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Letter regarding the University of Liverpool's inappropriate use of research metrics.

The University of Liverpool's Senior Management Team have announced their intention to make 47 academic staff members redundant by the end of May 2021 as part of a management project titled 'Project SHAPE'. The selection process has used two quantitative metrics to identify 'under-achieving' researchers (average research income and a citation measure known as the Field Weighted Citation Impact score which is derived from Elsevier's Scopus database).

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Using research metrics in this way directly contravenes the Hong Kong Principles.

Using such metrics as the main marker of academic quality fails to ensure a "broader view of markers of best practice" is included in assessment of research contribution (Hong Kong Principle 1) and encourages the "short-term academic reward cycle" (Hong Kong Principle 4). Moreover, the use of such metrics excludes the collegial and 'good will' contributions upon which the proper functioning of the academe rests. They exclude essential task that we all rely on, like peer review, and mentoring (Hong Kong Principle 5).

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I regard the application of quantitative metrics in a mass redundancy exercise metrics as a major issue of concern for recent initiatives on responsible research metrics. The timing of this, at such a crucial time for debates in the academe, threatens to set back the responsible use of metrics in the sector.

The inappropriate use of research metrics incentivizes poor science, corner cutting, and data massaging; while creating insecure, untrustworthy, and low-morale research cultures.

The inappropriate use of research metrics also adds to the existing structural barriers facing underrepresented groups and fails to recognize the broader range of academic activities that contribute to research and impact.

I call on the University of Liverpool to reverse its decision to make academic staff redundant via the inappropriate use of research metrics; and instead, to fall in line with local, national, and international efforts to create positive research cultures.

Yours sincerely,



David Moher
Lead, Hong Kong Principles