

Correspondence

Control side effects of the psychedelic renaissance

Australia is the first nation to license the medical use of the psychedelic drugs MDMA for post-traumatic stress disorder and psilocybin for depression (*Nature* **619**, 227–228; 2023). There is a danger that this approval could encourage unsupervised uptake worldwide.

These drugs, known as ecstasy and magic mushrooms, respectively, are controlled under the United Nations Convention on Psychotropic Substances. Ecstasy can cause mental-health disorders and lethal complications (see K. K. Rigg and A. Sharp *J. Subst. Use* **23**, 345–352; 2018). Unsupervised use of psilocybin can cause psychotic symptoms (G. Barber *et al. Am. J. Psychiatry* **179**, 892–896; 2022).

Public-health authorities need to prepare medical and legal systems for a surge in the drugs' recreational use. To reduce harm, they could set up sites for the free testing of drug samples. These would inform users about the drugs' chemical composition, contamination level and strength (see go.nature.com/3zdasyg). Germany recently legalized such centres. These life-saving services should not be viewed as conflicting with drug-offence laws.

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The authors declare competing interests; see go.nature.com/3gh473f

Ethiopia paved the way for the Nagoya Protocol

The Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-sharing (ABS), adopted in 2010, ensures that the advantages arising from the use of genetic resources are distributed fairly (www.cbd.int/abs/). Ethiopia established a similar treaty four years earlier, in part to protect its rich and unique biodiversity against biopiracy. Contrary to the suggestion by ThankGod Ebenezer and his colleagues (*Nature* **603**, 388–392; 2022), this 'Access to Genetic Resources and Community Knowledge, and Community Rights law' welcomes applications from non-parties to the Nagoya Protocol, as well as from parties to it (go.nature.com/3oxztad).

Ethiopia is a haven of globally important crops and medicinal plants. It has experienced monumental biological theft, including that of national heritage crops such as teff (*Eragrostis tef*) and the prized Arabica coffee (*Coffea arabica*). The Ethiopian Biodiversity Institute in Addis Ababa, the national focal point for the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Nagoya Protocol, enables the collection, acquisition and transfer of genetic resources and their associated traditional knowledge for commercial purposes through mutually agreed terms, and for research through material-transfer agreements.

The Ethiopian ABS law is a benchmark for African countries seeking to adopt their own ABS laws and the Nagoya Protocol.

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Research excellence: make funding governance more transparent

Broadening the assessment of work submitted to the UK Research Excellence Framework (REF), which is used to decide the allocation of government funding, should alleviate pressure on individual researchers (*Nature* **618**, 648; 2023). However, it could hand too much power to institutional leaders.

This power shift risks disadvantaging both research and education in universities. Poor leadership from senior administrators, for example, might manifest as an ill-judged use of metrics. This could result in top researchers receiving insufficient credit, or in discrimination against academics with high teaching loads.

UK research administrators already have a chequered record on the use of metrics during the REF cycle (see, for example, *Nature* **595**, 471–472; 2021). And the former head of London-based biomedical research funder Wellcome blamed a culture of hyper-competitiveness for "toxic power dynamics and poor leadership behaviour" in UK research (*Nature* **574**, 5–6; 2019).

In any system of resource allocation, responsible use of statistics and rational decision-making are promoted through transparent governance, which decreases the power of administrators. Improved transparency concerning the structure, content and narrative of institutions' REF submissions would encourage external checks and guard against inadequate leadership and abuse of the system.

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