



**higher education  
& training**

Department:  
Higher Education and Training  
**REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

## **MEDIA RESPONSES**

**11 September 2017**

### **DHET STATEMENT ON THE EXTENT OF SOUTH AFRICAN RESEARCH PUBLICATIONS IN SOCALLED PREDATORY JOURNALS**

The Department is aware of the research article published by Prof Johann Mouton of the Centre for Research on Evaluation, Science and Technology (CREST) based at Stellenbosch University. The research article, titled “The extent of South African authored articles in predatory journals” published in the South African Journal of Science (July/August 2017), highlights the magnitude and prevalence of publications in predatory journals by South African authors and or institution.

The article also estimates the amount of money that DHET has paid in the form of the research output subsidy to public universities for articles published in probably predatory journals.

The Department is aware of possible unethical publishing practices in the sector and that includes publishing in predatory journals for the purposes of accruing subsidy. The article mentions that approximately R300 million could have been paid for articles in predatory journals. This amount represents only 1.6% of the total subsidy paid to universities during this period.

The Department deeply condemns such practices as they are not only unethical but also tarnish the integrity of the research as well as the institutions.

In 2014, the Department obtained enough evidence to suggest that the Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences (MJSS) was a predatory journal. The Journal was subsequently withdrawn from the list of accredited journals as no research output subsidy claims were paid to institutions for publications in that particular journal, regardless of it being on the list accredited journals.

This clearly shows that the Department does act when there is evidence of unethical practices at play in the publications of journal articles. Section 9 of the revised research output policy clearly states what action would be taken by the Department when there is evidence of unethical behaviour.

Following the MJSS issue, the Department took necessary steps to curb the problem of predatory journals by communicating with the relevant stakeholders, including universities. Included in the steps taken was a workshop in October 2015 between the Department of Science and Technology (DST), the National Research Foundation (NRF), the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf) and CREST, where a proposal was discussed to put in place a specific focus on predatory publishing, the quality of research outputs and what should possibly qualify for subsidy.

Following the 2015 workshop, the Department has funded a collaborative research programme, led by Prof Mouton at CREST focused on the quality of research outputs. The programme has an ultimate aim of developing mechanisms to ensure that the Department only funds quality research.

In the meantime, the DHET will continue to seek satisfactory evidence on the validity of claims pertaining to predatory publishing, including investigations on the journal titles mentioned in the article. If they are confirmed then subsidies will not be provided for articles published in such journals.

The Department is committed to incentivising good research and to ensuring that research productivity is rewarded. However, vanity or predatory publishing will not be recognised, and it is expected that all institutions uphold high standards with respect to the research outputs.

The onus is on institutions to ensure that their researchers engage in quality research and do not publish in such journals, regardless of whether they are on an approved list or not. Research offices are also required to inform the Department should they identify a journal on one of the approved lists that does not meet the standards required in the research outputs policy.

**Ends**

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