

# Indom slaughter set by poaching'

will disagree with Simon Gaskell's fine  
ary of the past and present merits of  
Mary, University of London ("From  
o posterity", Opinions, 9 August), least  
those who join with us in challenging  
ethods now introduced to consolidate  
ins of recent years.

However, acute problems have emerged,  
of which is the use of derivative publi-  
and related "metrics" to identify alleg-  
nderperforming individual members  
ff. College authorities seem reluctant to  
nowledge that this primary tool of perfor-  
e management is widely discredited by  
creasing number of rigorous studies.  
Gaskell gives just one sentence to the  
r in his apologia overlooks the instinctive  
ge that academics everywhere feel if  
s are destroyed by decimal points in  
ous calculations. Metrics might, at a  
, mirror the best and the worst scholarly  
when reduced to averages for depart-  
al comparisons. However, when scaled  
to individuals – and especially at the  
ins where most nascent academics are  
found – they are meaningless. Any  
ment based on them amounts to a lottery.  
re we point to the unintended conse-  
es of restructuring already in evidence.

include undermining morale in the  
ols and departments concerned; the flight  
ented colleagues to other institutions; the  
gnment of teaching to lecturers in casual  
oyment or those deemed unfit for  
rch; scandalous gender disparity; and  
psided, counterproductive allocation of  
nces. When staff are dismissed, replace-  
s can come only from other institutions  
have been willing to invest in people,  
rch and scholarship. As a part of normal  
emic life, mobility is acceptable, even  
able, but when enforced on the scale  
aged at Queen Mary, it is random  
hater offset by poaching.

ie traditions of the college do indeed  
und that high standards are set and main-  
d. For 125 years such standards have  
achieved by common sense and collegial-  
ostering mutual trust and respect. We see  
ecessity, and no intelligence, in resorting  
vidious instruments of fear and interper-  
l rivalry. We deplore the growing use in  
ersities of bogus management methods  
have consistently failed elsewhere.

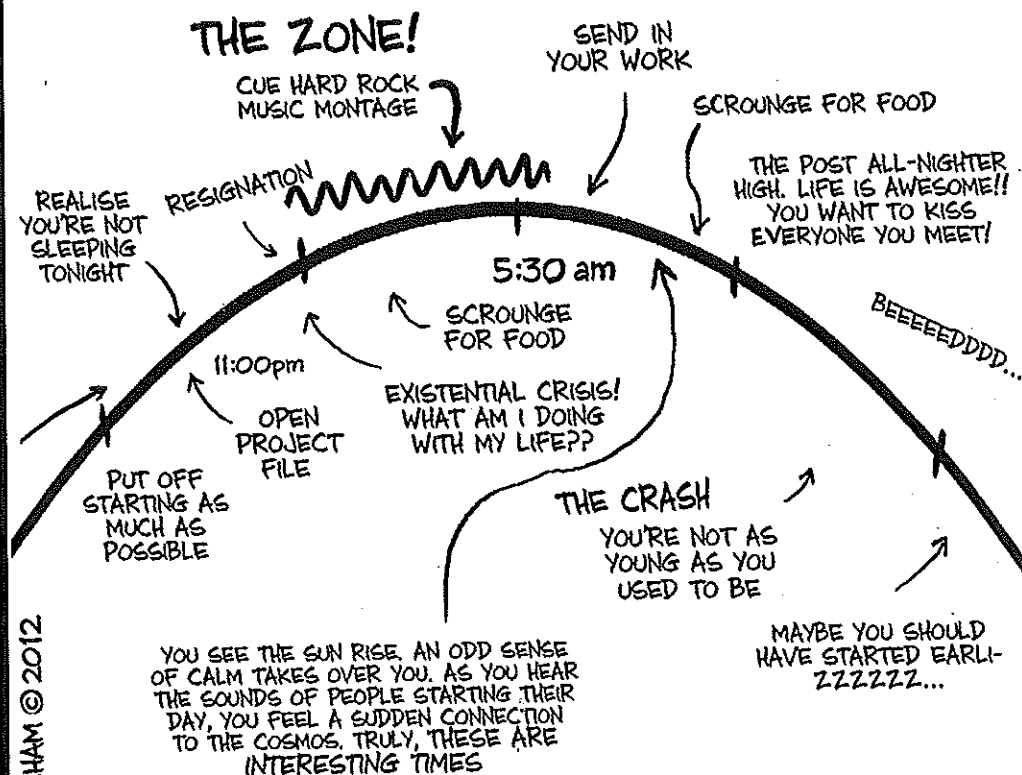
**Bignell**, emeritus professor of zoology, Queen  
University of London; **Gavin Vinson**, emeritus  
ssor of biochemistry, Queen Mary, University of  
on; **Don Braben**, honorary professor of research  
ation, University College London; and 10 others  
r the full list of signatories, see  
u.timeshighereducation.co.uk

certainly odd that Simon Gaskell's response  
s critics devotes very little space to their  
isms. He says that the criteria used to fire  
le "were based on generally recognised

## PILED HIGHER AND DEEPER

by JORGE CHAN

# THE ALL-NIGHTER



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academic expectations". Nothing could be  
further from the truth: simply counting papers  
(not even weighting them) and using journal  
impact factor to measure their quality are meth-  
ods that were utterly discredited years ago.

Queen Mary's *Frequently Asked Questions:  
Restructures and Reviews in Academic  
Departments 2011-12* document states that  
the "research-related metrics" used in the  
School of Biological and Chemical Sciences  
are the result of "extensive consultation  
with staff and include both the Australian  
[Research Council] journal classification  
system as well as impact factor".

But a year ago, Kim Carr, at that time the  
Australian minister for innovation, industry,  
science and research, said that setting targets  
for publication in A and A\* journals had  
encouraged "ill-informed, undesirable  
behaviour in the management of research".  
This had led him "to remove the rankings,  
based on the ARC's expert advice".

It seems that Gaskell is unaware of  
this, since he is enforcing the "ill-informed,  
undesirable behaviour in the management  
of research" that Australia has dropped.

The UK has dropped it, too. Is Gaskell  
not aware of the instructions for the research  
excellence framework? They state: "No

sub-panel will make any use of journal impac  
factors, rankings, lists or the perceived stand-  
ing of publishers in assessing the quality of  
research outputs."

The people Gaskell seeks to please  
have condemned his methods. If that is not  
"bringing your university into disrepute",  
I don't know what is.

**David Colquhoun**  
Professor of pharmacology  
University College London

Simon Gaskell admits that the capability  
of individual academics was assessed under  
a restructuring exercise, in contradiction of  
Section 139 of the Employment Rights Act  
1996. Adding to this insult, a number of  
professors who failed to meet "objective"  
criteria remain unscathed, as previously  
reported for the head of the School  
of Biological and Chemical Sciences  
(*The Lancet*, 12 May).

Queen Mary is currently seeking to recrui  
a lecturer in cell and molecular biology, whic  
was the post I held until 29 June and from  
which I was dismissed by reason of redun-  
dancy ("Metrics critic's marching orders",  
News, 5 July). It is time for the council or  
the vice-chancellor of the University of