

*Anne-Wil Harzing, author and creator of the Publish or Perish citations software, gives us an insight into how the software has been used in some unusual ways and discusses the differences between the REF and the ERA.*



**When you launched Publish or Perish in 2006, did you envisage it to have multiple uses, e.g. allowing users to evaluate other academics and find authors who share interests, as well as allowing users to understand their own citations?**

No I certainly did not envisage this. As I mentioned in the foreword of my book (<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2012/01/14/book-review-the-publish-or-perish-book/>), the Publish or Perish software was mainly created for personal use to help me prepare my application for promotion to full professor. However, I quickly realised that it would be very useful for other academics as well. Hence I made it freely available on my website very soon after the first version had been developed.

It even took me a while though to realise that PoP could be used for many more purposes than an analysis of an academic's own citations. In fact, I still discover new uses for it every month. One handy use that many academics are unaware of is the "pre-submission check". You can use PoP to check whether the journal you are submitting your work to has recently published any other papers on your topic. Academics often work on their papers for several years, and then it is only too easy to miss recently published work in your field. This doesn't create a good impression with either the editor or the reviewers! So just go to PoP's general citation tab, search for the journal in question and your topic and sort by year. If you find any relevant papers click through to Google Scholar to locate them or even download them. It can often be done in 5-10 minutes!

What has also surprised me is that the program is used in so many different countries. For instance, Publish or Perish is used even more in Italy and France than in the UK. PoP has received substantial press coverage in Italy as a way to counteract nepotistic tendencies in academia. Recently the Italian newspaper *Linkiesta* (<http://www.linkiesta.it/ministri-citazione-monti-berlusconi>) even used Publish or Perish to compare the academic credentials of ministers in the new Monti government with those in the old Berlusconi government.

**Do you get a lot of feedback or responses from users?**

Yes I do, I typically get at least a dozen support requests a week, and sometimes many many more. Users often seem to think that I have a whole team of people here who help me with PoP and with answering their questions. Unfortunately, that's not the case. Australian professors don't even have assistance for their photocopying these days, not unlike professors in the UK I expect.

That said, in most cases I am very happy to answer any user questions as it gives me great insights into how people are using the program. However, some questions were asked over and over again. Therefore, I have created a FAQ (<http://www.harzing.com/pophelp/faq.htm>), which relieves me of some of the more tedious work.

The only thing I don't like is the aggressive emails I sometimes get written by academics who don't seem to realise that PoP is just an interface for Google Scholar. These academics order me – sometimes in fairly abusive terms – to **immediately** add their missing publications to "my database". They even go as far as claiming that I am ruining their career by not including their publications. I even get mailed complete CVs with the request/order to check all publications and enter any that are missing. I sometimes wonder: Do these people really think I have entered these millions and millions of publications myself?

**Do you have any plans for developing it, or do you have any new projects on the horizon that we can look forward to?**

Well in fact PoP has been continuously developed over the years. I have lost count, but I think there have

been at least 30 major new versions and hundreds of smaller updates. Over time, we have added many new features, as well as new metrics, new query options, a tabbed interface, a multi-query centre to manage your queries more efficiently and effectively, and have drastically extended the help file.

I still have several dozens of feature requests pending. However, we have to balance simplicity and user-friendliness with having more complicated features that might be of interest for some users, but lead to confusion for others. Remember I still have to answer all of their questions.

I don't have any specific projects on the horizon at the moment. I have my hands pretty full balancing my job as Associate Dean, as a researcher, and as a provider of academic services. However, if the LSE Impact blog readers have any ideas about academic products they would be interested in, I would love to hear about them.

### **There has been much debate about the benefits and disadvantages of the REF in the UK; is the ERA as hotly discussed in Australia?**

There certainly was a lot of discussion and discontent about the ERA journal ranking list. However, there is probably not as wide an engagement with ERA as there is with REF in the UK. Part of that is because ERA is still fairly new; we had our first ERA in 2012. However, I think it might also be because individual academics don't really have much input into ERA. They don't have to choose their "four best" publications as they do in the UK, because **all** their publications over a 6-year period are submitted. They don't need to write up any impact or background statements about their research either.

Universities are required to select a proportion of their research output in a specific field for evaluation, but this selection is not up to individual academics. This means that much of the submission is in the hands of only a couple of individuals in each Faculty or School. That might not be bad though, as at least it means that the bulk of the researchers can spend their productive time doing the actual research



### **Are there any elements of the REF that you would like to see incorporated into the ERA, or vice versa?**

The focus on impact in the UK is a definite plus as it broadens the impact agenda to include wider societal impact. However, my concern is that academics and academic managers will end up spending an inordinate amount of time on writing case studies for the REF and other such assessments, time that could be more productively spent to improve research and teaching.

ERA could also learn from the REF in terms of organisation and consultation. ERA seems to be operating in rather ad-hoc and last minute fashion, whereas REF seems to be a much more considered exercise in general, and based on more systematic consultation with the academic community. For instance, we received our final guidelines for the 2012 submission not much more than **half a year** before the submission date.

Nine months before the submission date major aspects of the assessment were still in flux. A case in point was the sudden (and to me rather unexpected) abolishment of a list of ranked journals. Incidentally, there is a great piece in the Australian about this "Inside the ERA bunker (<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/higher-education/opinion/inside-the-era-bunker/story-e6frgcko-1226071198170>)", which claims to tell the true story about why the Minister took this decision. It's hilarious and well worth a read.

***For more on Publish or Perish, see Harzing.com (<http://www.harzing.com/pophelp/faq.htm>) and see our other related posts below.***

Related posts:

1. Google Scholar Citations is now open to everyone. It shows great promise as a free, reliable way to track and compare academic impact over time.  
(<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2011/11/24/google-scholar-citations-shows-promise/>)

2. How to use Harzing's 'Publish or Perish' software to assess citations – a step-by-step guide (<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2011/07/27/how-to-use-harzings-publish-or-perish-software-to-assess-citations-a-step-by-step-guide/>)
3. Across Europe there is a fundamental failure to agree on the value of research. Classifying academic and government perspectives on impact is a step towards settling the debate (<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2011/08/17/europe-impact-debate-classification/>)
4. Five Minutes with Nicholas Lemann: "Incorporating academic research adds value to the social mission of journalism." (<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2011/12/30/5-minutes-with-nicholas-lemann/>)
5. Government's changing priorities will require evidence-based results of cutting-edge academic theory and practice (<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2011/10/31/cutting-edge-policy/>)