

Statement of the Commission for Research Integrity on Handling Cases of Plagiarism

As several plagiarism-related cases have been handled in the recent past, the Commission for Research Integrity wishes to issue the following statement on plagiarism for authors as well as scientific/research institutions.

The appropriation of texts written by other authors in one's own scientific publications without due citation of the author and source is the most common form of plagiarism. Plagiarism constitutes a theft of intellectual property; the presentation of achievements as one's own, for one's own benefit and to the detriment of the author; and a violation of a fundamental principle of research, that is, the need to acknowledge other researchers' accomplishments, which form the basis for their reputation in science and research. Failure to acknowledge the work of other researchers by omitting citations also harms communication in science and research. Ultimately, such behaviour also destroys public confidence in the mechanisms for assessing scientific and academic achievements.

Plagiarism can take many forms, which may be viewed in different ways in different disciplines. For this reason, universities and the relevant journals and publications have not yet developed a standard procedure for dealing with authors who plagiarise. Each case is different and must be reviewed individually. (On the variety of forms of plagiarism in practice and the difficulties of evaluating these forms, please refer to the seminal publication of the US Office of Research Integrity (ORI): <http://facpub.stjohns.edu/~roigm/plagiarism/Index.html>). However, the ways of dealing with plagiarism do not differ fundamentally. In borderline cases (plagiarism which is minimal in scope and where there is plausible evidence of a lack of intent), a warning is a suitable response. In any cases which go beyond that minimal scope or which include evidence of intent, the termination of the qualification procedure (e.g. conferral of doctoral degree, *Habilitation*) and possibly the rescission of qualifications gained by way of plagiarism are not uncommon sanctions in many countries. In such cases, universities are well advised to impose heavy sanctions in accordance with applicable law. In specialist journals, it is common practice to withdraw articles with plagiarised content.

Throughout the world of science and research, plagiarism is considered objectionable misconduct. In particular, the procedures for obtaining degrees and qualifications at universities have been subject to scrutiny by the press and media, which act in the public interest because tertiary education is financed from tax revenues. Universities as well as their individual departments and faculties and the scientists/researchers who work there are responsible for preventing scientific misconduct and sanctioning such activities if discovered. They must have an interest in protecting their reputations instead of damaging them with misguided solidarity or mere negligence in dealing with misconduct. In this way, they not only harm themselves, but also the reputation and standing of science and research in general.

As a result, the Austrian Agency for Research Integrity is making efforts to promote a uniform policy among Austrian universities in dealing with plagiarism and related forms of scientific misconduct, and to promote the application of internationally recognised standards of good practice in research.

Vienna, April 2011