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# **Are Evaluations in Academia National or Global? A cross-national study on evaluations in academic recruitment processes in Europe**

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Joint paper with Ingvild Reymert & Siri Borlaug (NIFU)



**R-QUEST**  
Centre for Research Quality and Policy Impact Studies

## What is our paper about?

- How to define quality in research is a contested question especially in hiring processes where concrete trade-offs between candidates must be made
- Scholars might rank quality criteria differently and the importance of criteria can be driven by different factors
- In the literature both disciplinary differences and differences in national research systems are highlighted as relevant, but we do not know how they interact
- → This is the gap that we want to address

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# Are evaluative cultures national or global? A cross-national study on evaluative cultures in academic recruitment processes in Europe

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 A [Publisher Correction](#) to this article was published on 10 April 2021

 This article has been [updated](#)

## The R-Quest Center of Excellence

- The Centre for Research Quality and Policy Impact Studies (R-QUEST)
- Eight-year Center of Excellence funded by the Research Council of Norway
  - What is research quality?
  - How are notions of research quality negotiated, established and practiced, and what are the mechanisms through which these notions affect policy?
  - What are the drivers of high-quality research, and what is the role of policy in developing outstanding research?
  - What are the effects of high-quality research on the society?

# RESEARCH QUALITY AND POLICY IMPACT

Quality in research is a highly prioritized, but also a much debated issue in research policy. The Centre for Research Quality and Policy Impact Studies (R-QUEST) constitutes an 8-year commitment to explore the nature and mechanisms of research quality – funded by the RCN FORINNPOL initiative. The centre will address three closely related questions:

*What is research quality? How are notions of research quality negotiated, established and practiced, and what are the mechanisms through which these notions affect policy?*

*What are the drivers of high quality research, and what is the role of policy in developing outstanding research?*

*What are the effects of high quality research on the society?*

We will explore these questions through three interrelated research strands:

1. Understanding research quality
2. Conditions for high research quality
  - 2a. Country level studies
  - 2b. Research groups and research organisations
3. Effects on society

A central aim of the centre is to understand research assessments, standards and practices in different fields of research. More generally, we aim to help policy makers in their efforts to develop the best framework conditions for high quality research.

Six research institutions contribute to establishing R-Quest with NIFU as host:

- Department of political science, University of Oslo
- Danish Centre for Studies in Research and Research Policy (CFA), University of Aarhus
- Centre for Science and Technology Studies (CWTS), Leiden University
- Division of History of Science, Technology and Environment, KTH- Royal Institute of Technology
- Manchester Institute of Innovation Research (MIIoR), The University of Manchester
- Nordic Institute for Studies of Innovation, Research and Education, NIFU

You will find more info about the partners [here](#).

## Our starting point

- While being nationally regulated, academia is becoming more international (disciplines have always been)
- That has an influence on assessment of quality of candidates as standards can differ (e.g. Habilitation)
- Recruitments as critical decisions for universities and candidates → focal point to assess use of quality criteria
- Recruitment processes are embedded in national regulations & traditions but also in disciplinary notions of quality that are increasingly international
- Do we see convergence or divergence in the use of quality criteria in higher education?

## Conceptual foundation

- National context matters:
  - Universities embedded in highly organized national higher education systems with specific rules, norms and traditions
  - Logic of appropriateness
  - Historical institutionalism: temporality and context matter and create path-dependence / lock-in effects that lead to lasting differences
  - Even if we have more internationalization in academic labor markets, national rules, norms and traditions will create lasting differences on the use of quality criteria
- Researchers from similar fields in different countries have distinct preferences regarding evaluative criteria due to national context

## Conceptual foundation

- Internationalization rules:
  - Academia is increasingly international, and universities are competing more globally → evaluative criteria are more global
  - Increasingly shared values lead to isomorphism as organizations converge when the org. field matures
  - HE as a field with well-established norms that define what is perceived as valuable & “recent” internationalization amplified this
  - While assessments are performed in universities, they are embedded in disciplinary fields with own evaluative cultures which are increasingly international (journals, conferences etc.)
- Due to increased internationalization and isomorphism, researchers in the same field in different countries prefer similar criteria



## Data and methods

- R-Quest survey distributed in 2017/18 to researchers in NL, UK, SWE, DK, N in economics & physics (and cardiology)
- Overall response rate 33.6% (n= 1697)
- Singled out respondents who were involved in hiring processes (n= 848)
- Respondents:
  - Mainly Profs
  - 80% male
  - More than 50% between 40 & 59 years old

Table 1 Number of respondents by field and country

| Country     | Economics | Physics | Total | Response rate |
|-------------|-----------|---------|-------|---------------|
| Sweden      | 57        | 242     | 299   | 27.8%         |
| Norway      | 60        | 82      | 142   | 57.3%         |
| UK          | 32        | 62      | 94    | 11.4%         |
| Netherlands | 66        | 120     | 186   | 20.0 %        |
| Denmark     | 44        | 83      | 127   | 32.2%         |
| Total       | 259       | 589     | 848   | 31.4%         |

## Data and methods

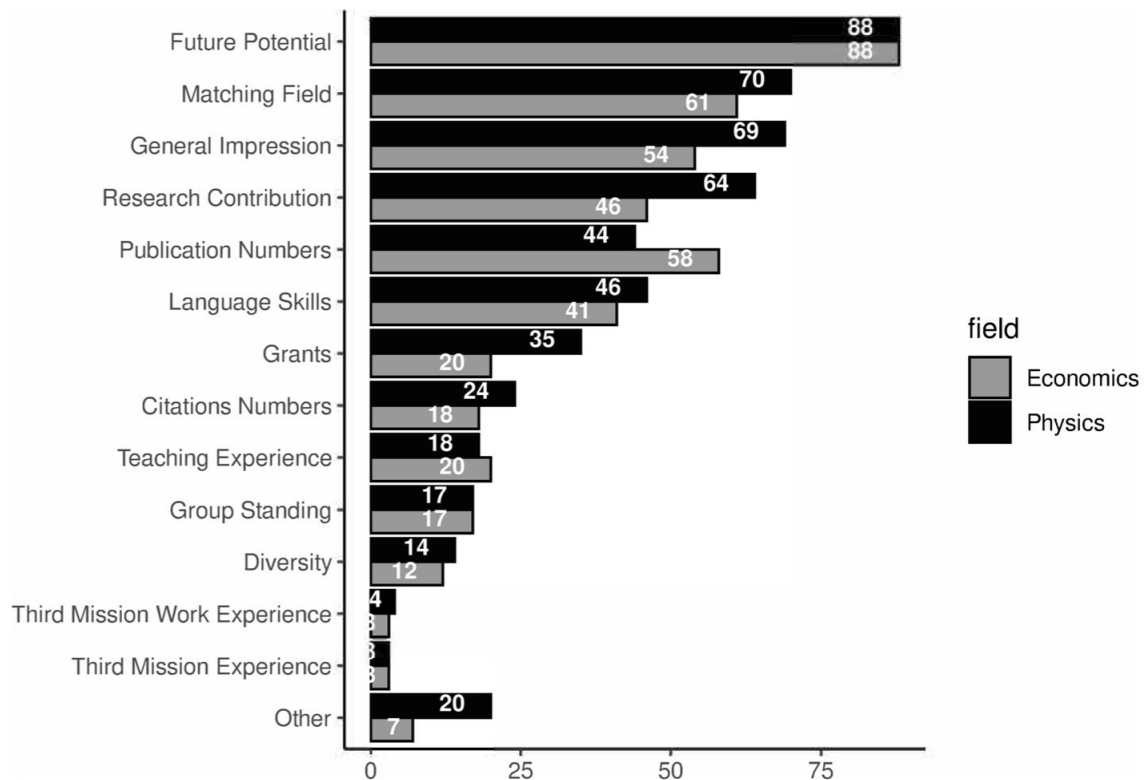
- Asked respondents about their last assessed candidate and identify which type of position they had assessed for: junior vs senior
- Asked to indicate the importance of 13 predefined evaluative criteria
- Focused in the regression on those criteria that were ranked as highly important
- Controlled for: country, field, type of recruited position, gender, age, position of the respondent

## Data and methods

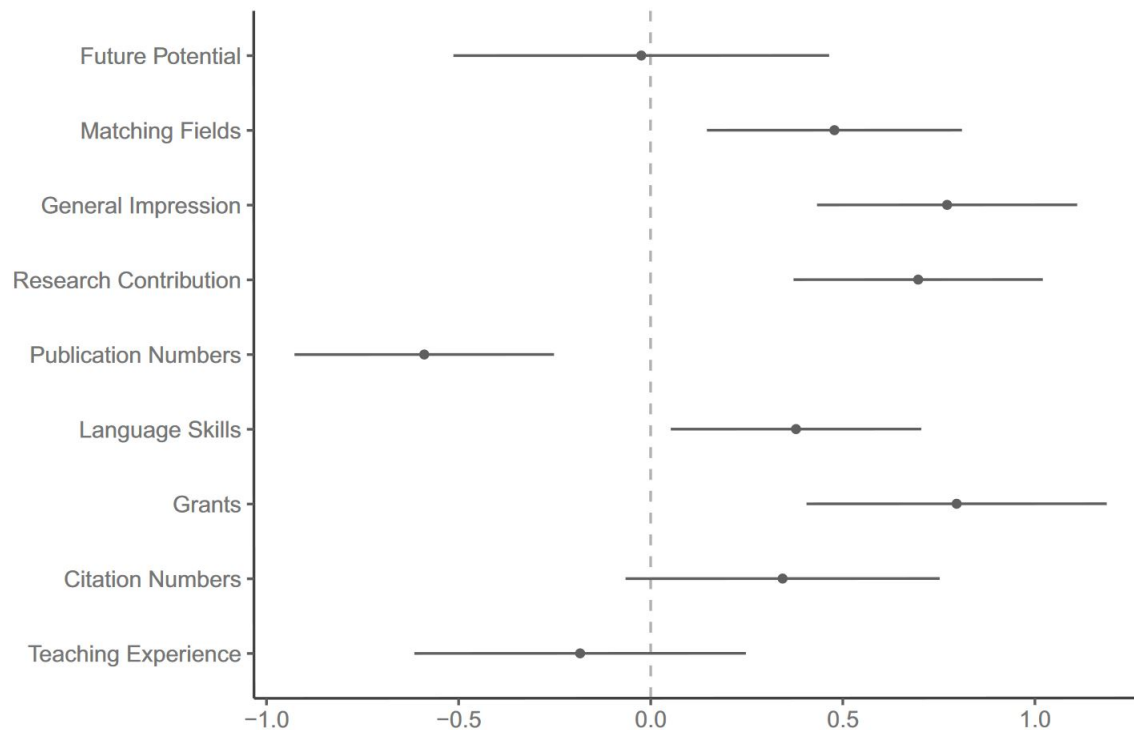
**Table 3** Abbreviations for predefined evaluative criteria categories in the questionnaire

| Short abbreviations           | Full text from the survey   |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Citation numbers              | Research achievements: citation impact of past publications   |
| Diversity                     | Ensure diversity in the group/department (e.g., gender, ethnicity, age)   |
| Future potential              | The potential for future achievements   |
| General impression            | General impression from interview with candidate  |
| Grants                        | Ability to compete for research grants  |
| Group standing                | Standing of the unit/group where the candidate is/has been working/trained  |
| Language skills               | Communication and language skills   |
| Matching field                | Matching field/expertise to the needs of the group/unit/project   |
| Publication numbers           | Research achievements: number of publications/productivities  |
| Research contributions        | Research achievements: important prior research contributions (assessed independently of citation scores and source of publication) |
| Teaching experience           | Teaching experience/achievements (including supervision of students)  |
| Third mission experience      | Experience in interacting with the public/users/industry  |
| Third mission work experience | Experience/achievements from work outside science, e.g., professional/clinical practice, industry or public administration          |

## What do we find?

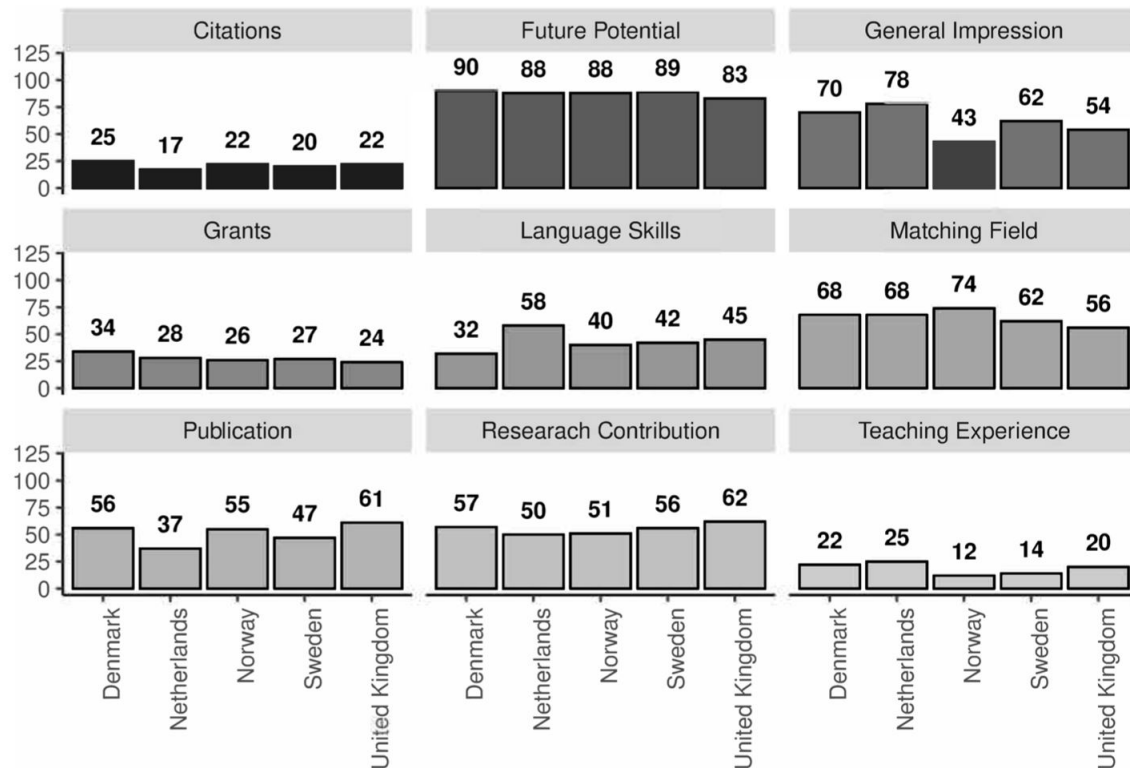


## What do we find?

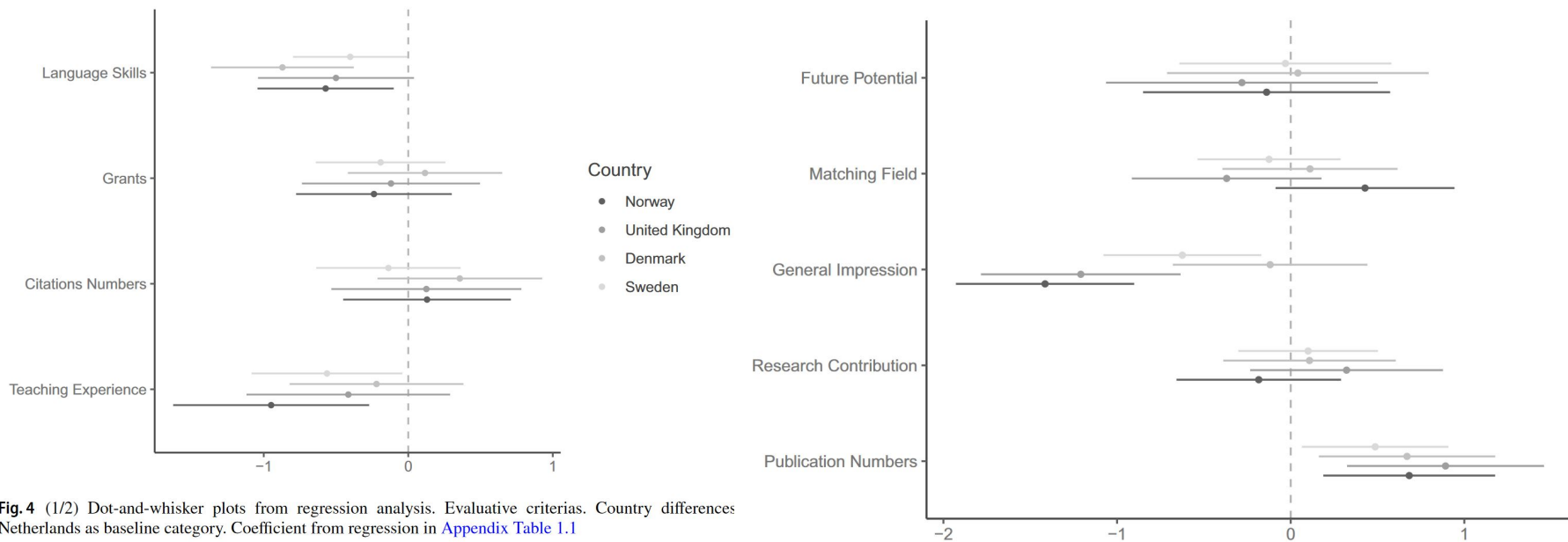


**Fig. 2** Dot-and-whisker plots from regression analysis. Evaluative criteria. Field differences Physics. Coefficient with economics as baseline category. Coefficient from regression in [Appendix Table 1.1](#)

## What do we find?

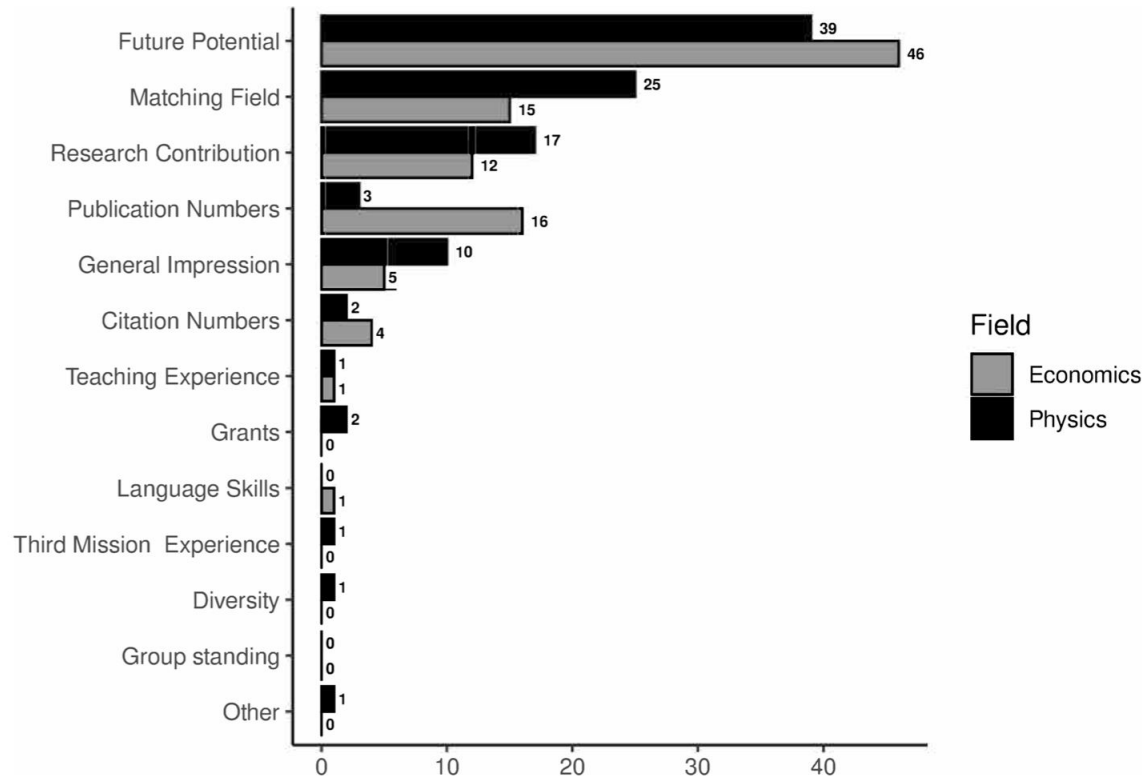


## What do we find?



**Fig. 4** (1/2) Dot-and-whisker plots from regression analysis. Evaluative criterias. Country differences Netherlands as baseline category. Coefficient from regression in [Appendix Table 1.1](#)

## What do we find?



**Fig. 5** Most important evaluative criteria by field. Percent. Economics ( $N = 375$ ), Physics ( $N = 399$ )



## What do we find?

- Regression analysis on most important criteria further confirmed strong field differences and only very limited country differences
- Evaluative criteria also depended a lot on the type of position for which the candidate should be assessed with senior positions relying more on Research Contribution and Publication Numbers, while Future Potential, Matching Field, and General Impression were more frequently in junior recruitment

## What do we find?

- Our results support both expectations, although the field differences were stronger than country differences
- Moderate country differences: e.g. Dutch put less focus on publications (possible link to national perf.-based funding system?) but more focus on language (see recent debates about Dutch as teaching language)
- Strong field differences: e.g. economists assessed the candidates on publication records, while physicists relied on important research contributions and relevance of their research profiles → in line with previous studies but also the way academic work is structured (lab vs. single researcher)

## What do we find?

- Evaluative cultures in recruitment were primarily embedded in the fields and, to some extent, national contexts
- Thus, we should regard the international academic labor market as layered and multiple rather than singular
- Processes are nationally regulated, but they are particularly tied to different internationally oriented fields, with their evaluative cultures
- What mechanism is behind this? Disciplines provide global norms regarding preferences of evaluative criteria and these norms are then filtered when they are applied in a national context (see Christensen et al. 2014)

## Where do we go from here?

- Look into perceived barriers for recruiting best possible candidates to a position
- Same data (somewhat more limited sample → N, NL, UK)
  - The salary level at my institution
  - Career development opportunities at my institution
  - The limited international prestige of my institution
  - Not allowed to recruit new permanent staff
  - High demands/work pressure at my institution
  - Competition from non-academic organizations
  - Rigid/slow hiring process at my institution

# Where do we go from here?

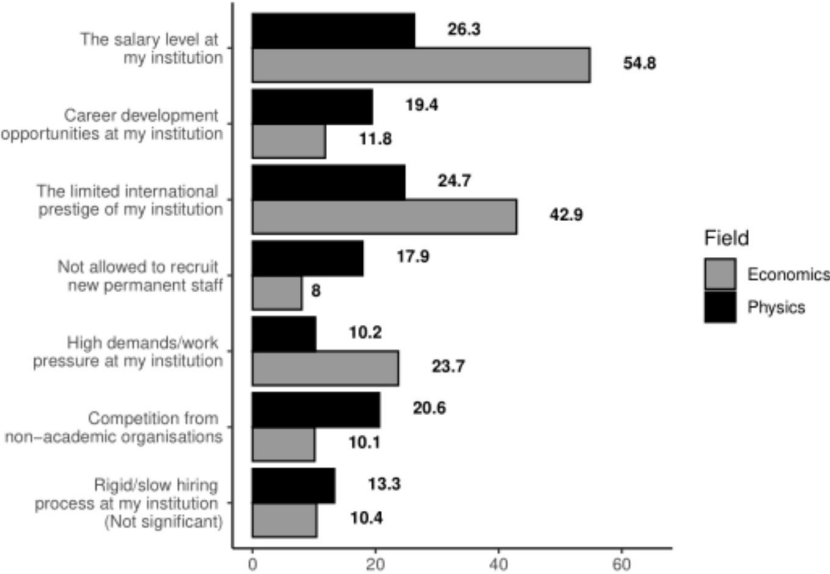


Figure 1. Field-effects from the regression analysis

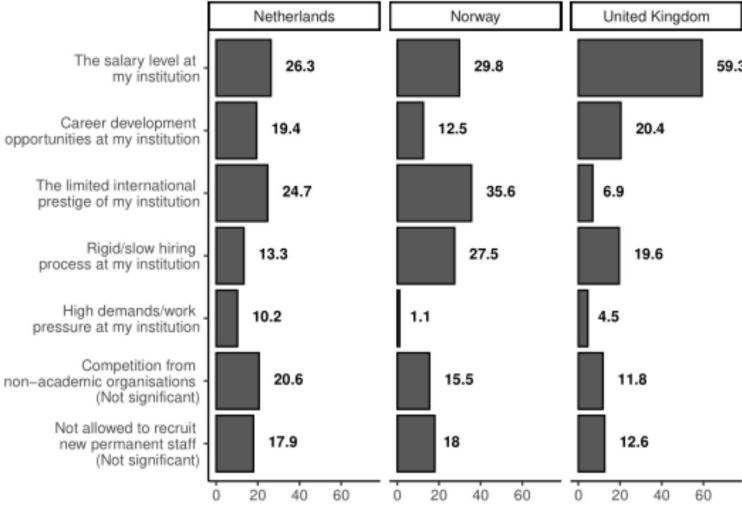


Figure 2. Country-effects from the regression analysis

**Thanks a lot for your attention**

## Sample overview

**Table 2** Descriptive statistics for control variables

| Statistic                                     | Number | Mean  | St. dev | Min   | Max   |
|---|--------|-------|---------|-------|-------|
| Age: 39 years and younger                     | 848    | 0.212 | 0.409   | 0     | 1     |
| Age: 40 to 49 years old                       | 848    | 0.298 | 0.458   | 0     | 1     |
| Age: 50 to 59 years old                       | 848    | 0.261 | 0.439   | 0     | 1     |
| Age: 60 years and older                       | 848    | 0.198 | 0.399   | 0     | 1     |
| Gender (female = 1)                           | 823    | 0.196 | 0.397   | 0.000 | 1.000 |
| Respondents own position: Professor           | 846    | 0.459 | 0.499   | 0.000 | 1.000 |
| Respondents own position: Associate Professor | 846    | 0.281 | 0.450   | 0.000 | 1.000 |
| Respondents own position: Assistant Professor | 846    | 0.178 | 0.383   | 0.000 | 1.000 |
| Respondents own position: Leader              | 846    | 0.063 | 0.242   | 0.000 | 1.000 |
| Respondents own position: Other               | 846    | 0.019 | 0.136   | 0.000 | 1.000 |
| Recruiting to junior position                 | 835    | 0.725 | 0.447   | 0.000 | 1.000 |
| Recruiting to senior position                 | 835    | 0.275 | 0.447   | 0.000 | 1.000 |