
Funding: proposals ignore mentoring and teaching

SIR — Christopher Exley, in Correspondence (“Funding should recognize outcome, not income” *Nature* **440**, 1112; 2006), rightly criticizes the proposal that past research income should be used to assign future funding. But he falls back on the equally simplistic idea that “the only significant research outcome is the science and, primarily, its communication through publication”.

Mentoring and teaching, both of students and the public, have long been the poor relations of publication and funding in the eyes of many researchers. For example, the current strike by UK university lecturers involves the suspension of teaching duties, rather than the suspension of either grant applications or manuscript submissions. Although a boycott of grant applications would, arguably, hit institutes harder than a teaching boycott, lecturers can suspend lecturing at minimal cost to themselves because academic preferment is rarely dependent on the ability to educate.

Given the UK’s shortage of science and engineering graduates, this under-appreciation of education is a terrible and preventable waste. But there is little incentive to mentor in the current UK system and few people, scientists included, do something for nothing. It would be an opportunity missed if more emphasis were not placed on developing the potential of young scientists for the next Research Assessment Exercise. How many scientific outcomes are more significant than inspiring and training the generation which is to replace us?

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