



Questions on Notice for Academic Board

On 9 September 2014 Winthrop Professor Ray Da Silva Rosa posed the following questions to the Academic Board, and specifically to the Deans of Faculties.

The SI (Socratic Index) is an index developed administratively to measure and influence research activity at UWA.

An academic's SI score is a function of points awarded for three outcomes: Completed higher degree (HD) research supervision, competitive research grants won, and research publications.

Points awarded vary by level of HD supervision, amount of research grant won and type of research publication. The award of points makes the SI an expression of institutional values but there are no explicit guidelines on how it may be used.

My questions are:

- 1. How is the SI used in each Faculty? For instance, is it used in performance reviews, approvals of sabbaticals, support of promotion application and, importantly, to determine teaching loads?*
- 2. Where it is used, are academic staff provided with information about the distribution and values of SI scores for their discipline that allow them to present their relative performance fairly? Even with a discipline the distribution of SI scores may be expected to vary by level of seniority, age, and personal circumstance for which allowance is often made.*
- 3. Will a set of guidelines for use of the SI be produced?*
- 4. Is there a set of protocols to determine when and how the SI formula is changed?*

I have undertaken the task of collating answers to question 1 from each of the faculties and will provide a whole of institution response to the other questions, although individual Deans may wish to speak about the particular practices within their faculties.

1. How is the SI used in each faculty?

Each Dean was sent the questions above and asked to provide information on how Socrates is used, by indicating against a set of tasks whether data aggregated in Socrates, the Socratic index, or some other sources of data were used. Overall, it was discovered that while most of the Faculties use Socrates to view publication, grant and HDR completion data, very few use the Socratic Index to determine academic staff decisions. The Science Faculty, which is the largest at UWA, has developed their own database, with their own set of measures for performance. Science has different approaches across the different Schools. Faculties also seem to be using other data sources, such as the Web of Science, Medline, Scopus or Callista, as tools in their decision-making processes. While the extended University Executive frequently uses Socrates to identify high performing staff for nominations to awards and leadership positions, at the local level, where staff performance is better understood, these decisions are made in other ways. The appendix to this paper lists the individual responses received.

Performance review

Overall, some Faculties use the data in Socrates to inform Performance Reviews while others use other data sources, either external or databases they have constructed internally. No faculty explicitly uses the Socratic Index to compute satisfactory performance, and nor does HR use the SI.

Approval of sabbatical

Overall, some Faculties use the data in Socrates to inform decisions about sabbatical while others use other data sources, either external or databases they have constructed internally. Some Schools use the Socratic Index to determine whether staff are deemed research active, and thus eligible to apply for sabbatical leave. In any case, final approval for sabbatical leave is given by the Senior Deputy Vice Chancellor, who considers the case made by the applicant, the support of the School and Faculty, and alignment of the leave plans with the Strategic Plan of the University.

Support for promotion

The Chair of the Promotions and Tenure Committee advised that some applicants for promotion use Socrates to compare their research performance against others in their School or Faculty; to compare their performance against other staff who already hold the level of appointment they aspire to; and, to determine if they are ready to make an application for promotion. The Promotions and Tenure Committee itself may refer to Socrates to validate data and to assist in the decision about whether an application should be sent for external review.

To determine teaching loads

The Faculties of Arts and Engineering, Computing & Mathematics use Socratic data to determine broad parameters for the allocation of teaching workload, but do not directly use the Socratic Index to calculate workload. All other faculties use alternative databases.

To nominate for prizes or awards

ALVA, LAW and a few Schools in Science use Socratic data to identify staff who may be eligible for prizes and awards. Centrally, this is one of the most common uses of Socrates, particularly when we are searching for staff across the University but in particular subsets, e.g., under 40 years of age, outstanding supervision, outstanding translation of research, or for development for future leadership positions.

To appoint to faculty leadership positions

ALVA, EDUCATION and LAW use Socratic data to inform decisions about faculty leadership positions. The other faculties use other databases or other methods.

To support appointment to University leadership positions

The data in Socrates seems to be rarely used to consider staff for University-level leadership positions, such as sitting on central committees or nominating staff for executive level positions.

2. Are Benchmark Data Provided to Staff?

Benchmark data were provided as part of Socrates feedback to staff when publication and grant data was pro-rata shared over collaborators. In Socrates III, there is no longer any sharing of points among co-authors or co-PIs on grants, and so University-level averages are now meaningless. Each individual is, however, provided with the Average SI for their School and their Faculty. As a general rule, we have found that the average Socratic Index doubles with each increment of academic level.

3. Will Guidelines be Produced?

Guidelines could be produced for Deans, Heads of School and the Promotions Committee, but usually people holding these roles are provided training in how to use Socrates if they ask. It is clear from this document that not many line managers actually use Socrates.

4. When and How is the SI Changed?

Each year, the University collects publication data for the HERDC data return to the Federal Department of Education, along with data on all Research Income and Higher Degree enrolments and completions. The collection of publication data is the most intensive process, and the audit of material is usually completed mid-year. Socrates is then updated to move to the most recent six-year window. Each year, elements of the Socratic Index are reviewed to determine if they continue to align with the University's Strategic Plan. Recent changes have removed the sharing of points for collaborations, since many staff had complained about this and in some cases this was seen as a disincentive to collaboration. Additionally, bonus points were given for publications in Top 20% journals (used in subject rankings) and for Category 1 grants (used in ERA evaluations).

Robyn Owens
Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research)

4 November 2014

Appendix: Responses from the Faculties

ALVA

Item for consideration	Use Socrates data to inform decision	Use Socratic Index to calculate decision	Use other data source
Performance review	YES	NO	YES
Approval of sabbatical	YES	NO	YES
Support for promotion	YES	NO	YES
Determine teaching loads	NO	Yes – but not for long since the changes to pro rata counting has made the use inappropriate for ALVA	YES
To nominate for prizes or awards	YES	NO	YES
To appoint to faculty leadership positions	YES	NO	YES
To support for University leadership positions	YES	NO	YES
Other (please specify)	Socrates always used by level and by discipline group	Socrates always used by level and by discipline group	

EDUCATION

Item for consideration	Use Socrates data to inform decision	Use Socratic Index to calculate decision	Use other data source
Performance review	YES	YES	
Approval of sabbatical	YES	YES	
Support for promotion	YES	YES	
Determine teaching loads	NO	NO	
To nominate for prizes or awards	NA	NA	
To appoint to faculty leadership positions	YES	NO	
To support for University leadership positions	NO	NO	
Other (please specify)			

SCIENCE: CET

Item for consideration	Use Socrates data to inform decision	Use Socratic Index to calculate decision	Use other data source
Performance review	NO	NO	YES
Approval of sabbatical	NO	NO	YES
Support for promotion	NO	NO	YES
Determine teaching loads	NO	NO	YES
To nominate for prizes or awards	NO	NO	YES
To appoint to faculty leadership positions	NO	NO	YES
To support for University leadership positions	NO	NO	YES
Other (please specify)			

SCIENCE: CMCA

Item for consideration	Use Socrates data to inform decision	Use Socratic Index to calculate decision	Use other data source
Performance review	YES	NO	YES
Approval of sabbatical	YES	NO	YES
Support for promotion	YES	NO	YES
Determine teaching loads	NO	NO	YES
To nominate for prizes or awards	YES	NO	YES
To appoint to faculty leadership positions	NO	NO	YES
To support for University leadership positions	NO	NO	YES
Other (please specify)			

SCIENCE: PLANT BIOLOGY

Item for consideration	Use Socrates data to inform decision	Use Socratic Index to calculate decision	Use other data source
Performance review	NO	NO	YES
Approval of sabbatical	NO	NO	YES
Support for promotion	NO	NO	YES
Determine teaching loads	NO	NO	YES
To nominate for prizes or awards	NO	NO	YES
To appoint to faculty leadership positions	NO	NO	YES
To support for University leadership positions	NO	NO	YES
Other (please specify)			

SCIENCE: PLANT ENERGY BIOLOGY

Item for consideration	Use Socrates data to inform decision	Use Socratic Index to calculate decision	Use other data source
Performance review	Yes	No	Yes
Approval of sabbatical	n/a	n/a	
Support for promotion	Yes	No	Yes
Determine teaching loads	n/a	n/a	
To nominate for prizes or awards	Yes	No	Yes
To appoint to faculty leadership positions	n/a	n/a	
To support for University leadership positions	n/a	n/a	
Other (please specify)			

SCIENCE: PHYSICS

Item for consideration	Use Socrates data to inform decision	Use Socratic Index to calculate decision	Use other data source
Performance review	NO	NO	NO
Approval of sabbatical	YES	NO	YES
Support for promotion	YES	NO	YES
Determine teaching loads	NO	YES	NO
To nominate for prizes or awards	NO	NO	NO
To appoint to faculty leadership positions	NO	NO	NO
To support for University leadership positions	NO	NO	NO
Other (please specify)			

SCIENCE: PSYCHOLOGY

Item for consideration	Use Socrates data to inform decision	Use Socratic Index to calculate decision	Use other data source
Performance review	YES	NO	YES
Approval of sabbatical	NO	NO	YES
Support for promotion	YES	NO	YES
Determine teaching loads	NO	NO	YES
To nominate for prizes or awards	NO	NO	YES
To appoint to faculty leadership positions	NO	NO	YES
To support for University leadership positions	NO	NO	YES
Other (please specify)	Socrates also used to access information on research supervision.		

SCIENCE: CHEM&BIOCHEM

Item for consideration	Use Socrates data to inform decision	Use Socratic Index to calculate decision	Use other data source
Performance review	Yes, in comparison with School and UWA averages as relevant - but alongside Faculty KPIs	Absolutely not.	Faculty KPIs
Approval of sabbatical	No	No	Faculty KPIs as well as balancing absences among all relevant staff
Support for promotion	Yes, especially in comparison with School/UWA averages for level to which they aspire	No	Yes - as much relevant data as possible
Determine teaching loads	Absolutely not	Absolutely not	Other factors include expertise, teaching load in other areas, service commitments
To nominate for prizes or awards	No	No	Data depends on award
To appoint to faculty leadership positions	No	No	
To support for University leadership positions	No	No	
Other (please specify)			

SCIENCE: SPORTS SCIENCE

Item for consideration	Use Socrates data to inform decision	Use Socratic Index to calculate decision	Use other data source
Performance review	Yes		Yes
Approval of sabbatical	No	No	Yes
Support for promotion	Yes		Yes
Determine teaching loads	No		Yes (workload formula)
To nominate for prizes or awards	No	No	
To appoint to faculty leadership positions	No	No	
To support for University leadership positions	No	No	
Other (please specify)			

SCIENCE: CENRM

Item for consideration	Use Socrates data to inform decision	Use Socratic Index to calculate decision	Use other data source
Performance review	A little	No	Yes
Approval of sabbatical	NA	NA	NA
Support for promotion	A little	No	Yes
Determine teaching loads	No	No	Yes
To nominate for prizes or awards	No	No	Yes
To appoint to faculty leadership positions	A little	No	Yes
To support for University leadership positions	A little	No	Yes
Other (please specify)			

SCIENCE: EARTH&ENVIRONMENT

Item for consideration	Use Socrates data to inform decision	Use Socratic Index to calculate decision	Use other data source
Performance review	N	N	Y
Approval of sabbatical	N	N	Y
Support for promotion	N	N	Y
Determine teaching loads	N	N	Y
To nominate for prizes or awards	N	N	Y
To appoint to faculty leadership positions	N	N	Y
To support for University leadership positions	N	N	Y
Other (please specify)			

SCIENCE: AGRICULTURAL RESOURCE ECONOMICS

Item for consideration	Use Socrates data to inform decision	Use Socratic Index to calculate decision	Use other data source
Performance review	N	N	Y
Approval of sabbatical	N	N	Y
Support for promotion	N	N	Y
Determine teaching loads	N	N	Y
To nominate for prizes or awards	N	N	Y
To appoint to faculty leadership positions	N	N	Y
To support for University leadership positions	N	N	Y
Other (please specify)			

SCIENCE: ANATOMY, PHYSIOLOGY & HUMAN BIOL

Item for consideration	Use Socrates data to inform decision	Use Socratic Index to calculate decision	Use other data source
Performance review	N	N	Y
Approval of sabbatical	N	N	Y
Support for promotion	N	N	Y
Determine teaching loads	N	N	Y
To nominate for prizes or awards	N	N	Y
To appoint to faculty leadership positions	N	N	Y
To support for University leadership positions	N	N	Y
Other (please specify)			

SCIENCE: ANIMAL BIOL

Item for consideration	Use Socrates data to inform decision	Use Socratic Index to calculate decision	Use other data source
Performance review	N	N	Y
Approval of sabbatical	N	N	Y
Support for promotion	N	N	Y
Determine teaching loads	N	N	Y
To nominate for prizes or awards	N	N	Y
To appoint to faculty leadership positions	N	N	Y
To support for University leadership positions	N	N	Y
Other (please specify)			

OCEANS INSTITUTE

Item for consideration	Use Socrates data to inform decision	Use Socratic Index to calculate decision	Use other data source
Performance review	NO	NO	YES
Approval of sabbatical	NO	NO	YES
Support for promotion	NO	NO	YES
Determine teaching loads	NO	NO	YES
To nominate for prizes or awards	NO	NO	YES
To appoint to faculty leadership positions	NO	NO	YES
To support for University leadership positions	NO	NO	YES
Other (please specify)			

MEDICINE

Item for consideration	Use Socrates data to inform decision	Use Socratic Index to calculate decision	Use other data source
Performance review			X
Approval of sabbatical		X – in some schools SI is used to define research active staff	
Support for promotion		X – used by some staff in their applications, but not necessarily by those assessing the application	
Determine teaching loads			X
To nominate for prizes or awards			X
To appoint to faculty leadership positions			X
To support for University leadership positions			X
Other (please specify)			

LAW

Item for consideration	Use Socrates data to inform decision	Use Socratic Index to calculate decision	Use other data source
Performance review	YES	NO	YES
Approval of sabbatical	YES	NO	YES
Support for promotion	YES	NO	YES
Determine teaching loads	NO	NO	YES
To nominate for prizes or awards	YES	NO	YES
To appoint to faculty leadership positions	YES	NO	YES
To support for University leadership positions	NO	NO	YES
Other (please specify)			

ARTS

Item for consideration	Use Socrates data to inform decision	Use Socratic Index to calculate decision	Use other data source
Performance review	Yes		
Approval of sabbatical	Yes		
Support for promotion		Yes	
Determine teaching loads	Yes		
To nominate for prizes or awards	We don't really have research prizes		
To appoint to faculty leadership positions	No		
To support for University leadership positions	No		
Other (please specify)			

BUSINESS

Item for consideration	Use Socrates data to inform decision	Use Socratic Index to calculate decision	Use other data source
Performance review		Yes but not systematic as yet	School RPP system
Approval of sabbatical		No	School RPP system
Support for promotion		Yes but not systematic as yet	School RPP system
Determine teaching loads		No	School RPP system
To nominate for prizes or awards		No	
To appoint to faculty leadership positions		No	School RPP system
To support for University leadership positions			
Other (please specify)			

ENGINEERING, COMPUTING & MATHS

Item for consideration	Use Socrates data to inform decision	Use Socratic Index to calculate decision	Use other data source
Performance review	YES	Only to set parameters for discussion	
Approval of sabbatical	YES	Only to set parameters for discussion	
Support for promotion	YES		
Determine teaching loads	YES	Only to set parameters for discussion – in a very broad band to define research intensive and not research active – numbers are only indicative	
To nominate for prizes or awards	NO		
To appoint to faculty leadership positions	NO		
To support for University leadership positions	NO		
Other (please specify)			