



Leiden, 21<sup>st</sup> February 2021

To: Professor Dame Janet Beer  
Vice-Chancellor of the University of Liverpool

Dear Professor Beer,

we are writing to you as experts in research evaluation and bibliometrics, in relation to the use of research performance metrics for redundancy of 47 academic staff members in the University of Liverpool.

We have been informed that the University of Liverpool has stated that it has used two quantitative measures of research performance to select staff for compulsory redundancy.

1) A calculation of average research income over a 5-year period, compared with the Russell Groups average for a Professor, Senior Lecturer and Lecturer in a Unit of Assessment. The threshold (the redundancy red zone) was set at the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile for Professors and Senior Lecturers, and the 20<sup>th</sup> percentile for Lecturers.

2) The use of a citation measure known as the Field Weighted Citation Impact score based on data from Elsevier's Scopus database. The threshold (the redundancy red zone) was set at a score of 2 for each researcher, which purports to indicate that a researcher is twice as cited as a typical researcher in their field.

We are seriously concerned that this proposal seriously contravenes the principles of ethical and responsible use of research metrics as stated in documents such as the [San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment](#), the [Leiden Manifesto](#) or the [Metric Tide](#).

As authors of the Leiden Manifesto, let us briefly review some of the principles of research evaluation that were disregarded.

First, the apparent use of only metrics to justify redundancy is not responsible since metrics can be biased in various ways (e.g. regarding topic or age), which may contravene the basic principle of equal treatment in employment. Indicators can inform decisions but should not substitute expert judgement (principle 1 of the Leiden Manifesto).

Second, the mission of universities is thankfully much broader than that represented by metrics on acquiring funding and citations –lecturers and professors should be assessed according to the range of activities they are expected to conduct, not according to indicators that capture only a small part of their tasks (principles 2 and 7).

Third, we have been informed that scholars facing redundancy have not been provided with basic information about the construction of the Field Weighted Citation Impact score, nor have been made aware of the metrics, or indeed the way those metrics were applied. Neither were they given the opportunity to ensure the data applying to them was accurate. Actually, it seems this is the first time those metrics have been used to assess the capability of staff at the University of Liverpool. These failures would represent a clear contravention of principles 4 and 5.

Fourth, we are concerned about the statistical robustness of the Scopus Field Weighted Citation Impact score, in particular when applied to relatively low number of publications – for example, below 50-100 publications, which is generally the case for individuals. This would contravene principles 8 (false precision).

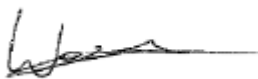
We regard the application of quantitative metrics in a mass redundancy as a major threat for recent initiatives on responsible research metrics. We are not aware that this has been attempted previously in a European University, and would certainly be a setback for the responsible use of metrics.

As scholars engaged in policy advice in evaluation to various national governments, the European Union, charities and university associations, we are seriously concerned that inappropriate uses of metrics, such as this, may undermine the public strengths and values of universities.

Therefore, we hope that the University of Liverpool find alternative procedures for making decisions in these difficult times.



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