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# DHET: Putting the 'Statement on Ethical Research and Scholarly Publishing Practices' into practice

*Following a Workshop on the Ethics of Scholarly Publishing on 11 April 2018, and with the collective goal of advancing research integrity in South Africa, the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf), the Council for Higher Education (CHE), the National Research Foundation (NRF), the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and Universities South Africa (USAf) signed the joint **Statement on Ethical Research and Scholarly Publishing Practices** in Pretoria on 31 July 2019.*

*The signatories were invited by the South African Journal of Science to outline to the South African research community how they individually and collectively will be 'putting the Statement into practice'.*

Unethical practices in the research and publishing value chain affect all of us in the higher education system. A single incident of unethical practice could tarnish the image and integrity of the whole sector and every member of the higher education system must be an agent of ethical conduct, particularly in research and publishing but also generally in academia.

The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) enthusiastically participates in promoting research integrity at every level because our task is to protect the integrity of higher education in South Africa and to ensure that the DHET presides over the administration of a quality system that can be counted among the most credible and trustworthy in the world. For this reason, the DHET calls upon every academic in South Africa to join hands and support the fight against the scourge of putting money ahead of ethics, quality and integrity.

In this regard, the DHET Research Outputs Policy 'aims to encourage research productivity by rewarding quality research output at public higher education institutions'. In doing so, all publications have to follow acceptable standards associated with academic publishing, such as effective peer review, norms of citation, and proper acknowledgement when using ideas from others. The Research Outputs Policy uses academic publications as a proxy for research output and emphasises the importance of research integrity by demanding that research integrity lies at the heart of submitting research output claims for subsidy.

The DHET continuously engages with administrators of the approved indices, especially when there are suspected unethical practices, so that these can be uprooted at source. The purpose of removing predatory journals from indices and journal lists is to make certain that they do not get recognised, and that articles published in them do not accrue subsidy for South African scholars. Moreover, and importantly, the DHET reserves the right to withhold research subsidy for research and publications it considers unethical.

Furthermore, the DHET participates in an international initiative to deal with unethical practices of predatory publishing. The approach of this initiative is to focus on a consensus definition of predatory journals; to create a 'one-stop shop' for educational resources regarding predatory journals; to develop an observatory for surveillance of predatory journals/publishing and to develop a Journal Authenticator which would verify the status of each journal.

Moreover, in fulfilling its obligations as a signatory to the *Statement on Ethical Research and Scholarly Publishing*, the DHET will use all avenues and platforms at its disposal to strengthen the work of purging unethical practices in research and publishing. There are several platforms to use in this regard, including the Forum of the Deputy Vice Chancellors (Research); communication of individual institutional research outputs reports and the collective sector report to all institutions; and workshops with responsible managers at all universities. The DHET continues to invest resources in ensuring that only quality work accesses state funding.

All South African universities have an obligation to ensure that their Research Ethics Committees – a requirement of the Research Outputs Policy – are effectively functional and supported in the fulfilment of their mandates.