Insights – 34, 2021
Empowering ECRs for research quality | Veronique De Herde, et al.

Game over: empower early career researchers to improve research quality

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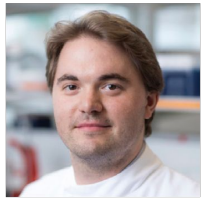

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The PhD candidate: 'locked-in' to the current system if I want to progress

'early career researchers are "locked-in" when it comes to selecting venues for publication'

The researcher turned science advocate: change the system from within

'The game may be rigged, but we all are forced to play'

The young academic and PhD supervisor: no choice but to perpetuate the current system

'no researcher should have to martyr themselves to advance openness, given how valuable it is for science'

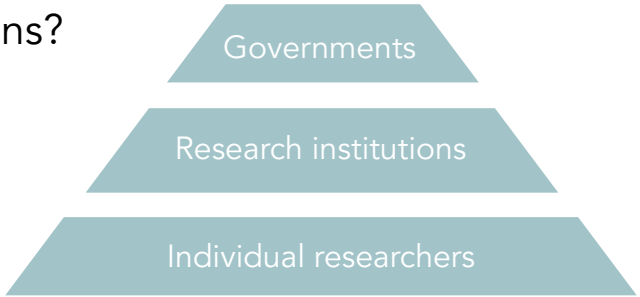
De Herde, Véronique, Mattias Björnmalm, and Toma Susi. 2021. "Game Over: Empower Early Career Researchers to Improve Research Quality". *Insights* 34 (1): 15. DOI: http://doi.org/10.1629/uksg.548

Evaluation: prestige-based metrics flow downhill

An easy-to-use and globalising system, but…

Does the evaluation capture the actual impact and diversity of research institutions?

Competition over collaboration



Stress, burnout, leaky pipelines

Does the evaluation successfully cover the innovation capacity?

Metrics are outsourced to commercial entities

Prestige-driven publication choices → Feeding a very costly publishing landscape with public €€€!

Most pernicious problem: misuse of journal-based impact metrics

...creating dilemmas for researchers (especially ECRs)

Career incentives

- Publish (a lot and fast) or perish
- Strategic journal choices over innovative publishing models

Idealistic thinking

- FAIR data sets
- Slow-paced innovative approaches
- Collaborative review systems
- ...and much more

We need to reform research assessment
...and change the evaluation culture!

twitter.com/fdsayre/status/1374756832279810048

Changing established mindsets is hard

I have been advocating for change for more than decade…
yet my thinking is still strongly affected by the prestige game!

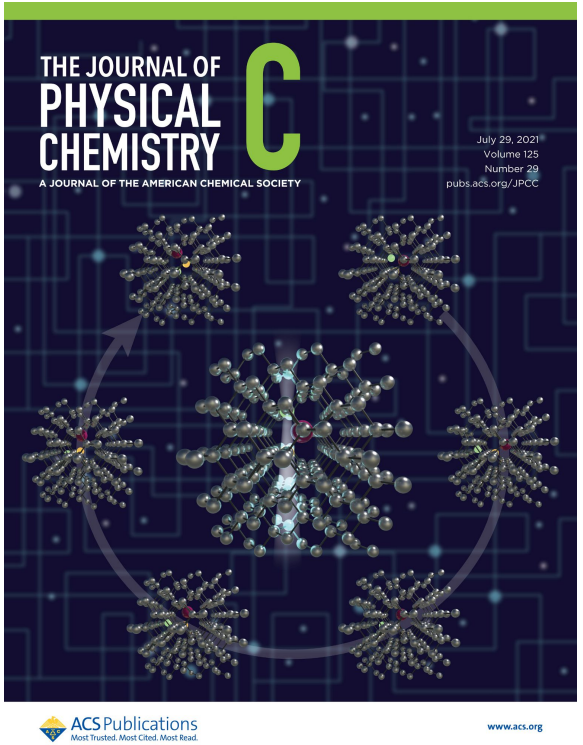
"I recently published a cool piece of science from my ERC project that I was quite proud of.

We tried to initially submit to a very prestigious journal but they said it's not novel enough – a subjective judgment – and we ended up publishing this paper in a respected journal, just not as prestigious. The research didn't change, it was exactly the same article.

And I caught myself thinking "Oh, it's not worth a press release, because it's not such an impressive journal"...

...but then I said to myself "No, it doesn't matter, it's the same research, and I'm going to do it." Luckily, the university agreed.

So yes, it is hard and this mentality change will take time. I'm not sure if people who are now decades into their scientific careers and never thought about these problems can change their minds."



https://erc.europa.eu/news-events/magazine/open-science-needs-no-martyrs-we-must-recognize-need-reform

Which steps do we identify to implement a change of culture?

First, as a research community, among researchers across all career stages, we need to take a *hard, realistic and honest look* at the current reward system and its flaws, regardless of how well it may have served us.

Second, beyond localized examples of evolving practices of research evaluation, for example in the recruitment practices of some faculties or research institutes, a broader internal dialogue is needed *within the research community* to focus on what is important, what should be rewarded and how individuals are evaluated at different stages of their research careers.

To this end…

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March 2021: workshop on the assessment of Open Science practices

ISE held a 2-day stakeholder workshop to discuss the implementation of mechanisms to incentivise and reward the adoption of Open Science practices.

[FULL REPORT IN PREPARATION]

ise:
Initiative for Science in Europe

https://initiative-se.eu

external policy advisors

Toma Susi

www.mostlyphysics.net/policy

"…it is urgent and vital that diverse research communities *concretely consider* how they wish evaluation systems to be adapted to reward open science practices,

and that decision-makers *engage* with such communities in planning the reforms.

There is serious risk that if research communities *cannot agree* on what to replace currently prevalent prestige indicators such as journal impact factors and quartile ranks with,

these will either continue to be (mis)used or new indicators will be imposed without the community's participation."

'Evaluation is largely in hands of the academic community'

But you can help!

https://www.deviantart.com/scruffytoto/art/Stop-Hitting-Yourself-162754503

What will Europe look like in 2030, if we succeed?

Five key enablers for ministers and leaders at research funding & performing organisations

1) There are sustainable funding levels
   - All European states meet the 3% GDP target (incl 1.25% public effort target)
   - Competitive (short-term, stimulating) and non-competitive (long-term, strategic) funding streams are balanced
2) There are no legal barriers to the mobility of researchers
   - Being a researcher working across Europe no longer means navigating labyrinths of incompatible labour laws, migration rules, social security schemes, pension systems etc.
   - European Commission has taken on an active role as an 'eliminator' of barriers on EU and national levels to ensure that Article 179 TFEU is fulfilled with 'researchers, scientific knowledge and technology circulating freely'
3) There is full acknowledgement of modern research careers
   - Diverse trajectories are common: e.g. permanent senior scientist, research infrastructure expert, data steward...
4) Research infrastructure is abundant and access is fully supported
   - Resources and expertise (hardware and people) are available to the broader research community
5) Knowledge is a global public good
   - Societal leaders and politicians embrace and promote knowledge as a global public good in contrast to positioning knowledge as tool to pursue competitive/financial advantage