



Workshop Record

The Ethics of Scholarly Publishing

Date: 11 April 2018

Venue: Albert Luthuli Auditorium, NRF

Table of Contents

1. Brief Background	2
2. Welcome (Dr Molapo Qhobela, CEO: NRF).....	2
3. Opening Remarks and Objectives of the Workshop (Dr Gansen Pillay, Deputy CEO: NRF).....	2
4. Scale and Nature of Unethical Practices in Scholarly Publishing (Prof Johan Mouton, University of Stellenbosch)	3
5. Lessons from DHET Accreditation of Publications (Mr Mahlubi Mabizela, DHET).....	5
6. Manifestation of Unethical Practices in NRF's Rating System (Professor Valerie Corfield, NRF Panellist)	6
7. Research Institutions' Experiences and Challenges on Ethics in Scholarly Publications (Professor Ahmed Bawa, USAf)	7
8. Open Discussion (Dr Andrew Kaniki, NRF).....	8
9. Discussion on Coordination of Efforts (Susan Veldsman, ASSAf)	14
10. Other Comments and Questions	16
11. Closing Remarks and Vote of Thanks (Prof Barend Baijnath, CHE).....	19

1. Brief Background

The topic of ethics in scholarly publishing has recently come to the fore, most notably through the practice of publishing in predatory journals. Against this background, the NRF together with key stakeholders, viz., the Department of Science and Technology (DST), the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), the Council on Higher Education (CHE), Universities South Africa (USAf) and the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf) convened a workshop for key players to engage on the subject of ethics in scholarly publishing and try to agree a way forward in this regard. The workshop was held at the NRF on the 11th April 2018 and was attended by about 100 persons from, in addition to the organisations mentioned above: higher education institutions; science councils, editors of South African journals and publishers and providers of bibliometric data.

The programme for the workshop is attached as **Appendix 1**. Beyond this point, the structure of this record of the workshop is aligned to the programme of the workshop.

2. Welcome (Dr Molapo Qhobela, CEO: NRF)

Dr Qhobela welcomed all present to the meeting and expressed the trust that the meeting will lead to productive deliberations.

He commented on the necessity for all public office bearers to have integrity, ethics and a compass to guide any choices and decisions as they were the compass for society. The stakeholders present at the workshop were acknowledged as the guardians of the quality of knowledge production and generation, in an ethical way, in the South African National System of Innovation (NSI). Although predatory publishing was to dominate the conversation at the workshop, he pointed out that there are many other areas of ethical concern: how students are worked with; relationships between student and supervisor; the principles that inform the knowledge enterprise more broadly; approaches taken; etc. He expressed hope that the workshop will result in a set of principles and guidelines that will aid and strengthen the research and scientific system in SA as a whole.

3. Opening Remarks and Objectives of the Workshop (Dr Gansen Pillay, Deputy CEO: NRF)

Dr Pillay commented favourably on the attendance of so many of the key role-players for this workshop. CHE, ASSAf, USAf, DST and DHET were thanked for accepting a partnership with the NRF which was prompted largely by the recent changing patterns of drivers for scholarly publishing in South Africa, noted by all stakeholders represented at the workshop.

The NRF's value of "a passion for excellence" governs all its decision-making and it is central to the ethos of the organisation. The organisation became concerned when it noted changes in patterns where researchers publish, this mainly observed in the applications for rating and for funding for scholarships and research. A variety of presentations will be given on ethical issues that all come into play in the journey of researchers that produces high impact, peer-reviewed papers and it is hoped that there will be robust discussion on the issues raised in the presentations. It is hoped that the outcome of the workshop will be some form of quality assurance system to enable the various organisations in the NSI to vet the quality of

publications. The NRF has no punitive recourses but we work in close partnership with the Higher Education Institutions (HEI) in SA and have a close relationship with USAf, CHE, DHET and other stakeholders in this regard.

The NRF has already produced statements on Open Access and Predatory Journals and Deceptive Publishers. The NRF also belongs to the Global Research Council (GRC), and is co-signatory of its statements on peer review, open access, gender equity, etc. It is hoped that post this meeting a joint accord signed by all key role players represented at the workshop will be produced to indicate to the outside world, South Africa's position on the ethics of scholarly publishing. This should find its way onto the GRC agenda so that, jointly on a global level, a statement should be put out.

4. **Scale and Nature of Unethical Practices in Scholarly Publishing (Prof Johan Mouton, University of Stellenbosch)**

Prof Mouton welcomed all and congratulated and thanked the NRF for taking this initiative to forge a common approach on this matter by hosting this workshop as the evidence shows an increase in questionable practices in scholarly productions in the SA NSI. He explained how the Centre for Research on Evaluation, Science and Technology (CREST), of which he is the Director, became interested in the topic.

The following were key messages from the presentation (also refer **Appendix 2**):

- Issues around quality in scholarly publishing are inextricably linked to issues about ethics.
- In its most 'primitive' form, scientific quality is an epistemological concept (how truthful are the knowledge claims), where the word stems from the Greek meaning truthful knowledge, something that all scientists and scholars strive for, but it is also one of human decision-making: from the initial choice of topics, how research questions are framed, methodological choices up to publication choices and strategies, a neglected area in the past. Where unethical practices become pervasive and remain unchecked, they undermine confidence in the authority of science and trust in its findings and more importantly, the general public's trust in science.
- The rate of publication of a journal is both a function of the demand for publication in its domain and the journal's capacity to process and publish a specific volume of materials. When the typical pattern of incremental increases is replaced with one of exponential increases in the volume of papers published over a short period of time, it should be accompanied with a significant investment by the journal in editorial resources to meet this demand. Where this fails, it is evidence of the weakening, even relinquishing, of principles of good publication practice such as blind and independent peer review.
- The CREST study Professor Mouton reported on, took Beall's list as point of departure, but not at face value as there was awareness of many criticisms of Beall's practice. The study attempted to apply a more refined set of criteria to distinguish between predatory and non-predatory journals. It assigned one of the following categories to the journals they investigated: (i) not predatory; (ii) insufficient evidence

for predatory; (iii) weak evidence for predatory; and (iv) strong evidence for predatory. The results of the investigation allowed the estimation of the overall extent of predatory publishing in South Africa.

- The 'watchdog' role of Beall has since (it being closed down) been taken over by entities such as Cabell's list, but more importantly, more articulated and scholarly approaches to identifying predatory journals (e.g. Petrisor's work) are now at play; and a better understanding of the deeper issues around scholarly publishing is evident.
- New websites/tools to identify predatory journals include:
 - Stop predatory (<https://predatoryjournals.com/>)
 - Cabell (<https://cabells.com/about-blacklist>)
 - Predator vs Academator:
<https://predatorvsacademator.wordpress.com/2017/01/18/alleged-misleading-metrics/>
 - Consult the Directory of Open Access Journals (<https://doaj.org/>)
- New websites that list 'fake' journals: (<https://fakejournalss.wordpress.com/list-of-fake-computer-science-journals>), exist. In addition to predatory publishing, CREST identified the questionable editorial practices of high volumes of publications by journal editors or members of editorial boards.
- Two challenges therefore exist,
 - Firstly an epistemological one in the demarcation challenge whereby a distinction can be made between predatory and non-predatory journals and between ethically acceptable and questionable editorial practices with acceptable levels of certainty.
 - Secondly a quality assurance one in which the main actors (HEIs, DHET, ASSAf, NRF etc) need to assure that scholarly publishing in South Africa maintains high levels of quality.
- It is not a black-and-white situation with an absolute distinction and therefore the problem indicates that clear and robust indicators are needed.
- The archetypical predatory journal is characterised by its violation of rules of research/publishing integrity and also by falling short of achieving acceptable levels of editorial quality. The specific aim of the predatory journal/ publisher is to make money out of publishing without conforming to good, conventional editorial practices.
- The following were presented as indicators to guide demarcation decisions:

Conclusive indicators:

- Fake metrics
- Promising fast turnaround time from submission of manuscript to publication
- Personalised and flattering spamming to solicit manuscripts

Strong indicators of being predatory:

- Suspicious journal names (include hijacking of names of existing journals of high impact)
- Journal subject matter covered (often very broad and/or incoherent)
- Journal location (attempts to mask real location)

Professor Mouton posed the question of how can the publishing quality in a science system and specifically in South Africa be insured, and concluded that by default DHET performs this role when it accredits or de-accredits journals or recognizes lists of indexes for subsidy purposes as encapsulated in the Research Output Policy. ASSAf also performs a related and complementary function when it uses instruments such as the Editor's Forum and its journal review panels to produce journal assessments. The current problem is that there is insufficient co-ordination of effort between these agencies and other stakeholders and information is not shared between them. He proposed that a platform should be established between DHET, ASSAf, NRF and CREST to share information on scholarly publishing and ways to identify questionable publishing practices in the country.

5. Lessons from DHET Accreditation of Publications (Mr Mahlubi Mabizela, DHET)

The following were key messages from the presentation (also refer **Appendix 3**):

- The Research Outputs Policy of the DHET (2005) provided subsidies to HEIs for research outputs which includes articles, Masters and PhD graduates. The subsidy currently amounts to about R3billion per annum.
- The policy's key principle is to fund institutions and not individual authors but institutions have the autonomy to distribute the subsidy in accordance with their own criteria. These institutional policies' in many cases have the unintended consequence of leading to unethical publication practices amongst researchers.
- Research integrity and quality are mainstays of this policy and the Department may consider punitive measures (e.g. recalling of units claimed) in cases where institutions persistently make incorrect claims that compromise the integrity of scholarship or research.
- The DHET is working with CREST on criteria and processes to identify Predatory Journals on its accredited list.
- The policy significantly impacted on improving the qualifications of researchers and growth in research productivity. For example the doctoral qualifications of academics in the sector has improved from approximately 33% in 2008 to 56% over 10 years, and the NDP's target is 75% by 2030.
- The DHET is continually reviewing this policy and is open to suggestions for improvement.
- The retraction of some journals identified as predatory in February 2018 was only technical in nature and DHET is determined to remove those journals that are proven to be predatory, from the accredited list.

6. Manifestation of Unethical Practices in NRF's Rating System (Professor Valerie Corfield, NRF Panellist)

Prof Corfield shared her experience on how predatory publishing impacted in decision-making over the past few years in three social science panels. She sketched a situation in which the current "rules" (i.e. peer reviewer reports being credible and the main input to decision making) were no longer adequate and the need for NRF policy guidelines in the rating system to implement the statement on Predatory Journals and Deceptive Publishers. The following were key messages from the presentation (also refer **Appendix 4**):

- In the absence of an official NRF list, a list of predatory journals, possible predatory journals and predatory publishers was compiled by panellists, based on the 'old' Beall's list, internet searches, common knowledge and collective wisdom.
- This list was checked against the DHET accreditation status of the journals commonly used by applicants in the relevant disciplines. Credit was given to Professor Lyn Wadley (Assessor for two of the panels) for her extra-ordinary effort in putting this baseline list together.
- A further a set of guidelines for usability of reviewer reports was compiled.
- It should be noted that the reviewer response template specifically asks the reviewers if the portfolio under review includes predatory journals.
- When reviewer reports fail to identify the use of predatory/lower-tier/unaccredited journals or state categorically that predatory journals were not used, when in fact this is evident to the panellists, this may lead to a disqualification of the report(s). To award a rating, 4-6 acceptable reviewer reports are required.
- Challenges encountered by the panels in implementation include:
 - Fluidity in and non-consensus on what constitutes a predatory journal, possible predatory journal, accredited/unaccredited journal;
 - Anxiety among stakeholders, of a 'witch hunt';
 - The agreed upon percentage (some felt zero tolerance whilst others wanted to look at patterns of use) predatory outputs that are acceptable within a portfolio within the different panels;
 - Applicants 'hiding' predatory publications (possibly on the advice of their institutions/research offices), something considered to be unethical;
 - Reviewers not discussing the use of predatory journal/lower impact unaccredited journals and delivering unrealistically positive reports emphasising quality;
 - Disregarding of reviewer reports which are given in good faith is also unethical;
 - Long turn-around times in the rating process as more reviewer reports are solicited;
 - Lengthy correspondence between applicant/the institution, defending their portfolio, and the NRF who try to engage at the highest level; and
 - Increase in applications to the Appeals Committee who are not necessarily aware of why the particular rating was issued.

Professor Corfield presented three case studies to illustrate the difficulties experienced:

Case 1: *The case of the moving target - is it a predatory journal or not a predatory journal?*

Case 2: *The Case of the Missing Articles.*

Case 3: *Hidden article plus supervised students using predatory journals.*

She proposed that the following list and actions be developed by the stakeholders (NRF, DHET, and academia):

1. A list of acceptable journals;
2. A list of unaccredited journals;
3. A list of journals that should be avoided (predatory/dubious);
4. It be the responsibility of the researcher and the institution to be aware of acceptability of journals and to make the case for these to be added to the lists;
5. Reviewers should be given access to these lists so that they are enabled to produce credible reviews;
6. Change the naming of research output categories on the application template:
 - From: Articles in refereed/peer reviewed journals
 - To: Articles in refereed/peer reviewed accredited journals (with lists available on NRF website – advising applicants and reviewers);
7. Add a section in which applicants tick DHET, ISI, SCOPUS listed journals.
8. Set up an IT system that flags any journals on the list of predatory journal/possibly predatory journal or non-accredited journals in an application. Convey this fact to the applicant/institution/reviewer and notify the relevant Specialist Committee;
9. Make it clear that listing outputs in the wrong category of outputs is unethical;
10. Make it clear that 'hiding' journals is unethical practice.

In conclusion Kelley Cobey, an adviser and the publications officer at the Ottawa Hospital Research Institute in Canada, is quoted *'more workshops in basic bibliometrics are needed to understand the publication and citation behaviour, the dangers of unethical and questionable practices in scientific authorship and especially of predatory publishing for all students and emerging scholars'*, and *'Growth in output must go hand-in-hand with proper quality and ethical surveillance'*.

7. Research Institutions' Experiences and Challenges on Ethics in Scholarly Publications (Professor Ahmed Bawa, USAf)

As a starting point Prof Bawa contended that these ethical issues have always been part of an interwoven eco-system in which research is produced in South Africa. There, however, has been a shift from an elite system to a massified one with its own implications. . South Africa currently still has a very solid system and those ethical issues which are now emerging must be taken note of and methods found of how to deal with them.

The following were key messages from the presentation (also refer **Appendix 5**):

- **Quality:** The purposes of scholarly publishing, other than the satisfaction and joy that it creates, are the creation of scholarly writings to preserve scholarly knowledge (stand on the shoulders of giants), as well as deliver public good. If the purpose becomes monetary, there is something fundamentally wrong with the system.

- **Enabling environment:** He questioned whether the current managerial ethos in place in the HEI system is enabling good quality scholarship. There must be a public culture that engages scholarly publishing. Previously there were public intellectuals globally who played this role and provided public commentary. In the US for example, it is being questioned where those public intellectuals are and whether they still exist.
- **Funding:** Research funding systems in South Africa are steering mechanisms that shape institutional conditions and are powerful differentiators in the HEI sector. The problem at the moment is, however, that all the funding schemes focus on quantity over quality

He proposed the following to change the above:

- Return to a quality paradigm after having defined what it means. It is not enough just to say that this is about the predatory journals, or the slicing and dicing, it is also about saying how the desire to publish in the best journals can be encouraged.
- Universities must be encouraged to find alternative ways to incentivise research. If money becomes the source of incentivising, it will produce the outcomes that are emerging. There are other ways of incentivising, such as improving working conditions and ensuring that people have time to conduct research.
- Too many of the South African universities are disengaged from their local context and a way of generating research that is locally connected must be found.
- There needs to be a move towards team-based research funding such as national/international peer-reviewed centres rather than funding individuals.
- The development of ethical researchers is an organic enterprise - young scholars need to be seen as scholars and grow as scholars.
- Training programmes of various kinds for research administrators and researchers should be thought about in this context.

He closed by saying that universities have been so fundamental in the disruption of many industries, but asked - when will the time come when universities disrupt themselves? It is necessary to think to the future and consider that, as the system moves from an elite one to a massified one, what the implications of this are. It cannot remain business as usual with research continuing to be funded in the same way (quantity over quality and relevance) and it cannot just be about the production of new PhDs. He proposed that the current way peer review is used must itself be reviewed and new ways to assess quality should be found.

8. Open Discussion (Dr Andrew Kaniki, NRF)

Dr Kaniki briefly provided an overview of the presentations delivered. It was acknowledged that a continuing conversation was necessary for raising awareness for all researchers including those young and emerging researchers. An interesting point was that the Singapore Statement on Research Integrity, generated in 2010, identifies four basic principles of research integrity and ethics, namely: (i) the need for honesty in all aspects of research; (ii) accountability in conducting research; (iii) professional courtesy and fairness in working with others; and (iv) good stewardship of research on behalf of others, all of which are lauded principles but are critical in terms of where we are headed. The statement goes on to identify fourteen responsibilities that can actually guide researchers and others. What is wanted from this session is to raise issues of clarity and to hopefully to develop some form of statement or commonality that can be issued.

Prof Eloff, UP (Member of the editorial board of South African Journal of Botany) – suggestion directed to Prof Mouton: The number of publications that a journal has rejected should also be accounted for in his criteria, as he felt that the number of publications by members of the editorial committee is not a good measure in all cases. He also asked if the impact factor of a journal should not be considered as well.

Prof Mouton - response to Prof Eloff: Acknowledged as fair comments which illustrated that indicators need to be looked at within context. The project being carried out for DHET was to develop subject indicators and it was correct that it was necessary to look at size of output of journal and the percentage published within that output. Some South African scholars only publish in their own local journals but at the same time they are prolific publishers and this covers a spectrum of journals; this cannot be viewed in the same light as researchers publishing in a limited number of their own journals. Unfortunately, at the moment there is not sufficient coordination between DHET, ASSAf and CREST. In the previous study the average acceptance rate of publications was 75% and this has now shifted to a 20% acceptance rate over ten years. CREST tries to be very careful when developing a set of indicators, in reality the idea is to find indicators that suggest further action.

The South African system is actually doing very well and has increased its International citation visibility and is publishing in more top journals in the world. The whole ethics and behaviour discussion must be put into this context and acknowledged that there are a particular set of issues which it is necessary to address.

Prof Mouton stated that the use of impact factors is dependent on circumstances but should be used with caution as people often comment without being adequately informed on parameters such as rankings and impact factors and more courses need to be developed for young academics that cover the subjects.

Denise Webster, CHE - comment - There is a need to think about all the systems, both national and institutional, that provide context for certain behaviours. These behaviours appear to have manifested from the need to value quantity over quality, as well as through the institutional promotion systems, as many require set numbers for publications and research outputs, which does not create a level playing field. Those types of behaviours manifest from national systems and the perverse consequences become evident at institutional level.

Cathy Harriman, Research Integrity Officer, SU – comment: Agreed with the previous comment. It is becoming increasingly more difficult to encourage academics to serve on committees (e.g. ethics committees) as their time is taken up with producing research outputs. This then impacts on administrative duties, on teaching quality and academic citizenship. Stellenbosch University is trying to change the promotional criteria which their academics have to meet and it has become apparent that there is a need to shift the emphasis from research and actually diversify.

Prof Bawa – comment: As soon as the universities (and the scholarly publication enterprise) became considered as businesses they lost a sense of academic citizenship. Previously, as an academic became more senior in the system, it was expected that they would play more senior roles that were important for the University, and for the science system and it was accepted that this would happen, it was never a question that this would result in promotion but rather it was considered as being a good academic citizen. Perhaps there should be a return to this ethos when one considers the purpose of an academic in society. It is not possible to expect a new upcoming young scientist or social scientist to play those kinds of roles, which require experience. A deep conversation on the nature of academic citizenship may be necessary in South Africa. This actually starts with the appointment of Executive Deans and these Deans need to return to their original roles of representing the faculty to the university, currently this is in the reverse. The scholarly publishing enterprises are all part of that system.

Patience, DUT - question to Prof Corfield: When an academic publishes in a particular journal originally on the DHET list, which is then removed and is applying for NRF rating, they become discredited despite it being initially on the list. Is it fair to discredit such a case as they published according to the original list? Further, would this affect the rating of this researcher if other publications were in high impact journals?

Prof Corfield - response to Patience question: The panel doesn't rate an applicant on the basis of a few publications in predatory/non-accredited journals. The reviewers assess the whole portfolio of outputs. It must be also asked what is an acceptable percentage - if 10 of the total portfolio are not as of strong quality as the remainder, this does not necessarily mean the application will be unsuccessful. Further it will be noted by the reviewers that the applicant has, for example, a wide ranging portfolio, does not have focus, is using several lower tier journals, some with dubious publication policy. A researcher should not start off by consulting the DHET list of accredited journals prior to publishing with the aim of receiving subsidy as this is counter the goal of publishing good quality research in appropriate journals which builds profile required for obtaining a rating. Currently, the problem is how to assess the quality of the whole portfolio when the reviewers are not aware that some of the journals are at the lower end rather than in the top echelon of accreditation and standards. In that case often those reviews are wasted and there needs to be a system which enables the reviewers to identify those journals and also to recognise the percentage present in the portfolio. This is usually associated with a pattern of poor and unethical publication procedures.

Roshan Cader, Wits University Press - comment: There is a limited number of people available for reviewing, within a small community of researchers in the system, which results in an over-taxation of people's time. Perhaps there should be incentives offered rather than centering this function around academic citizenship as academics' time is becoming increasingly encroached upon. It has become harder to find peer reviewers and there seems to be over-reliance upon the same people.

Prof Bawa – comment: It is acknowledged that South Africa has an incredibly small system, which in itself is a challenge. A further aspect for consideration is whether there is a need to think of new ways of evaluating research and can new approaches be considered using new technologies available. Artificial intelligence would be able to identify those predatory or possibly predatory journals in applications almost immediately, as opposed to hoping that reviewers would be able to recognise them.

Prof Corfield – comment: At present the NRF rating system approaches international reviewers for everybody and for some applications the preponderance of reviewers was international (the pool was thus not limited to reviewers from the SA system).

Dr Skeef - comment: On the issues of reviewer usage, small community and incentives being serious challenges which the NRF is continuously trying to improve, another consultation workshop will soon take place to which some of the people present today will be invited. Firstly, the public-good expectation is a core expectation in the system of reviews, to the extent that it is written into the conditions of award and recipients are expected to avail themselves. As a counterbalance the NRF is conscious of manifesting reviewer fatigue and has just signed off on a policy which limits the number of times a reviewer can be used.

There is a conscious distinction in reviews conducted in the NRF, into three types, namely virtual, one-stage and two-stage. The evaluation and rating of individuals is run through the two stage process and in that case the reviewers are not the panel. Panel members are drawn locally but the intention and the practice is for international peer reviewers to write peer reports. The reality is that although this should be done for the public good there has always been a system of honorarium, essentially to say “thank you for the time given” and this does assist.

Professor Phindile Lukhele-Olorunju, Director Research, University of Mpumalanga - comment: The workshop was important as several have wondered what criteria or bases were being used to determine what a possible predatory journal was and Prof Mouton’s explanation was clear. Although not all questions have been answered, the presence of key stakeholders such as DHET, NRF and CHE, is pleasing. It is interesting to note that DHET is aware that some of their policies are ambiguous which does not make it easy for the universities and that the policy should be more specific. It would be interesting to know the criteria that informed the DHET decision to retract various journals from the predatory list in February of this year.

Mr. Mabizela, DHET – response: These sessions are important for DHET to hear what changes are needed and respond to questions. The criteria for identifying predatory journals is work in progress. The standard is – once a journal is removed, that is final, i.e. it does not come back onto the list. Work has just started with Scopus and when we say there is a problem with a journal and it is removed they do not return it and there will be no units awarded for it. DHET will provide criteria for removal of journals and removals will be accompanied by interactions with the publisher and editor of the affected journals.

Prof Nyna Amin, UKZN – comment: Overall, academia believed in an honourable system, something which has proven not to work and it is apparent that surveillance and accountability are necessary. An example was given in the presentation of a researcher submitting marginally different versions of the same article to a journal. In such a case the editor should also be held accountable. The editor of a journal in a field should be aware of what has been published and what is currently cutting edge and should not be publishing something that has been published elsewhere. The idea that the researcher is a cog in the system needs to be re-visited as it is actually a far bigger problem which is further complicated by the multi- and intra-disciplinary journals. In those cases, it would be reasonable to assume that an editor may not know everything as the field is so discursive. It would be good to know if there are checks and balances on for example how often the journals' boards meet. For some there have never been a board meeting, whereas with other journals every article is scrutinised by the board. There is a rumour that DHET want to fund local and international publications differently. How does that address the issue that local context is important?

Mr. Mabizela, DHET – response: This was dismissed as false. DHET is working with CREST to create a list of credible African journals that are not listed on the main international lists.

A delegate from UNISA Press - question for DHET: Would DHET be interested in partnering or collaborating with journal editors or publishers, such as at UNISA Press, to engage in ensuring high standard and quality journals.

Mr. Mabizela, DHET - response: The idea is welcome and this is an area that could be further explored as South African Journal editors already have a forum and UNISA Press should consider joining these structures.

Dr. Kaniki, NRF – comment: Prof Mouton's work in 2004 looked at various criteria in terms of editor meetings and how often this happened etc., and some of the output from this led to the work currently being done by ASSAf.

Susan Veldsman, ASSAf response: ASSAf supported editors with a number of activities to ensure quality and this will be alluded to in more detail in her presentation. There is a National Scholarly Editors Forum in which there are 700 contact people participating and this is something that ASSAf would like to encourage people to join and to strengthen the system by creating awareness of the role that this forum can play in the creation of awareness of for example unethical practices.

Adele Thomas, UJ comment: Highlighted the fact that in the Mouton and De Jager study there was identification of serial publishers in predatory journals, and it is difficult to understand how these people get through their faculty and the institution monitoring structures without being picked up. In 2015, she carried out a study of plagiarism amongst academics, which was published in the South African Journal of Science. It was found that 21.3% of published articles from amongst 19 management journals in South Africa contained over 25% plagiarism. The study has been replicated over the same 19 journals but using 2016 data and that percentage increased to 32.4%. She recommended that institutional level mechanisms need to be put into place to ensure that the journal outputs submitted for subsidy are of good quality.

Prof. Karataglides, UJ comment: On the issue of lists which identify predatory journals, he made the point that it had already been mentioned that some journals are on and then off these lists. He cited the Australian approach as an alternative. They had a system of A, B and C lists, where A was the top, B was borderline and C was unacceptable, but in 2013 they decided to drop the lists and rather take things case-by-case. If a journal is identified as predatory it is dropped and is considered no longer acceptable for the purposes of evaluation.

He requested that in terms of the DHET subsidy policy, thought should be given to re-consider the concept of publication units. In terms of the big science and other fields it is possible to typically publish with anything up to 3,000 co-authors (e.g. those produced at Cern), In terms of the publication unit metric used as part of university performance management systems, it becomes non-feasible for academics to obtain the required one or two units agreed upon in these fields.

Mr. Mabizela, DHET – response: DHET ideally would like to stop the use of stand-alone lists and over the next two years transfer the responsibility of capturing of data on quality research outputs, to the institutions and the noting of acceptance and rejection should be done there. If a journal is considered predatory it will not appear on the database options used at the institution and that will also have to be dealt with by the institution.

Lucia Schoombee, Elsevier – comment: With regard to the list issue - Scopus has been in existence since 2004 and the journals indexed are selected by an independent board. Originally, once a journal was approved for Scopus, it stayed there. Since 2016 it has been necessary to begin re-evaluating all the listed titles and about 120 journals were removed last year, some being predatory and some just unethical. This is one of the many ways to keep a very high standard index. A “discontinued” list has also been created. Within Scopus an algorithm radar has been implemented which runs through Scopus and attempts to identify all the outlying factors such as large increase in the output, self-citations, geographical diversity of the authors and editors not matching. All of this information is used and Scopus attempts to create awareness around South Africa on selection criteria that they are using, and providing advice for authors on which journals should be avoided.

At the moment Scopus works with African and South African journal editors to assist with elevating their journals so that they can be indexed and to provide more publishing alternatives for researchers.

Mr Makgalo, CHE question: What is the percentage of predatory publishing within the total of scholarly publishing in South Africa?

Prof Mouton – response: In 2014 it was about 3.5% (this was money that had already been paid out representing more than 3,000 predatory papers that had earned about one hundred thousand Rand of taxpayers’ money per article).

A Walter Sisulu University representative – question: How does one identify predatory conferences?

Prof Mouton – response: There is literature on how to avoid / detect predatory conferences. They work on similar deceptions - people apply, registration fees are paid, bookings are made, and then the academic arrives at the venue to find out that there is no conference. Basically money is being paid for a non-existent event. Advice given included: check with experts in the field; look at the program carefully; if you are uncertain, ask a senior colleague if the organisers are known. The Web of Science has a list of many of the reputable conferences listed. Discussions are being carried out with DHET to produce a list of known predatory conferences and advice on how to avoid them in a similar manner as predatory journals.

Denise Nicholson, Wits – comment: The ‘turnitin’ software is a similarity index. Some journals insist that this must be used for screening submissions. Potential authors use it to create a paper from cutting and pasting the result of the ‘turnitin’ report. They submit up to three times and by the time they have finished re-working the material the percentage is low enough to be acceptable for publication. This is another variant on the unethical conduct practices observed at the meeting.

Prof Bawa, comment: If there is a serious intent to build a research system that is cutting edge, one that would add to global and local knowledge, it is necessary to think about the ways in which the national funding system takes into account the level of risk that is taken. Projects that have no risk should be avoided and we have to go back to risk taking to justify why research is undertaken and that will put you into the terrain where cheating does not work anymore.

9. Discussion on Coordination of Efforts (Susan Veldsman, ASSAf)

It was agreed that this session will start with a brief overview of ASSAf’s involvement/experiences with the phenomenon of unethical practices in scholarly publications in South Africa (by Ms Veldsman), followed by a summarising of what had transpired to that point (see **Appendix 6**):

9.1 ASSAf and Unethical Practices: Membership and Scholarly Publishing

This pattern (of unethical publishing practices) has awakened a lot of questions as ASSAf has annual membership elections for the Academy, which normally requires a researcher to submit 5 to 10 of their top articles in order to be considered for membership. An extra process has been put in place in the workflow, that when the nominations come forward, a small team checks the references and having compiled a report then returns the application back to the subject selection panels, who then consider whether or not to put that name forward for election by the Academy.

The following were key messages from the presentation:

- Incidences of unethical practices found during ASSAf’s membership applications screening is relatively low (1.3% over a 2-year period).
- It is important to agree upon standards of expected ethical behaviour for all parties involved in the act of publishing and such agreement should include: the author, the journal editor, the peer reviewer, the publisher and the society of society-owned or sponsored journals.

- Unethical has different dimensions and manifests in many different practices all across the research program. So it is important to decide what is particularly defined as unethical.
- ASSAF is involved in a number of activities and production of publication related to the subject, as part of its awareness-raising campaign on the subject matter.

The way forward from an ASSAf perspective:

- Scholarly publishing and evaluating the quality thereof is part of the core business of ASSAf.
- The DHET policies are clear regarding quality and research integrity, but the challenges are around the implementation of these policies?
- Analysis of DHET lists.
- Collaboration between CREST, ASSAf and DHET in giving advice.
- Further coordination between relevant stakeholders (CHE, USAf, NRF, ASSAf and DHET) and this relationship needs to be formalized.

9.2 Summary of Suggested Issues and Activities from Workshop

Publishing of research outputs

Research outputs are typically published in journals, books or conference proceedings: There is Research Output Policy (2016) which has clear guidelines.

Key role players in ensuring the right behaviours and attributes are editors, peer reviewers, editorial boards, authors and higher education institutions. What follows are some of these attributes and behaviours:

- Quality
 - What needs to be improved in the policy, should there be some punitive measures, or are there other things that need to be considered.
 - Criteria - must encompass both editorial quality and editorial ethics
 - Higher education institutions have a big responsibility - how should potential Research Integrity Committees be constituted?
- Ensure accountability by different stakeholders.
- There is a need for training/awareness-raising on this particular issue.
- Editorial practices should be professionalised.

Evaluating research outputs

- There is a need for central listing of questionable journals (stakeholders should compile this).
 - Share the lists of acceptable journals, unaccredited journals, journals that should be avoided, unethical/predatory journals;
 - Alignment of predatory journal's amongst different role players;
 - Institutions and panels must have access to these lists. There is a large emphasis on collaboration and combined efforts.
- Individual motivation for publishing not in accredited journals.

- Research output categories:
 - Naming, which is technical;
 - Section for accredited lists;
 - Technical solutions—flag unethical journals, feedback to the author/institution.
- Ethical surveillance.
- Look into new ways of evaluating research outputs.

Quality assurance by all stakeholders

- Training programmes of various kinds:
 - Of young and emerging researchers in ethical publishing; and
 - Research administrators and researchers.
- There should be better collaboration/cooperation between CREST, ASSAf and DHET, in giving advice to DHET.
- There is a need for further coordination between the relevant stakeholders (CHE, USAf, NRF, ASSAf and DHET).
- What measures should be put in place to ensure accountability?

Other broader issues

- Incentives at different levels - between universities, inter-disciplinarity, etc:
 - Should universities find alternative ways to incentivise research?
 - Team-based research funding - national and international peer-reviewed centres.
 - Incentivise collaborative publishing.
 - Research articulation across the system
 - Inter and multi disciplinarity.
 - Engagement with society.
- Where, when and how the shifting technological terrain should be considered?
 - Promotion systems and criteria – might these be encouraging unintended perverse consequences into the system?

Desired outcomes expressed by organisers of the meeting

- How can we ensure there is a binding mechanism between the stakeholders?
- Effect/implement the actions identified.
- Produce and publish a declaration on ethical scholarly publishing.

10. Other Comments and Questions

Question:

- Is it still the best code of practice to have double-blind peer review (anonymity of authors and reviewers)?
- Are journals that do not apply that rule penalized as in the Natural Sciences this does not always makes sense?

Answer:

Ultimately this is pushed for as it is believed that there should be some distance between author and reviewer. It is nevertheless understood that in some subject areas there are differences and this is not always possible., This can be problematic as sometimes the same people seem to constantly be the reviewers of a journal and the system would like more people brought into that peer review group to ensure that the best articles in the field are being published. Beyond this there is also open peer review. There are different ways of conducting open peer review as everything is visible for the public. The process of editorial practice must be that which is best for the journal and a broad spectrum of practices need to be available to ensure fitness for purpose

Comment:

The central listing of questionable journals must be speeded up as this is very important.

Comment:

Quite a bit of time is spent on quality assurance arrangements in terms of policies, funding, structures etc. in the research environment and less on the quality of research. There is a need to insist on institutional mechanisms to monitor the integrity of knowledge production.

Question:

Is the commercialization of publishing in itself not unethical, and if not, can it be done in an ethical manner?

Answer:

Different people have different opinions. ASSAf advocates open science, open data and open access. There are even commercial open access publishers who make the end product available to all for reading, copying or citing but they still have to generate money to host the journal and provide editorial services. Commercial publishers also claim that they add more value as they give other services. If we do commercialise South African journals there is the danger of locking away our own knowledge from South Africans and other Africans, particularly to read, which can be seen by the incidences of current cancellations of many subscriptions by institutions. It would mean that readers in South Africa would have to subscribe to that journal to be able to read on research published by and in South Africa. If the gold route of open access is not available, the green route, which is the institutional repositories in which each researcher has the responsibility to deposit a copy, should be considered, to provide access to a vast number of articles produced by South African authors.

Question:

With regard to peer review for books for DHET submission we look at independent blind review, but there are cases where editors are reviewing the publications. Is that acceptable?

Answer:

This must be looked at with an informed mind and an understanding of the system that that particular publisher is using. ASSAf advocates multiple people be involved in reviewing the content of the chapters or the book and that it is not embedded in just one person. ASSAf has produced a code of best practice to influence standardisation and to assist when DHET evaluations are done. What is advocated is to look at who was on the editorial board, what was the role of the editor, was (s) he assisted and by whom and from where, to hopefully confirm that the decision was not embedded in one person but rather a wide stakeholder group.

Question:

Can African Journals or South African Journals be monitored for quality?

Answer:

Yes, especially through the work that ASSAf is doing and how they evaluate journal by journal. As an outcome of its evaluations, ASSAf makes recommendations on the accreditation of the journals. The biggest challenge according to ASSAf is how to ensure that these recommendations are noted and acted on.

Question:

In terms of the predatory lists of journals, will the Beall's list be used as a starting point or will it be a compilation list and will this be an ongoing process? .

Answer:

We will have to find a middle way amongst all these lists, which is are applicable for the system in South Africa.

Question:

Can you clarify that the DHET list is in the process of being cleaned up, and if so, what process will be followed?

Answer:

- By cleaning up ASSAf means that because they have such vast databases on all the journals in South Africa they need to monitor those scholarly journals that are not yet accredited by anyone. In the process they noticed that some have not published for the past few years, some have stopped publishing altogether and a recommendation to DHET is that those journals need investigation and if they are genuinely redundant they must be removed from the list in order to establish neatness and clarity.
- Mr. Mabizela reiterated that at any given time any journal on the list that appears suspicious can be pointed out.

Comment:

There are actually multiple platforms for identifying predatory journals, one called Stop Predatory journals¹, which works on a model where evidence and information can be submitted anonymously which they then evaluate. This is a continuously evolving list of journals which is very useful.

Comment:

It was noted that while all encouraged that the policies that drive behaviour be about the search for quality, the systems proposed are effectively still quantity driven. What is being said in essence is that 'as long as what you publish is not in the journals on the (bad) list' that is acceptable, once again relating to a quantity driven system thus setting the bar at a minimum level. Even at minimum level it is debatable if you are just above or just below that bar but it is at the low quality end. We need to encourage the system to aim at the top end, the quality end. We need to build a system where we incentivize quality, world-impacting research"

¹ <https://predatoryjournals.com/journals/>

Comment:

Often when established researchers are looking back at their first publications they are considered to be very descriptive, naive and not highly theoretical or explanatory but this is a way of starting a career. Care must be taken that in the search for the elusive notion of quality, that emerging researchers are not discouraged to such an extent that they could be destroyed and in some way it is necessary to be a little bit generous as well, considering our context.

Dr. Skeef concluded that not moving fast enough in terms of some specific actions that are informed by the outcomes of today's workshop was a threat to the sustainability of this initiative. . He therefore proposed a recommendation that workshop participants should agree to form a working group with an overall objective to try to find a coordinated/national/collaborative way of dealing with the issue of unethical scholarly publishing. At a minimum that working group requires representatives from each of the five organisations that were behind the organising of the workshop (NRF, DHET, ASSAf, CHE and USAf).

Beyond that, if there is a clear absence of a key constituency, additional people could be co-opted. Dr Skeef volunteered to convene the working group for the first time, at which meeting the decision as to who should be the primary drivers, will be taken.

Susan Veldsman requested that as a second recommendation there must be a report back to the participants of this workshop of the work done and the priorities, how they were aligned and redefined.

These two specific recommendations were supported by the attendees.

11. Closing Remarks and Vote of Thanks (Prof Barend Baijnath, CHE)

There was recognition what transpired at the day's proceedings is evidence that the problem of predatory journals is real, but that all the represented organisations have been giving deep thought to it and are fully aware of the potential impact of this on the reputation of institutions and the entire research enterprise.

The imperative is for greater scrutiny and more vigilance, and unfortunately, even more control, which immediately points to the unfortunate necessary consequences of greater managerial oversight, which the higher education sector has argued against over the past few decades. This is a hugely significant moment as the NRF CHE, DHET, ASSAf, USAf and DST, and the universities each are mindful of the consequences for the enterprise and the need for coordinated and concerted action.

The foundations for a coherent and consistent approach to the problem and a practical way forward has been suggested. The work of that working group will be vital to capitalize and distil and crystallise issues in order to take it forward to retain the momentum created in the workshop. All of the partners and organisers represented realise it is imperative to protect the integrity of the research enterprise.

Prof Bawa's illumination of the perversions in the system which have flowed from a long period of massification in higher education, in response to funding scarcity, was noted. In this environment incentive and reward systems have become mechanisms that are being used for institutional and individual recognition and greater access to resources. With this has come the use of a whole range of numerical metrics which have introduced a very technicist way of measuring research outputs. If those metrics are continued to be used for promotion and for securing research funding, they will influence inappropriate behaviours of researchers and scholars. The key point made was that the entire eco-system of the research enterprise must be considered instead of only pointing at predatory journals as the problem. There is perhaps a wider problem of predatory practices that are being impelled by the way in which we have driven research productivity over the past two decades in particular. Monetisation of the knowledge enterprise through commercialisation and consolidation in the publishing industry (where the two dominant players are Elsevier and Taylor & Francis) means that more and more of the knowledge that is being produced is becoming inaccessible and by the time effective measures are taken to prevent this, all of the knowledge accumulated over decades, paid for by the public purse through the labour of scholars and academics, will have disappeared behind paywalls and be inaccessible to generations of scholars to come.

There was a cautioning that institutions are chasing research subsidy and some give a proportion of that subsidy to staff as incentives, which in turn gives them access to conference funding, prestige and promotion. These are the behaviours that need to be looked at thoroughly. There are other behaviours which have not even been mentioned which relate to supervisors who have not contributed to the production of the knowledge, often taking primary credit for the work of their students. Instead of pointing a finger only at the predatory journals predatory practices within the higher educational institutions need to be curtailed. Performance management and the culture of managerial or corporatisation is also a huge driver of unethical conduct and the establishment of the working group will send a strong public message.

Dr Skeef and his assistant were acknowledged for their work and for being the key drivers of this workshop and bringing everybody together in this joint initiative.

Prof Baijnath thanked everyone present for their valuable input and all the contributions made to the discussions.



22 June 2018

Dr Rocky Skeef
Executive Director: Review and Evaluations

Date