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**Abstract**

In 2013, the European Union (EU) unveiled its new ‘Composite Indicator for Scientific and Technological Research Excellence’. This is not an isolated occurrence; policy-based interest in excellence is growing all over the world. The heightened focus on excellence and, in particular, attempts to define it through quantitative indicators can have important implications for research policy and for the conduct of research itself. This paper examines how the EU's understanding of excellence has evolved in recent years, from the presentation of the Lisbon strategy in 2000 to the current Europe 2020 strategy. We find a distinct shift in the understanding of excellence and how success in the knowledge-based economy should be achieved: in the early period, excellence is a fuzzy concept, intrinsically embedded in research and researchers and revealed by peer review. In the later period, excellence is more sharply defined and connected with a particular sort of knowledge that which produces breakthroughs; the result is that policy-makers have turned their focus towards

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directly steering and controlling what is increasingly considered to be the key element for success in the knowledge-based economy. This change is evidenced by the ‘Composite Indicator for Scientific and Technological Research Excellence’, its rationale and its components. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)