Research Integrity in the European Policy Landscape

Open Letter by Science Europe Governing Board

15 December 2016

On 1 December 2015, the Competitiveness Council adopted conclusions[1] highlighting the need to respect fundamental ethical principles and integrity in European research and innovation activities, promoting the topic to the top of the European research policy agenda. Over recent years the policy debate around research integrity has been maturing. The Science Europe Governing Board is delighted that Science Europe has played a key role in this process both by providing evidence-based policy recommendations and through advocacy work. The current revision of the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity provides a timely opportunity to take stock of these recent policy developments, and of Science Europe's contribution to the European debate on research integrity. At this time, the Governing Board would like to share the key outcomes of Science Europe's reflections on this topic:

Safeguarding Research Integrity is a Shared Task

The ultimate responsibility for responsible research conduct lies with individual researchers. However, it is also the responsibility of the research community as a whole — including public institutions, research performers and research funders — to promote responsible conduct of research and to provide the conditions for adherence to this. Research organisations, such as the members of Science Europe, play a key role in reducing research waste (waste of funding, assets, talents, and so on) and ensuring maximum benefit from the public funding of research (for example accountability).

Setting Research Integrity as a Priority for Science Europe

Research integrity has been a priority topic for Science Europe since 2013. The premise was simple: there is general agreement on key elements of research conduct; however, implementation still varies widely from country to country, sector to sector, and organisation to organisation. Consequently, Science Europe launched its Working Group on Research Integrity in order to develop common understanding[2] and approaches to issues[3] relevant to research integrity, and to progress from principles to actions.

Moving from Principles to Actions

In 2014 and 2015 the Science Europe Working Group undertook a survey on research integrity practices in Science Europe Member Organisations. This exercise resulted in a mapping of existing policies, procedures and practices for the promotion of research integrity, and the prevention and prosecution of

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[1] http://bit.ly/2gHhDUV
[2] Science Europe Brochure 'Seven reasons to care about integrity in research' (2015) - http://scieur.org/integrity
[3] Science Europe Briefing Paper 'Research Integrity: What it Means, Why it Is Important and How we Might Protect it' (2015) - http://scieur.org/integrity-paper

misconduct. The level of involvement of an organisation in research integrity activities will depend on the type of organisation, the national research integrity set-up in the specific country, and other factors such as the legal systems, tradition, and role in the national research system. Taking into consideration these diverse environments, the Working Group developed recommendations[4] which stress that it is important for research organisations to:

- **Develop clear policies and processes,** including a definition of research integrity, the promotion of good research practices, procedures on how to deal with misconduct, and whistle-blower protection;
- **Raise awareness of research integrity in their daily activities**, for instance on their website, or as part of their administrative processes and application procedures;
- **Support and incentivise research integrity training** – within their remit – starting at PhD candidate-level and continuing throughout a researcher's career. Particular emphasis should be given to 'train the trainer' schemes in order to introduce knowledge sharing and harmonisation in training standards;
- **Enable preparedness and transparency both in their own organisation and in host institutions.** Thorough investigations of allegations of misconduct and subsequent reporting on proven cases should be encouraged which will ultimately benefit, not compromise, an organisation's reputation; and
- **Ensure that formal agreements for collaborative research include a section on expectations concerning research integrity**.

Contributing to the Revision of the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity

The Science Europe Governing Board was strongly in favour of the consultative approach adopted by All European Academies (ALLEA) when facilitating the revision of the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity earlier this year.

The Science Europe Working Group on Research Integrity were invited to provide detailed feedback to ALLEA as a part of this process, in both July and December 2016. Below are some of the key messages that were articulated by the Working Group; beyond the revision of the European Code of Conduct, these can also contribute to further policy advancement in this area.

For Science Europe Working Group, the future revised Code of Conduct should:

- **Refer to a limited number of fundamental principles of research integrity**. These principles should be self-explanatory, clearly differentiated from research practice, and not subject to aspirational or political agendas;
- **Acknowledge that the nature of the research endeavour is increasingly collaborative**. Consequently, all partners involved in a collaborative research activity should formally agree on expectations and standards concerning research integrity, as well as on the process that would be used if an allegation of research misconduct or questionable practices were made against one (or more) of the partners; and
- **Recognise the fast-paced changes in the research environment.** As new paradigms, tools and techniques develop, the revised Code should invite individuals to continuously reflect on the integrity of their own practices, and institutions on the adequacy of their policies and procedures.

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[4] Science Europe Survey Report 'Research Integrity Practices in Science Europe Member Organisations' (2016) - http://scieur.org/integrityreport