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My involvement in the Triangle SCI meeting 2016 culminated in, among other things, a [paper](#) that outlined the group's shared concern over the use of the term 'excellence' in academia. The abstract is below:

*The rhetoric of “excellence” is pervasive across the academy. It is used to refer to research outputs as well as researchers, theory and education, individuals and organizations, from art history to zoology. But does “excellence” actually mean anything? Does this pervasive narrative of “excellence” do any good? Drawing on a range of sources we interrogate “excellence” as a concept and find that it has no intrinsic meaning in academia. Rather it functions as a linguistic interchange mechanism. To investigate whether this linguistic function is useful we examine how the rhetoric of excellence combines with narratives of scarcity and competition to show that the hyper-competition that arises from the performance of “excellence” is completely at odds with the qualities of good research. We trace the roots of issues in reproducibility, fraud, and homophily to this rhetoric. But we also show that this rhetoric is an internal, and not primarily an external, imposition. We conclude by proposing an alternative rhetoric based on soundness and capacity-building. In the final analysis, it turns out that that “excellence” is not excellent. Used in its current unqualified form it is a pernicious and dangerous rhetoric that undermines the very foundations of good research and scholarship.*

Moore, S., Neylon, C., Paul Eve, M. et al. “Excellence R Us”: university research and the fetishisation of excellence. [Palgrave Commun](#) 3, 16105 (2017).

This work has been the subject of much discussion among the academic community in the following years, and has raised important questions about how we evaluate and assess research. (It has not, I should note, had any noticeable effect on universities' proclivity for using the term in their publicity materials). It has also had a strong influence on my own career. After the TriangleSCI meeting I joined the journal, *eLife*, and there we have been re-evaluating what it means to assess research, and the role of journals in this process. We have recently changed our [publishing model](#) to one where research articles (in the form of preprints) are evaluated publicly with reviews and editorial assessments published without the 'accept/reject' decision usually associated with journal publication. This new model of publishing again questions the notion of any one definition of excellence, and replaces it with more nuanced descriptions of individual pieces of research. It also paves the way for a future where researchers themselves can be evaluated not on *where* they publish their work, but instead on *what* they publish.

