

Commission on Research Integrity and Plagiarism Control Group

Report: 1 January 2021 to 31 December 2021

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 penalties (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 prevent and 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.

Following the agreement of the Commission's President, an investigation is coordinated by the delegate of the respective division or specialised committee, the member of the control group of the concerned division or specialised committee and a delegate of the legal department. (Article 4 of the [Organisational Regulations](#)). If the 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 copied text passages or other content (figures, tables, etc.). 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 spot checks, the Control Group investigates all suspected cases reported to them by the evaluators (referees and external reviewers), by the 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 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 sanctions 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 2021

The Control Group checks the research proposals submitted to the SNSF (i) at random (5% of all submissions) and (ii) when being alerted to potential cases of scientific misconduct by persons inside and outside the SNSF's Administrative Offices. In the year under review⁵, the Control Group ran 232 research plans through the software and carried out a detailed analysis for 78 research plans. In comparison with the previous years, the Control Group examined a lower number of research plans (see Fig. 1). This decrease is mainly because in 2021 neither a Special Call on Coronavirus nor a Spark call was launched.

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 2021 report is that the decision date is in 2021. Hence, analyses may be included that were conducted in 2020 if the corresponding decisions were taken in 2021. Similarly, decisions corresponding to analyses conducted towards the end of 2021 will likely be included in the 2022 report.

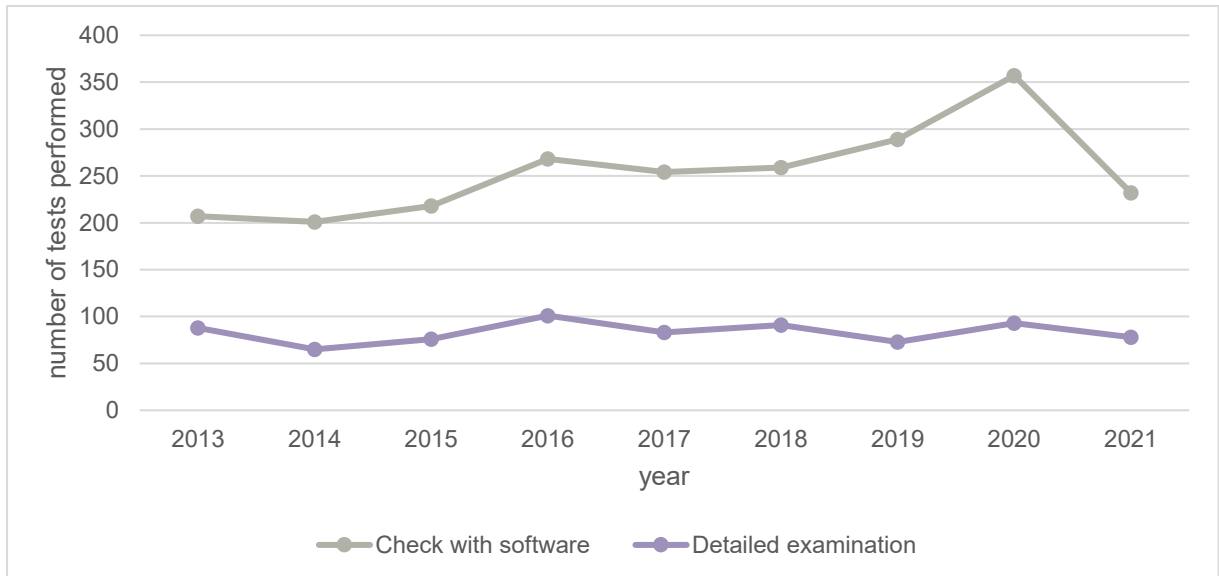


Fig. 1: Overview of the applications examined by the Control Group from 2013-2021: 232 checks with the software and 78 detailed analyses.

3.2.1 *Random checks*

In 2021, the Control Group conducted random checks on 232 applications (see Table 1). For 154 of them, plagiarism could already be ruled out based on the analysis conducted by the software; 78 research plans needed to be checked in detail. The Control Group identified 6 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, 11 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 11 reports were studied in detail by the Control Group. There were 6 cases where suspicions of scientific misconduct proved to be unfounded and no further action had to be taken. In 5 cases, the Control Group found minor irregularities as regards the citation of original sources or the information provided in the CV or the research output list and concluded the analysis by sending the applicants a written reminder of rules of good scientific practice. In 2 cases, serious research misconduct was identified and the cases were forwarded to the Commission.

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	232	78	6	0
Reports by externals	11	11	5	2

* 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 2 cases in the report year as indicated in Fig. 2 as well as in Table 2. In both cases, it recommended imposing sanctions to the Presiding Board of the Research Council. Fig. 2 summarizes the slightly fluctuating number of investigations and sanctions between 2013 und 2021. Hence, the number of investigations by the Commission and sanctions recommended in the report period was in the order of the previous years. The cases concerned the funding instrument Project Funding. The researchers concerned were both experienced.

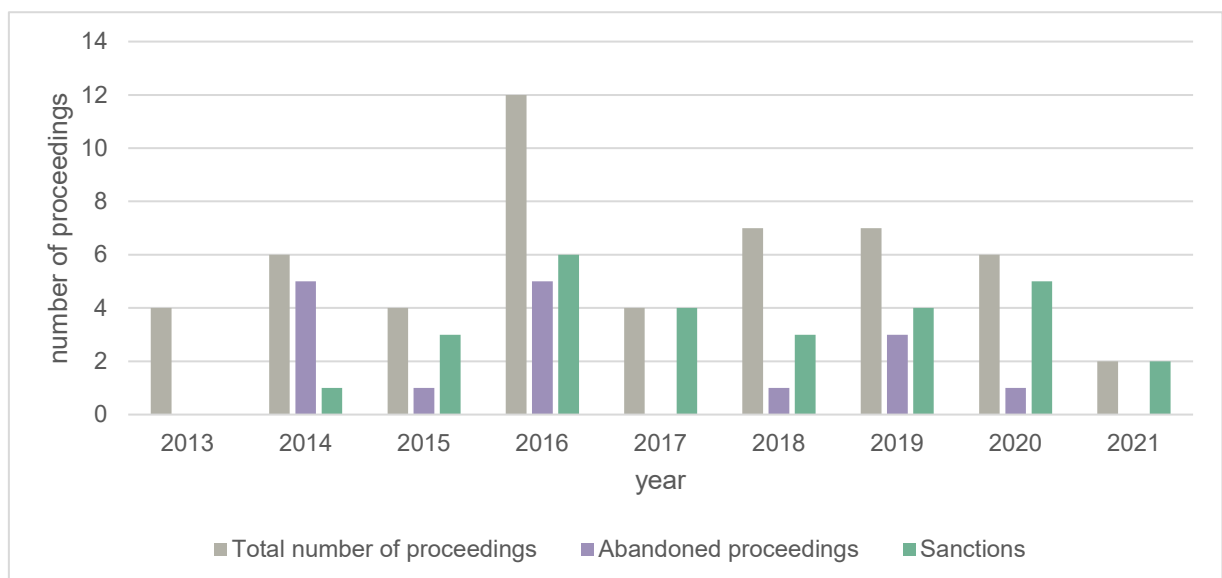


Fig. 2: Overview of the cases that the Commission dealt with from 2012-2021

Table 2. Investigations and decisions by the Commission in 2021

Investigations	
Investigations launched during the report period	2
Decisions	
Sanctions imposed in the report period (reprimands)	2
Total number of cases investigated	2

4.2 Investigations conducted by research institutions

In the report year, five cases of alleged misconduct in connection with the use of SNSF funding were reported to the Commission. In two cases, according to the principle of subsidiarity, the SNSF referred the informers to the institution concerned, two other cases did not concern SNSF funding and in the last case the sanction imposed by the institution covers the fraudulent behaviour carried out in the context of the SNSF project.

5 Further activities and events

5.1 Plenary meeting

The Integrity Commission has been contacted and decided to hold no meeting in 2021 as no urgent points had to be discussed. The report about the work of the Integrity Commission in 2020, thus, was sent to the members who accepted it.

5.2 iThenticate

5.2.1 Licence renewal

The licence for iThenticate was renewed for a further year at a similar price (\$ 7'935), factoring in the steadily increasing number of tests (testing one document costs CHF 21.40). The licence includes 350 tests and unrestricted access to the repository that enables the highly efficient matching of documents.

5.2.2 Renewal of confidentiality agreement

The Control Group investigated an exchange between the Control Group's lead and its delegate from the legal services, and the iThenticate account manager regarding the confidentiality agreement. Because the latter was signed on March 2010 a new confidentiality agreement with two minor adjustments was signed on 24 August 2021 with Turnitin.

5.2.3 Deletion of uploaded research plans

To provide 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 on regular basis since September 2020.

5.3 Code of Conduct for scientific integrity, published on 11 May 2021

Over two years, a [group comprised of experts from the Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences](#), the SNSF, [swissuniversities](#) and [Innosuisse](#), have been working on the new code of conduct for scientific integrity (https://api.swiss-academies.ch/site/assets/files/25607/kodex_layout_en_web-1.pdf). Its aim was to strengthen scientific integrity in research and educational settings, while addressing all actors, participating in the creation, dissemination and promotion of knowledge within the Swiss system of higher education. For institutions, it serves as a checklist for their own regulations and as a practical reference when there is doubt about best practices. Furthermore, the code takes recent developments in the fields of open science and social media into account and provides precise recommendations on how best to set up structures for the protection of integrity.

Annex I

Composition of the Commission on Research Integrity of the SNSF

In the report year 2021, 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. Andrew Barry (until 30.09.2021), Prof. Dr. Ulrike Lohmann (as of 01.10.2021), Div. II
- Prof. Dr. Bart Deplancke, Div. III
- Prof. Dr. Regina Aebi-Müller, Div. IV
- Prof. Dr. Stuart Lane, Specialised Committee Careers
- Prof. Dr. Thomas Südmeyer, Specialised Committee International Cooperations
- Prof. Dr. Juliane Hollender, Specialised Committee Interdisciplinary Research

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

- Eva Moser, Div. I
- Dr. Tania Bühler, Div. II
- Dr. Barbara Schellenberg, Div. III (lead Control Group as of 01.10.2021)
- Dr. Claudia Rutte (until 31.08.2021), Dr. David Svarin (as of 01.10.2021), Div. IV
- Dr. Sönke Bauck, Careers
- Dr. Sarah Glaser, Careers
- Dr. Vanja Michel, Interdisciplinary Research
- Dr. Stephanie Hoppeler (lead Control Group until 30.09.2021), Dr. Ladina Knapp (as of 01.10.2021), International Cooperations

Representatives of the Legal Department

- Milva Franceschi
- Danielle Jeanneret (deputy)

Administrative secretariat

- Daniela Büschlen, Secretariat Legal Department

9 September 2022, mlf / dj / sba

Annex II

Report of cases investigated and decided on between 1 January 2021 until 31 December 2021⁶

Sanctions

1.

Source	SNSF Administrative Office
Allegation	71% of the publication list of the co-applicant contained false information concerning his/her authorship comprising i) change of order, ii) omission of authors and iii) addition of authors. 21% of the manipulations were in favour of the co-applicant.
Investigation	The co-applicant was given access to the results of the inspection and asked to comment (right to be heard). However, he/she did not make use of this opportunity and did not submit a statement to the SNSF. The responsible applicant was informed in parallel and stated that he/she was not aware of the manipulations.
Decision	Sanction (written reprimand)

2.

Source	Referee
Allegation	33% of the applicant's publication list contained false information concerning his/her authorship comprising i) change of order and ii) missing information on equal authorship. All manipulations were in favour of the applicant.
Investigation	The applicant recognised having made mistakes but emphasised that this was done neither intentionally nor dishonestly. As reasons for the false information the applicant gave the following explanations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – publication list has been generated automatically via PubMed whereby equal contributions were not reflected, – lack of awareness that changing the order of authors is against scientific integrity, – first application to the SNSF after years working in industry, – inattentive control of the publication list before submission.
Decision	Sanction (written reprimand)

⁶ All cases of decision letters sent between 1 January 2021 and 31 December 2021.