There is no easy science by which to fire professors

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There are moments when the university ivory tower and the real world of academic affairs is so borotheaded that it deserves scorn far beyond the level of the normal day's virtuous goal. Under Queen Mary University of London is selecting which staff to sack from its science departments in a way that I can describe only as insane.

The firings, it seems, are nothing to do with hard financial times, but are a ham-fisted attempt to raise Queen Mary's ranking in the league tables. A university's position is directly related to its government's research funding. So Queen Mary's managers hope to do well in the 2014 Research Excellence Framework by firing staff who don't publish a paper every ten minutes.

To survive as a professor there you need to have published N papers during 2008 to 2011, of which at least two are "high quality". For lecturers, the target for keeping your job is five papers, of which one is "high quality".

You must also have had at least one PhD student complete their thesis.

What Queen Mary defines as "high quality" is publication in a "high-impact journal" (which gets lots of citations). Journals such as Nature and Science get most of their citations from very selective papers, so it does not mean that brainless baseless brains about the quality of research from such a skewed distribution. Of the talk of skewed distribution is no doubt, a bit too technical for innumerate HR people to understand. The point is precisely why they should have nothing to do with assessing scientists.

I have been writing for The Guardian that all three Nobel prize winners would have been fired. None would have passed the criteria laid down for a professor of Chemistry. Out of 5600 scientists, 10 of them have been fired and so would Peter Higgs. Three of these would be first-rate researchers, with six papers published in 2008-11, with six papers published in 2008-11, with six papers published in 2008-11, with six papers published in 2008-11.

Peter Higgs would not have passed the Queen Mary criteria.

being "high quality". The encouragement to publish reams is deaf. If you are not publishing a paper ever three or four weeks, you certainly are not writing them, and possibly not even reading them. Most likely you are expanding your name to somebody else's work with little or no checking of the data, as I am not real research.

It is also deeply unethical for Queen Mary to require all staff to have a PhD student with the aim of raising the university's ranking rather than benefiting the student.

Like so much managerialism, the rules are an active encouragement to dishonesty. The discredited assessment methods of Queen Mary will make sure that research is cheap, the kind of second-rate spiv scientists. Who in their right mind would want to work there any longer? So the question is: what does science's public knowledge about these research?