

A critical discussion of the attempts to represent “quality” and “excellence” in national systems for the evaluation and funding of research institutions

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During the last two decades, most European countries have tried to move towards what is politically understood as increased accountability by establishing partly performance-based funding systems for universities and other research organizations. Some of these systems are based directly on performance indicators, others on qualitative peer review that may be informed by performance indicators. In addition, some countries have established national systems for institutional research evaluation without funding implications so far. The overall picture is changing and becoming more complex. Countries are learning from each other and discussing alternatives, and some countries are presently moving from one type of system to another, or combining them.

Peer review-based models are often deemed superior to indicator-based models in representing and promoting “quality” and “excellence”. However, in the context of institutional evaluation and funding, both of them are faced with challenges. I will give a critical discussion of solutions and developments in a group countries where I know the situation through direct engagement or contact: Australia, Belgium (Flanders), Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, and Sweden.