

# Summaries of inquiries into scientific misconduct (1.10.2013 to 31.12.2014)

## Plagiarism and incorrect citation

### Case 1

Suspicion signalled by the referee. According to the referee, part of the proposed research is very similar to research reported in two publications in which a co-applicant and a post-doc to be employed in the project are co-authors. The first publication is a research report available online; it is cited in the application, yet not in relation to the proposed research. The second publication is a peer-review research article submitted before the proposal was sent to the SNSF and published online during the proposal evaluation. The referee considers that the applicants have not reported about their previous work in a way that allows the grant to be properly evaluated. The error is considered minor for the following reasons: the overlap concerns the work of a co-applicant, that is partly own work; only a small part of the proposed research is concerned; the concerned work is cited in the research plan, though not in direct relation with the proposed research; the proposed research is not strictly identical to the published work.

**Decision: minor error, reminder of standards of scientific integrity sent to the applicant.**

### Case 2

Suspicion signalled by an external reviewer. About 1800 words (21% of the research plan) were copied from 5 different peer-reviewed articles, including one of the main applicant's group. 4 of these 5 sources are referenced in the application, one relatively minor source is not. However, some of the references are separated from the text copied in such a way that the proper attribution is not possible. In particular, large blocks of text and a figure in the methods section are copied verbatim from a source that is only cursory referenced once at the beginning of the copied section. The concerned methods have not originally been developed by the copied authors, but are based on standard methods published by others, as cited correctly in the copied source and in the concerned application. The following factors are extenuating: mainly the methods section of the research plan is affected, the methods described are standard and the source of the text copied is cited in 4/5 instances, although, in an inappropriate and misleading way. The fact that both applicants are experienced researchers is considered aggravating.

**Decision and sanction (ruling in 2015): exclusion from the application procedure for 6 months for the main applicant. Notification of the commissioning institution. Decision for the co-applicant: closure of proceedings due to lack of intent.**

### Case 3

Suspicion out of a random check. 626 words (8% of the research plan) were copied without citation from 3 peer-reviewed research articles. All of these affect one research group that has not relation to the application. Although the extent of the copied text is relatively small, it concerns the specific aims of the project and notably elements that the applicant particularly highlighted as being "novel". Furthermore, the applicant has purposefully misquoted numerical results from a third-party research group. The fact that the applicant remained unrelenting in his statement but attempted to justify his actions through demonstrably false assertions is considered aggravating.

**Decision and sanction (ruling in 2015): exclusion from the application procedure for 2 years.**

### Case 4

Suspicion out of a random check. Summary of inquiry: 6 short paragraphs of the research plan (total 397 words, 7.3% of the research plan) were copied without citation from 4 different sources (3 peer-reviewed research articles and an online methodological guide). They affect the sections current state of research, methods and relevance of the project. There is a pattern whereby the applicant recycles text without proper citation, yet acknowledges the original publications referenced in the copied text. The relative lack of experience of the applicant, a PhD student, is a further extenuating circumstance.

**Decision: minor error, reminder of standards of scientific integrity sent to the applicant.**

#### Case 5

Suspicion out of a random check. 342 words (ca. 8% of the text of the research plan in the section describing the current state of research in the field) were reused from a published research article with the applicant as co-author. The article is not cited within the research plan.

**Decision: minor error, reminder of standards of scientific integrity sent to the applicant.**

#### Case 6

Suspicion out of a random check. 600 words (ca. 8% of the text of the research plan in the section describing the current state of research in the field) were reused from an published research article with the main applicant as co-author. The article is not cited in proximity of the copied passages, but is however cited elsewhere in the proposal.

**Decision: minor error, reminder of standards of scientific integrity sent to the applicant.**

#### Case 7

Suspicion out of a random check. Ca. 940 words (9% of the research plan) were copied from three articles published by the main applicant as only author, respectively co-author. The copied passages concern mainly the “Current state of research in the field” as well as “Summary and Background” sections. The copied references are provided near the copied passages, which are however not clearly indicated as verbatim copy for the reader.

**Decision: minor error, reminder of standards of scientific integrity sent to the applicant.**

#### Case 8

Suspicion signalled by an external reviewer. An external expert drew the SNSF’s attention to inconsistencies in relation to cited passages. An initial check of the passages in question and of the reference list indicated that the numbering had perhaps been mixed up. Checks conducted using the plagiarism software, however, revealed further passages that had not been correctly quoted, along with publications not mentioned in the references. The SNSF’s Commission on Research Integrity launched an investigation due to suspected scientific misconduct. The applicant issued a statement on the accusations and submitted meticulously compiled and exceedingly comprehensive material, which has not yet been evaluated.

**Decision: The proceedings are yet to be concluded.**

## Other suspicions of scientific misconduct

### Case 9

The documentation submitted with one application contained a letter of reference from a professor that was proven not to have been written by the professor in question.

The SNSF's view at the time was suspected falsification of a document in conjunction with an application for an SNSF grant. In accordance with Article 12 para. 5 of the Research and Innovation Promotion Act (RIPA, SR 421.1), the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI) punishes any criminal acts as defined in the Subsidies Act in the area of research in accordance with the rules of the Federal Act on Administrative Criminal Law.

The SERI concluded that, in the absence of wilful intent, the prerequisites stipulated in the Subsidies Act and Federal Act on Administrative Criminal Law were not fulfilled. It therefore stopped the proceedings.

The Specialised Committee's opinion was that there was still a suspicion of scientific misconduct, and it launched an investigation. The case was taken on by the Commission on Research Integrity with effect from 1 October 2013.

**Decision and sanction:** The Commission found that this was a case of scientific misconduct (wilful or grossly negligent provision of false information) and recommended that the National Research Council impose a **6-month ban on applications**. This was confirmed by the NRC. In the absence of any appointment at a Swiss or foreign institution of higher education, no notification of an institution was required.

### Case 10

The referee drew the SNSF's attention to the fact that the CV included in an application contained irregularities (prizes that the applicant had not received, presentations that the applicant had not given and publications that had not been published as he/she claimed).

The Specialised Committee considered there to be a suspicion of scientific misconduct and launched an investigation. The case was taken on by the Commission on Research Integrity with effect from 1 October 2013. After considering the applicant's statement, it concluded that there had been an "uploading error". It was not possible to prove that the applicant was guilty of any wilful or grossly negligent misconduct.

**Decision: The Commission closed the case.**

### Case 11

Following information from the RC, the Division reviewed an application using the plagiarism software. The test showed that the correlations with external texts were small and irrelevant. However, closed inspection revealed that a large portion of the text in the research plan matched the research plan submitted by another applicant as part of an earlier application, with regard to which the applicant concerned had been a co-applicant. He/she had failed to declare that the current application was a re-submission or that it was in any way scientifically related to the previous application.

The Division launched an investigation on the grounds of suspected scientific misconduct. The case was taken on by the Commission on Research Integrity with effect from 1 October 2013. After considering the applicant's statement, it concluded that he/she had merely adopted sections from the previous application that related to his/her sub-project and had not been approved. It was not possible to prove that the applicant was guilty of any wilful or grossly negligent misconduct.

**Decision: The Commission closed the case.**

#### Case 12

When reviewing an application, the Specialised Committee noted two instances where the information in the applicant's first authorship publication list did not match the information available to the SNSF. For two articles, the publication list included no reference to the involvement on an equal basis of a further author. The Commission launched an investigation on the grounds of suspected scientific misconduct. After considering the applicant's statement, it concluded that the author information in the applicant's publication list constituted an error rather than wilful or grossly negligent scientific misconduct.

**Decision: The Commission closed the case.**

#### Case 13

During the evaluation of an application, one of the members of the evaluation commission felt that the publication list was dubious. Subsequent review of the publication list revealed three problematic references. There were two instances in which the positioning of the applicant in the list of authors had been changed, once from tenth to first place, and once from fourth to second place. With regard to another reference, numerous co-authors involved in a study had not been mentioned. The SNSF's Commission on Research Integrity launched an investigation due to suspected scientific misconduct. After considering the applicant's statement, it concluded that the order in which the authors were listed and the omission of co-authors were due to problems with the end note software. It was not possible to prove that the applicant was guilty of any wilful or grossly negligent misconduct.

**Decision: The Commission closed the case.**

#### Case 14

The referee and co-referee proposed to directly reject the proposal, due to strong overlap in the proposed research with a running grant in another SNSF funding scheme. The two grants shared two applicants, but the main applicant of the running grant had been replaced by a new co-applicant. Entire paragraphs of text are (nearly) verbatim copied, in the section current state of research and detailed research plan (including methods and research aims). This was not precisely quantified but concerns about half of the research plan. Both grants use the same study design, yet do not propose the exact same research. In particular, there are some differences in the methodology used. Moreover, the sub-project of the new co-applicant as well as some minor tasks in the two other sub-projects are new. The link of the submitted proposal with the running project was not mentioned at all in the application, a fact that the referee and co-referee consider as scientific misconduct.

The Commission launched a scientific misconduct investigation. After considering the applicant's statement, it concluded that the two projects were similar but not the same and that the applicant's omission of any reference to the current project was not intentional or due to gross negligence.

**Decision: The Commission closed the case.**