**Memorandum from the Parliamentary Office**

**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**FOR WRITTEN REPLY**

**QUESTION 2869**

**DATE OF PUBLICATION OF INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER: 15/09/2017**

**(INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER 33 OF 2017)**

**Mr D Bergman (DA) to ask the Minister of Higher Education and Training:**

(1) Is (a) his department and (b) the Council on Higher Education (CHE) aware that a recent study suggested that a large proportion of academic publications emanating from our Universities are in so-called predatory journals; if not, why not; if so, what steps will they take in this regard;

(2) does his department have a specific policy on these journals; if not, (a) why not and (b) will one be developed; if so, what are the relevant details?

**NW3176E**

**REPLY:**

1. Yes, the Department and the Council on Higher Education (CHE) are aware of the recent article published by Professor Johann Mouton of the Centre for Research on Evaluation, Science and Technology (CREST) based at Stellenbosch University. The article highlights the magnitude and prevalence of publications in predatory journals by South African authors and/or institutions. The article mentions that approximately 4 072 articles were published in predatory journals over a 10 year period. It should be noted that while this is of major concern, it represents only 3.4% of the total number of articles recognised for subsidy during this period.

The Department is concerned of unethical publishing and has already initiated mechanisms to curb this behaviour before the article was published. In an attempt to deal with this problem, the Department has funded a collaborative research programme, led by Professor Mouton at CREST focussing on the quality of research outputs. The programme aims to develop mechanisms to ensure that the Department only funds quality research. In the meantime, the Department 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 If they are confirmed, subsidies will be withdrawn for articles published in such journals, in line with the *Research Output Policy (2015)*.

1. The Department has a specific policy - the *Research Output Policy* *(2015) -* that outlines the criteria to be used by institutions when claiming research outputs that qualify for subsidy. The 2015 policy was the result of the review of the *Policy and Procedures for Measurement of Research Output of Public Higher Education Institutions (2003)* that had been implemented since 2004. The purpose of the policy is to encourage research productivity by rewarding quality research output at public higher education institutions. The policy is not intended to measure all output, but to enhance productivity by recognising the major types of research output produced by higher education institutions, and uses appropriate proxies to determine the quality of such output. While increased productivity is a key driver behind the policy, what informed the 2015 revision was the need to ensure improved quality of subsidised research outputs.

In terms of the policy, institutions receive subsidy for the number of approved published research outputs in accredited journals, scholarly books and peer-reviewed published conference proceedings. The policy requires that all public higher education institutions submit to the Department their annual claims for research outputs published in journals, books and conference proceedings accompanied by the relevant supporting documentation. The policy also explains the quality mechanisms, which must be used to ensure that only quality publications receive subsidy. The policy holds institutions and researchers responsible for ensuring that they only claim for quality research outputs, and should an output claimed later be found to have been published in a journal that did not meet the required standards, funding will be withdrawn.

COMPILER/CONTACT PERSONS:

EXT:

DIRECTOR – GENERAL

STATUS:

DATE:

QUESTION 2869 APPROVED/NOT APPROVED/AMENDED

Dr BE NZIMANDE, MP

MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING

STATUS:

DATE: