

Editor's note

The state of research in Africa has been the subject of intense debate from time to time in many and different forums. The forthcoming National Scholarly Editors' Forum (NSEF) meeting scheduled for Wednesday, July 28 2010 in Johannesburg is a welcome initiative of the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf) to strengthen on-going efforts to improve African research and outputs. The meeting aims to "provide an exciting time and opportunity for Scholarly Journal Editors to exchange information and knowledge in our field, but also an exceptional occasion to meet not only our disciplinary peers, but other experts who share the same interests. The programme is designed to allow Editors to engage in discussions around these proposed items during the final session, and also to table points during the discussions".

The NSEF meeting comes at a time research and publications in the peer reviewed literature are under "scrutiny" and pertinent questions are being asked about the role of universities being to either "challenge its students and push back the frontiers of knowledge or to turn out productive, profitable, commercial research",¹ and about the so called "publish or perish" approach.²

Professor Wedgwood argues¹ that "One of the main benefits of academic research is its impact on teaching. The best lecturers are almost always scholars engaged in their own research. They will be educating future teachers, journalists, lawyers, civil servants, and politicians, many of whom will take degree courses involving philosophy. However, the council's [*Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)*] proposals state that the effect of academics' research on

their teaching is not the kind of 'impact' they particularly wish to encourage. They are looking for research that leads to 'creating new businesses', 'commercialising new products' or 'improving patient care or health outcomes'."

The incentive system for publishing in an accredited journal, or in peer reviewed conference proceedings or books entails that a percentage of the subsidy provided to the university by the Department of Higher Education reaches the author of the publication. Professor Macleod argues² that "the incentive system is a blunt instrument that serves the purposes of increasing university income rather than supporting scholarship and knowledge production in South Africa. It is essentially a managerialist solution, in which bean counting trumps over concerns for scholarship. It is time that we face the fact that research outputs are not necessarily the same as good scholarship."

Reflection and further debate on these thought-provoking points of view will no doubt help shape our approach to future research in the country.

Prof Demetre Labadaros

Editor-in-chief

SAJCN

References

1. Wedgwood R. A thoughtless approach to research funding. The Daily Telegraph 15 Dec 2009.. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/6819052/A-thoughtless-approach-to-research-funding.html> (Accessed 20-06-10)
2. Macleod C. The Incentive System for research is bad for scholarship. University World News. 06 June 2010. <http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20100605063654105>. (Accessed 15-06-10)