Critical review of application examples

The following examples are responses to questions asked about impact and reach of the candidate’s research portfolio. The assessment is for the fictional School of Jelly.

All of the following examples have good points and bad points, but some are worse than others. We have refrained from scoring or ranking these examples, as it would be bad practice for anyone to attempt to emulate one specific example.

Example 1:

*My citation count according to Web of Science is currently 147 with 34 citations in 2018.*

This example is poor, not only because it goes into too little detail for the assessors to make their judgement, but also because it supplies volume based citation metrics with no context. It is good that the candidate has supplied the source of their information, so that it can be verified. However, unless the assessors are able to put the citations into context and consistently and equitably apply them for all candidates, this information should be disregarded. Effectively, this candidate has supplied no usable information.

Example 2:

*I have published 60 papers in total, comprising 25 journal articles and 35 conference papers, of which 16 are high-impact society journal articles (9/16 as first author) and 8 are top conference papers (all as first author) on the study of Jelly. Additionally, I have submitted 2 articles which are under peer-review and 1 journal article is in preparation. My total citations in the past five years is 267, my H-index is 7.*


This example starts well by demonstrating productivity and indicating to some extent what their contribution to the field of research has been. However, an H-index is given without the source and the limitations of the metric and the data underpinning it have not been made clear. Furthermore, in the second paragraph, impact factor is used to imply the quality of the research output. While, the source is clear (Clarivate Analytic’s JCR), being published in those journals is not an appropriate indicator of the quality of an individual output. Listing those publication venues without the impact factor would be fine if it demonstrates visibility and engagement with the appropriate research community.

Example 3:

*My research findings push the boundaries of Jelly research and are being regularly published in high-impact international peer-reviewed journals, such as Science (1), Nature (4), Jelly Society Publishing (2), and Jelly Review Letters (6). I have also published several datasets, which are linked to by multiple publications and have informed studies outside my own research group. My track record includes 35 peer-reviewed papers in total (14 as first author, 1 as last author, 5 acting as an independent researcher), which attract ~95 citations per paper on average (see Figure 1), and over 60 conference presentations. My research work is highly influential as indicated by over 3,215 or 3,310 citations and an H-index of 19 or 23 (Web of Science or Google Scholar). The international standing of my work is evidenced by 28 invited and 4 plenary talks at UK and international conferences, including prestigious meetings, such as Jelly Con. and the Symposium of Jelly Research.*

This example provides a good synopsis of the work done and the applicant’s outputs. The work’s importance is highlighted and qualified in multiple ways, including the collaborations the publications have fostered. Journals and conferences are listed, but it is done in a way that indicates the research is being published in appropriate visible venues, as opposed to linking the article’s quality to a journal citation metric. However, the use of the H-index and citation volume metrics are not ideal, but plenty of context is provided to help the reader verify and interpret the scores. Additionally, alternative citation data and H-index sources are provided and referred to in text.

Example 4:

*My programme of research into Jelly has led to a number of high-quality REF returnable 3* and 4* outputs including papers in PNAS[5,8], Science[29,30,36], Jelly Communications[6], Jelly Reports[9,12] and a recent publication in Jelly[4] which reports on the wobble factor of jelly. These publications are widely cited in the literature resulting in an H-index of 17 (Web of Science) and ensure that I will make a robust contribution to the departments next REF return.*
It is good that in this example the candidate provides references to the research that they consider to be their strongest contributions which encourages the reader to go to the source. Note that article 4 gets a special mention and it is in a subject specific journal which likely has a lower impact factor than some of the other journals listed – in this example the quality of the research is allowed to speak for itself. An H-index is supplied (ideally, this should be avoided), but a source is provided so the assessors are able to verify the score, check the underpinning data and compare like for like. Supplying REF output scores is questionable, because despite the scores being assigned based on quality criteria and expert assessment, the detail of that judgement is lost in the number. The REF scoring system is designed to be collected together and assessed as part of a team effort and this could be considered an inappropriate use of that scoring system.

Example 5:

My research is multi-disciplinary. As such, I have published in leading jelly and science journals such as Science JCR IF: 41.037 and the Society Journal of Jelly JCR IF: 8.322 and numerous 3* and 4* journals on the ABS list. Currently, I have 2 papers under review in ABS 4* journals. My H-index is 7.

This candidate tells us their research is multi-disciplinary, but fails to explain why that is important or what disciplines they most commonly span. From the journals listed and the reference to the ABS list, we can assume they are combining science with business studies, but it’s not clear in what context or why this might be advantageous. The use of the impact factor to qualify one set of journals and the ABS to qualify the other set of journals indicates that they are linking prestige in the two disciplines to journal ranking systems, which is an inappropriate use of those metrics/ranks. Additionally, the H-index supplied is not put into context or supported with other information, which is especially important in this case, given that the H-index is heavily influenced by citation cultures within disciplines. Furthermore, no source is given, so it will be difficult for the reader to verify and compare across candidates.