughputs, and outputs

- Four Perspectives:
  - Internal Business Processes
  - Financial
  - Learning and Growth
  - Customer
THE FLOW THROUGH

Mission

- Customer Perspective
- Financial Perspective
- Internal Business Processes
- Learning and Growth Perspective
CHOOSING THE RIGHT METRICS (AUCKLAND)

1. High Quality and Motivated Professional and Technical Staff
2. Quality Internal and External Customer Relationships
3. Efficient Funding Processes
4. Effective Research Contract Management
5. Facilitation of Compliance with Risk Management requirements
6. Provision of Valued Outputs and Creation of Business Outcomes
7. Active management and reduction of financial risks

28 different measures

Key point: measures chosen to reflect issues of the day and how RO could support university strategy
1. High Quality and Motivated Professional and Technical Staff
   - % positive about office environment
   - % staff turnover
   - N° days sick leave/FTE
   - N° days staff development or training /FTE

3. Efficient funding processes
   - % applications submitted to RO by agreed internal deadline
   - % contracts signed by start date
   - Average time to sign subcontracts
   - % Project accounts activated within 5 working days of receiving signed contract
TOO MUCH DATA?

Need to portray numerically – but also graphically

Q2 2011

2010 Avg/Q2 2011

Discuss monthly with RO staff
CHOOSING THE RIGHT METRICS (SUSSEX)

University, Department, Researcher or Research Office?

Learning and Growth
- Staff turn-over rate
- Staff training (days / FTE)
- Training provided for investigators

Internal Perspective
- Application turn-round time (x% processed within y days)
- Claims / invoice turn-round (£days outstanding)
- Operational cover / availability
- Satisfaction index

Inputs, Outputs and Outcomes
- Operating within budget

External Stakeholder Perspective
- Satisfaction index
- Positions on external bodies
BALANCED SCORECARD

- UTS - Four Perspectives
  - Processes and People – 6 measures
  - Income and Finance – 4 measures
  - Research leadership and Recognition – 10 measures – mainly research related
  - Customers (Internal and External) – 4 measures

- Survey of external funders
- Monthly report to Associate Deans Research and RIO Office
BALANCED SCORECARD

- UTS Processes and People
  - RIO staff development
  - Workplan completions
  - RIO sick leave
  - Transaction effectiveness
  - Time for ethics approvals

- Customers
  - Internal customer satisfaction
  - External customer satisfaction
  - Use of Staff Connect website
  - Phone calls answered in 20 seconds

- Income and finance
  - External research income
  - Pipeline resilience
  - IP income
  - RIO expenditure in line with budget
BALANCED SCORECARD - CONCLUSIONS

- Potentially useful
- No agreement on measures within categories
- Needs to reflect current issues
- Measures chosen with stakeholders
- Very data driven – will it convince stakeholders?
- Or will perceptions prevail?
CHOOSING THE RIGHT METRICS (OXFORD)

- Director invited input from eight teams comprising Research Office – on quantitative and qualitative indicators

- Approximately 80 quantitative indicators identified

- Feedback on qualitative indicators regularly identified
  - positive feedback
  - increased awareness of researchers
  - going the extra mile
  - Small gifts/expressions of gratitude

Difficult to measure but nonetheless, real!
EVIDENCE AND ATTESTATION

- The power of anecdotes, especially bad ones!
- Evidence rarely changes opinions!
- Proving what to whom?
- Quantitative measures for some, qualitative for others
- The age of information overload and bite sized bits!

- A Research Office Scorecard
- One page, once a month
- To the governing research committee, on the website, in the research bulletin, with Research Office staff
- Graphs, infographics, anecdotes
**MY ONE PAGER**

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**Client feedback**
- Professor Jones “email of 25/9 said ……”
- Dr Smith dropped into office to thank us for ……
- Chair of HREC commented that quality of agenda papers facilitated ease of discussion
- etc

Five workshops on research impact delivered to Schools/Faculties

Highest number ARC applications processed in March
CONCLUSIONS

Oxford

- No further administrative reviews commissioned by Registrar at Oxford
- Oxford - reporting to Research Committee not on office operations but work on key topics as facilitated by our office (this in turn exposes more the workings of the office and we hope its value)

More generally

- Use both quantitative and qualitative information – must be relevant to local situation, and prepare to review and change
- Provide information regularly – but identify stakeholders, who needs to know!
- Would be useful for sector to agree metrics such that benchmarks could be established.
Thank you

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