

Commission on Research Integrity and Plagiarism Control Group

Report: 1 January 2023 to 31 December 2023

1 Research Integrity at the SNSF - Overview

[Research integrity](#) is of high importance to the SNSF. The [Regulations on scientific misconduct](#) specify the procedures to be applied in cases of suspected misconduct along with possible sanctions (e.g. letter of warning or exclusion from the application process for a limited period) and the procedural rights of the parties concerned.

The SNSF has appointed the Commission on Research Integrity (Commission) and the Plagiarism Control Group (Control Group) to investigate cases of scientific misconduct. The [Regulations of the Commission on Research Integrity](#) define the organisation and competencies of the Commission on Research Integrity appointed by the National Research Council. In this document, these two bodies report on their activities.

2 Framework and bodies

2.1 Control Group

The Control Group is composed of 8 employees of the Administrative Offices who represent the four divisions and three specialised committees as well as the Legal Department.

The Control Group employs the software iThenticate by Turnitin to compare texts and to investigate plagiarism. The software analyses research plans submitted with applications for research funding by searching for identical passages. In cases of suspected scientific misconduct – when research plans either contain an increased number of such passages or are reported as suspected cases by persons inside or outside the Administrative Offices of the SNSF – a detailed analysis is carried out.

2.2 Commission

The Commission is composed of the President, one delegate from each of the divisions and specialised committees of the Research Council plus the Control Group.

The Commission is responsible for processing cases of alleged scientific misconduct in connection with applications for SNSF grants or the use thereof. Investigating suspected misconduct in the *application process* is the primary responsibility of the Commission. If the suspected misconduct concerns the *use of SNSF funding*, the Commission according to the subsidiarity principle usually awaits the decision taken by the institution.

When discussing and deciding on cases of scientific misconduct in relation to grant applications or the use of SNSF grants, the Commission meets in the following four-member constellation: the President, the delegate of the respective division or specialised committee of the Research Council, a member of the Control Group and the delegate of the Legal Department (see Article 4 of the [Regulations of the Commission on Research Integrity](#)). If those responsible for the investigation conclude that scientific misconduct has occurred, it submits a recommendation to impose sanctions to the Presiding Board of the Research Council.

3 Plagiarism Control Group

3.1 Practice

5% of the submitted applications¹ are randomly selected and their research plans checked for plagiarism. The Control Group conducts these analyses using the software iThenticate, which compares the research plans with texts on the internet and scientific databases. Only results with a similarity index² of $\geq 10\%$ and/or the largest possible degree of correspondence³ of >200 words are followed up more in detail. Besides these checks, the Control Group investigates all suspected cases reported to them by evaluators (referees and external reviewers), by rule-breaking researchers themselves, by members of the Administrative Offices or by other informers. Based on detailed analyses, the Control Group then decides whether the suspicions are justified and whether the case should be forwarded to the Commission in its four-member composition for further investigation. Before forwarding cases to the Commission, they are presented to the President of the Commission who decides whether to formally open an investigation or not.

The severity of cases of plagiarism is judged based on the amount of text copied without proper referencing (share of whole text, number of words), structure (longer passages, individual sentences or fragments), location in the research plan (general, current state of research, methods or research hypothesis) and content. Incorrectly quoted passages from the applicant's own⁴ publications are considered to be less serious than plagiarism of text by uninvolved parties. However, making earlier research work / publications not transparent may be regarded as scientific misconduct. The decision to investigate a suspected case also depends on the results of a comparative analysis of the recently examined cases. In borderline cases (minor errors), the Control Group sends applicants a written statement reminding them of the rules of good scientific practice. This reminder does not constitute a sanction of any kind and it does not affect the evaluation of the application in any way. The applicants' institution is not informed.

3.2 Analysis in 2023

In the year under review⁵, the Control Group ran 296 research plans through the software and carried out a detailed analysis for 96 research plans. In comparison with the previous years, the Control Group examined fewer research plans (see Fig. 1). The previous year saw an increase mainly because of the transitional measures that were launched in 2022 due to Switzerland's status as a non-associated third country in the Horizon Europe programme. The year 2023 is again in a similar range as the years prior to 2022.

1 5% per funding scheme, only for full research applications. Lead agency projects, which are assessed by an external partner, so-called "excellence grant" projects, which are subject to a simplified evaluation process, and pre-proposals are excluded.

2 Percentage of texts identified by the software as identical with other published sources; not yet an indication of scientific misconduct.

3 Largest source identified by the software.

4 Publications with co-authors (regardless of the position of the authors) are not considered "own" publications.

5 The criterion for inclusion in the 2023 report is that the decision date is in 2023. Hence, analyses may be included that were conducted in 2022 if the corresponding decisions were taken in 2023. Similarly, decisions corresponding to analyses conducted towards the end of 2023 will likely be included in the 2024 report.

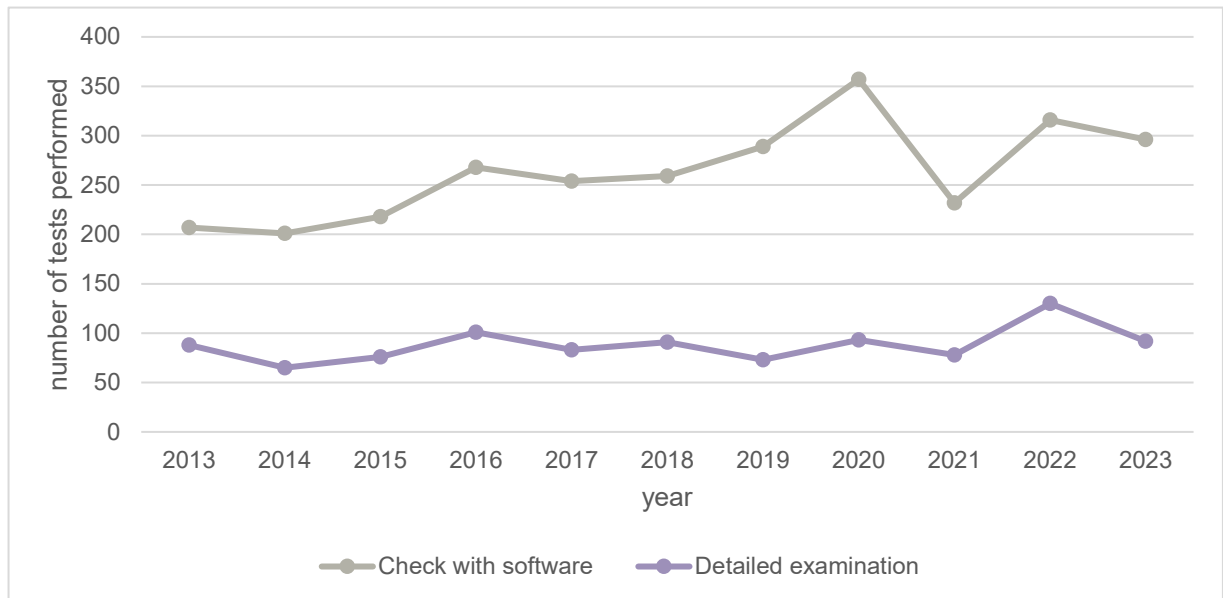


Fig. 1: Overview of the applications examined by the Control Group from 2013-2023

3.2.1 *Random checks*

In 2023, the Control Group conducted random checks on 287 applications (see Table 1). For 200 of them, plagiarism could already be ruled out based on the analysis conducted by the software; 87 research plans needed to be checked in detail. The Control Group identified 4 applications from random checks that had breached the rules of good scientific practice. In these cases, (i) isolated passages and/or (ii) few works of the applicants themselves had not been correctly cited. Based on that, the Control Group sent the applicants a written reminder of the rules of good scientific practice. The applications analysed had neither to be forwarded to the Commission for further clarification nor to be sanctioned.

3.2.2 *Reports on suspected scientific misconduct*

In addition to the random checks, 9 cases of suspected scientific misconduct were reported to the Control Group by persons inside and outside the Administrative Offices (see Table 1). Most of these reports were sent by Research Council members or external reviewers. All 9 reports were studied in detail by the Control Group. There were 8 cases where suspicions of scientific misconduct proved to be unfounded, and no further action had to be taken. In 1 case, the Control Group found minor irregularities as regards the citation of original sources or the research output list and concluded the analysis by sending the applicant a written reminder of the rules of good scientific practice.

Table 1. Checks with software on plagiarism or upon hint by others and decisions by the Control Group in the report period.

	Examinations		Decisions	
	Checks with software/upon external hint	Detailed analyses	Minor errors *	Forwarded to Commission
Random checks	287	87	4	0
Reports by externals	9	9	1	0

* If the detailed control yields a minor research misconduct, the case is closed by sending the applicants a reminder of the rules of good scientific practice.

4 Commission on Research Integrity

4.1 Cases

The Commission dealt with 1 case in the report year as indicated in Fig. 2 as well as in Table 2. The proceeding is still ongoing and no decision was reached in 2023. Fig. 2 summarizes the slightly fluctuating number of investigations and sanctions between 2013 und 2023.

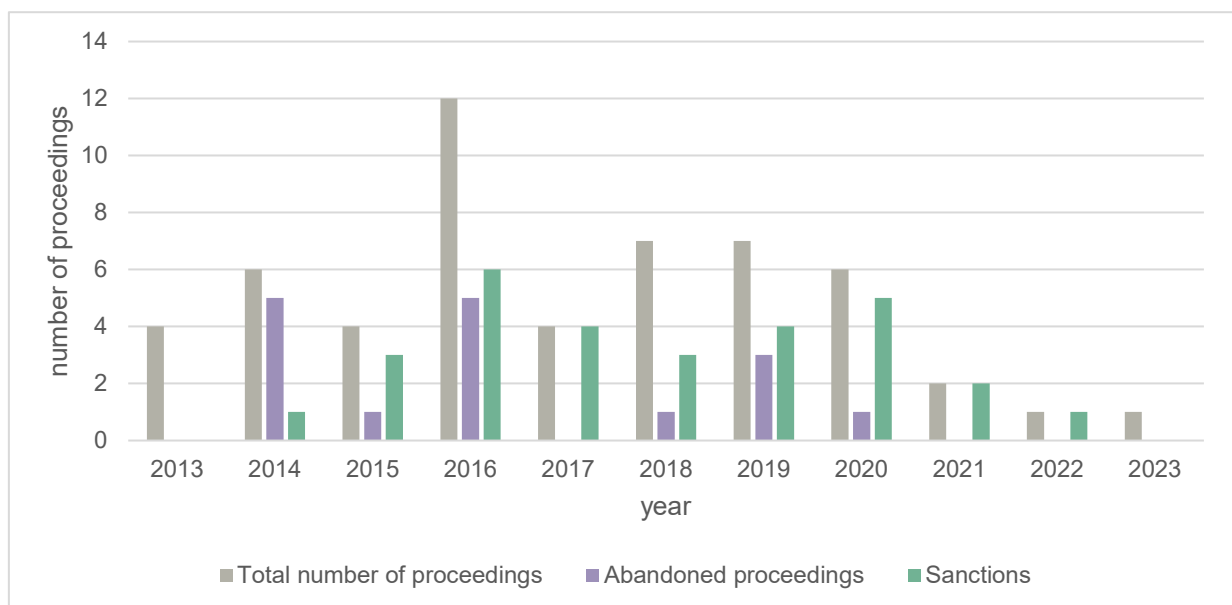


Fig. 2: Overview of the cases that the Commission dealt with from 2012-2023

Table 2. Investigations and decisions by the Commission in 2023

Investigations	
Investigations launched during the report period	1 ⁶
Decisions	
Sanctions imposed in the report period (reprimand)	0
Total number of cases investigated	1

5 Further activities and events

5.1 Plenary meeting

The Integrity Commission was contacted and decided to hold no meeting in 2023 as no urgent points had to be discussed. The report about the work of the Integrity Commission for the year 2022, thus, was sent to the members who accepted it.

5.2 iTenticate

5.2.1 Licence renewal

The licence for iTenticate was renewed for a further year at a similar price (\$ 8'871), factoring in the steadily increasing number of tests. The licence includes 400 tests and unrestricted access to the repository that enables the highly efficient matching of documents.

5.2.2 Deletion of uploaded research plans

To provide an adequate level of data protection, research plans uploaded to the Turnitin servers and analysed by the software are deleted after saving of the analysis report according to the guidelines elaborated by the Control Group.

5.3 Ongoing Developments

A number of current topics being discussed at the SNSF will also be addressed by the Commission in the near future from the perspective of research integrity, in particular the use of artificial intelligence tools by SNSF grant applicants and beneficiaries. Furthermore, as part of the SNSF GO2024 revision project, the Commission's Regulations as well as the Regulations on scientific misconduct will be reviewed.

⁶ The investigation opened in 2023 is still ongoing.

Annex I

Composition of the Commission on Research Integrity of the SNSF

In the report year 2023, the Commission was composed as follows:

President and chair

- Prof. Dr. Nadja Capus

Delegates from the Divisions and Specialised Committees of the National Research Council

- Prof. Dr. Danièle Tosato-Rigo, Div. I
- Prof. Dr. Jean-François Molinari, Div. II
- Prof. Dr. Bart Deplancke, Div. III
- Prof. Dr. Gudela Grote (as of 1.1.2022), Div. IV
- Prof. Dr. Stuart Lane, Specialised Committee Careers
- Prof. Dr. Thomas Südmeyer, Specialised Committee International Cooperations
- Prof. Dr. Olivier Devuyst, Specialised Committee Interdisciplinary Research

Scientific officers (also members of the Plagiarism Control Group of the Administrative Office)

- Eva Moser, Div. I (until 31.05.2023), Dr Daniel Krämer (as of 01.06.2023), Div. I
- Dr. Cornelia Sommer, Div. II
- Dr. Barbara Schellenberg, Div. III (lead Control Group until 31.03.2023), Claudia Ellenrieder (as of 01.04.2023), Div. III
- Dr. David Svarin, Div. IV (lead Control Group as of 01.04.2023)
- Dr. Amalia Sofia, Careers
- Dr. Sarah Glaser, Careers (until 08.06.2023), Dr François Lavergne (as of 09.06.2023), Careers
- Dr. Vanja Michel, Interdisciplinary Research (until 31.05.2023), Dr Margot Mütsch (as of 01.06.2023), Interdisciplinary Research
- Dr. Ladina Knapp, International Cooperations

Representatives of the Legal Department

- Milva Franceschi
- Danielle Jeanneret (deputy) (until 31.03.2023), Sophie Kohli (deputy) (as of 01.04.2023)

Administrative secretariat

- Daniela Büschlen, Secretariat Legal Department

26 March 2024, mlf / sko / dsv