

Correspondence

Students having to lead is shameful

The efforts of Amy Orben and other young researchers to fight the perverse incentives that dominate science right now are all the more impressive because these scientists are at the most vulnerable point of their careers (*Nature* 573, 465; 2019). And, just as it's shameful that teenagers have to lead international action against the climate crisis, students and new postdocs should not have to spearhead these efforts.

Top-down pressure to improve research practice is needed. In my experience, even the smallest mandate from funders, publishers or performance assessors boosts incentive. Evaluators of research quality should openly declare how they measure a study's rigour and how that rigour contributes to quality scores. And funders should insist that institutions sign the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment, commonly known as DORA.

For their part, prestigious journals need to be more willing to accept registered reports and direct replications of studies they have published. And publication of the code and syntax behind analyses in manuscripts should be obligatory across all journals.

These are not radical proposals. Any one of them would reinforce trustworthiness in science.

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More injustice for small island states

A statistical loophole is stopping research funding from getting to small island states — among the most vulnerable to climate change and among the least culpable for it. By contrast, international aid after disasters such as that caused by Hurricane Dorian ([go.nature.com/33eggxt](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-019-1333-3)) can be swift and forthcoming.

In general, funders that provide aid and development

use gross national income per capita as the sole measure of a country's development ([go.nature.com/35djbd8](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-019-1333-3)). Countries with small populations, including the small island states, are therefore unlikely to appear on the list of nations eligible to receive aid, compiled for "statistical purposes" by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

Although the OECD specifically states that the DAC list is "not designed as guidance for aid or other preferential treatment", several UK research funders, for example, do use the DAC list to determine the eligibility of countries in research partnerships ([go.nature.com/3jq92mm](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-019-1333-3)).

The solution is to include the official United Nations list of small island developing states ([go.nature.com/2ab2xhf](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-019-1333-3)) as eligible partners in research and development programmes.

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A first for African neuroscience

A new institute for neuroscience, the first of its kind in Africa, has opened at South Africa's University of Cape Town ([go.nature.com/2rmjjpc](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-019-1333-3)). Its aim is to meet one neglected aspect of a growing population, namely illnesses of the brain and mind. The entire continent has just nine mental-health professionals for every one million people ([go.nature.com/35n1afj](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-019-1333-3)).

The institute will focus on conditions that are of the highest priority for Africa. One example is the surge in the number of children with brain infections caused by HIV and tuberculosis. And an improved understanding of brain development and health should help to inform strategies

to maximize Africa's economic potential.

Cape Town's Neuroscience Institute promises to be an African centre of excellence, supported by scientists and clinicians from different fields. It will help to spread advances in the neurosciences across sub-Saharan Africa by acting as a nexus for training and collaboration through established networks such as the African Academy of Sciences (see also J. M. Wilmshurst *et al. Pediatrics* 137, e20152741; 2016).
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*On behalf of 4 correspondents; see [go.nature.com/2nyzbsu](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-019-1333-3).

A research dream is crushed by politics

Yachay Tech, in Urcuquí, was founded as Ecuador's first research-intensive university in 2012 ([go.nature.com/2mmqbpr](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-019-1333-3)). Once seen as an ambitious means of advancing a small emerging country, the university now seems to have followed a trend pervasive in Latin America: it has become primarily a teaching institution.

I was appointed as the university's vice-chancellor for research and innovation in 2016. I can attest to the hope of Ecuadorians from all walks of life that Yachay Tech would better their country's economy, and the lives of its people, through state-of-the-art higher education informed by research. Students were enthralled by the prospect of learning at a research institution of international calibre, and of engaging in research themselves (see C. Castillo-Chavez *et al. Science* 357, 881; 2017).

This optimism has been beaten down by the headwinds of political meddling. Fractious partisan politics and financial constraints are compounded by a conspicuous lack of support from other important institutions and ministries. The incompetence of planners and builders for the City of Knowledge Yachay, where

Yachay Tech is sited, is adding to the frustration.

I call on academics, politicians and concerned citizens to lend their weight to the development of research universities in emerging countries. These institutions need autonomy, national financial support, commitment to world standards of excellence and ethics — and freedom from political interference.

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Citation doping not for Italy's elites

Factors other than citation doping could have contributed to the recent rise in the number of Italians among the 100,000 most highly cited scientists (see *Nature* [http://doi.org/dcgj](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-019-1333-3); 2019).

Of the 100,000 most highly cited scientists in the database compiled by John Ioannidis *et al. (PLoS Biol.* [http://doi.org/gf6ckr](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pbio.1006606); 2019), including some 2,000 Italians, we found that the proportion using self-citation to boost their research impact was probably only 2% (see P. D'Antuono and M. Ciavarella Preprint at <https://arxiv.org/abs/1910.02948v1>; 2019). The practice seems to be more common among early-career scientists who are otherwise less frequently cited.

ANVUR, the Italian agency for research evaluation ([go.nature.com/2kqu5jj](https://www.anvur.it)), should in our view exclude self-citations from future evaluations, to avoid this 'noise'.

We consider that the jump in the number of Italians in the 100,000 most highly cited researchers is a symptom of the overall health of the Italian research system. It underscores the positive effect of introducing ANVUR in 2006.

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CORRECTION

The Correspondence article 'A first for African neuroscience' erroneously stated that Africa has just nine mental-health professionals for every 100,000 people. In fact, it has nine for every one million people.