Nuffield Council on Bioethics

Dr David Moher
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Dear Dr Moher and colleagues,

Re. The Hong Kong manifesto for assessing researchers: fostering research integrity

I am writing in support of your paper, *The Hong Kong manifesto for assessing researchers: fostering research integrity*. The principles that you lay out closely reflect the findings and suggested actions of our own work on the culture of scientific research.

The Nuffield Council on Bioethics is an independent body based in the UK that examines and reports on ethical issues in biology and medicine. In 2014, we undertook a series of engagement activities that aimed to inform and advance debate about the ethical consequences of the culture of scientific research. We explored the effects of a range of influences on scientific research, including funding mechanisms, publishing models, career structures and governance processes.

We found that scientists are motivated in their work to find out more about the world and benefit society, and that they believe collaboration, multidisciplinarity, openness and creativity are important for the production of high quality science. However, in some cases, we found the culture of research in higher education institutions does not support or encourage these goals or activities. For example, high levels of competition and perceptions about how scientists are assessed for jobs and funding are reportedly contributing to a loss of creativity in science, less collaboration and poor research practices, such as rushing to finish and publish research or employing less rigorous research methods.

We published a report summarising the findings of our activities, including a section on the assessment of research, and suggestions for actions directed at funders, research institutions, publishers and editors, researchers, and learned societies and professional bodies. The suggestions for action included:

- Funders: ensure funding opportunities, strategies and policies, and information about past funding decisions, are communicated clearly to institutions and researchers.

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- Research institutions: cultivate an environment in which ethics is seen as a positive and integral part of research; and provide mentoring and career advice to researchers throughout their careers.

- Publishers and editors: consider further the role of publishers in tackling ethical issues in publishing and in promoting openness and data sharing among scientists.

- Researchers: when assessing the track record of fellow researchers, for example as a grant reviewer or appointments panel member, use a broad range of criteria without undue reliance on journal impact factors.

- Learned societies and professional bodies: promote widely the importance of ensuring the culture of research supports good research practice and the production of high quality science.

Since 2014, we have seen increasing recognition in the UK of the importance of fostering a research culture that supports good research practice. The Hong Kong Manifesto is an important milestone in embedding assessment practices that incentivise research integrity across the world. We particularly support the manifesto being aimed at a broad spectrum of players. We believe there is a collective obligation for all the actors in the system to do everything they can to ensure the culture of research supports the production of high quality research.

If you would like to discuss our work further, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

Yours sincerely,

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