

The Centre of Research Integrity in the heart of Athens¹

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An international scientific symposium entitled "Why Research Integrity Matters" was held on 8 June 2023. This symposium was organised by the National Technical University of Athens, the National Kapodistrian University of Athens and the World Conferences on Research Integrity Foundation (WCRIF). It took place in the Lysander Kautantzoglou Hall, in the historic Averoff Building of the National Technical University of Athens, 42 Patission Street, Athens. The speakers at the symposium were internationally renowned experts in the field of Research Integrity from all over the world, as well as two researchers working at the National Technical University of Athens.² The symposium was broadcast worldwide via the National Technical University of Athens channel and was attended by a total of 284 people either physically present or online.

This symposium is a precursor to the 8th World Conference on Research Integrity, which will be held in Athens from 2 to 5 June 2024 (<https://wcri2024.org/>). Its aim was, on the one hand, to introduce the academic and research community in Greece to the current efforts being made to improve the credibility of scientific research and, on the other hand, to present to the Greek and international public the relationship between Research Integrity and the processes that create innovation.

The proceedings of the symposium

The proceedings of the symposium started with two presentations that set the framework of a study that aims to extend the positive results of Research Integrity to processes related to the development of reliable technology and responsible policy decisions. The first and opening talk was entitled "Research Integrity and Innovation Integrity" by Daniel Barr, Chief Research Integrity Advisor at RMIT University located in Melbourne, Australia. The second presentation was entitled "Research Integrity: Reliable results for responsible innovation and policy decisions" and was presented jointly by Panagiotis Kavouras and Eleni Spyraou, researchers at the National Technical University of Athens. The results of this study will be presented and enriched during the upcoming 8th World Conference on Research Integrity and, eventually, will take the form of a declaration, following the standards applied by the WCRIF in previous WCRI.³

The baton was passed to Chris Graf, Director of Research Integrity at Springer Nature and a member of the UK Research Integrity Committee, an entity that aims to promote Research Integrity both nationally and internationally. In his talk entitled "Publishing with Research Integrity: Challenges and Opportunities", Chris described the ways in which publishers are incentivising researchers to produce the most credible

¹ This is a translation in English of an article originally published in Greek at PRISMA Science Magazine, originally authored and subsequently translated by Panagiotis Kavouras, on the 24th of June 2023. Its online freely available version can be found here: https://www.avgi.gr/entheta/prisma/453077_epikentro-tis-akeraiotitas-tis-ereynas-stin-kardia-tis-athinas.

² The programme of the Symposium can be found here: <https://wcri2024.org/research-integrity/>. The Symposium has been recorded and the recordings are already openly provided the Vimeo channel of the WCRIF (<https://vimeo.com/user175668074>).

³ Until now five statements have been published by the WCRIF, which have been developed during five previous WCRI (see: <https://www.wcrif.org/>). These statements, which are the legacy of these conferences, are reference documents for the global community not only of Research Integrity experts, but for those involved in scientific research governance.

scientific publications possible. Among other things, he mentioned an initiative called STM Integrity, which aims to "*ensure that the great discoveries of our time are communicated with accuracy, clarity and integrity*", as stated on the website (<https://www.stm-assoc.org/stm-integrity-hub/>).

The symposium continued with a talk entitled "Paper Mills" by Jennifer Byrne, Professor of Molecular Oncology at the University of Sydney, Australia and head of the Publication and Research Integrity in Medical Research (PRIMeR) group. Jennifer, having played a pivotal role in exposing academic fraud and unreliable results in cancer research, presented a thorough summary of the problem of publishing scientific studies that rely on fabricated data and, particularly since the release of ChatGPT, are generated in an automated manner. She stressed the criticality of taking immediate action to prevent the "contamination" of the scientific literature with such fabricated scientific studies.

The next talk was by Ana Marušić (shown in photograph), Professor of Anatomy at the University of Split, Croatia, who is involved in important initiatives on Research Ethics and Integrity, one of which is her membership of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE). In her talk entitled "The Croatian Research Reproducibility and Integrity Network", Ana described the initiatives she has been able to develop to promote Research Integrity in Croatia. With The Research Reproducibility and Integrity Network, a first step has been taken to develop a community of researchers interested in learning about the tools that have been developed to ensure the production of reliable research results. Note that National Reproducibility Networks are informal institutions that have already been developed in nine European countries, as well as in Brazil and Australia (<https://www.ukrn.org/international-networks/>).

The next talk focused on the particularities of another, this time very distant country: Peru. The speaker was Roxana Lescano Guevara, a lawyer and member of the Association for the Care and Use of Animals in Research and Education. In her talk, entitled "Promoting Research Integrity in Middle and Low Income Countries", Roxana Guevara presented the common problems faced by middle and low income countries in addressing unsound research practices, as well as in fostering a healthy research culture. Roxana highlighted the great importance of human networks that bring together Research Integrity experts from different countries with different traditions and experiences in promoting Research Integrity.



The next speech focused, like the previous one, on the peculiarities of another very distant country: Malaysia. The speaker was De Ming Chau, Lecturer at the Department of Biomedical Sciences, Putra University, Malaysia. He is a member of the Malaysian National Research Integrity Committee and a member of the Young Scientists Network - Academy of Sciences Malaysia (YSM-ASM). His talk was titled "Pioneers of Research Integrity at the National Level: A Personal Experience" and focused on the creation of a network of young researchers who ended up leading the responsible research implementation

initiatives in Malaysia. De Ming illustrated the success of combining a "bottom-up" initiative with the assistance received from the country's research institutions, such as the Malaysian Ministry of Education.

The symposium concluded with a panel discussion (see second photo) on the five declarations published by previous World Conferences on Research Integrity (see footnote 2). Sabine Kleinert, Chief Executive Editor of The Lancet described the "Singapore Statement", the first document to set out a framework of principles of professional researcher ethics with international application. Zoë Hammatt, a lawyer and consultant on research integrity issues, described the "Montreal Statement", which set out a set of principles that provide a framework for research collaborations that cross national, institutional and disciplinary boundaries. Lex Bouter, Professor Emeritus of Research Methodology and Integrity at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, the Netherlands, described the "Amsterdam Agenda", which focused on the proper use of empirical data to develop policies to promote Research Integrity; in other words, it set the standards for research in the field of Research Integrity itself at the same level of rigour as all other research fields.



Mai Har Sham, Professor of Biomedical Sciences at The Chinese University of Hong Kong, described the "Hong Kong Principles" which focus on trying to change the way researchers are evaluated. This proclamation proposes that not only quantitative indicators should be taken into account in assessing the value of a researcher and their research (e.g. number of publications, number of citations, amount of resources attracted from competitive funding proposals), but also indicators related to the effort to produce reliable research results, as well as the proper supervision of budding researchers during the preparation of their PhD thesis. Finally, Lyn Horn, Director of the Research Integrity Unit at the University

of Cape Town, described the “Cape Town Statement”, which proposes a set of measures to reduce the unequal distribution of the benefits of scientific research in favour of the richer countries in international collaborations.

The discussion that followed, moderated by Maura Hiney, Adjunct Professor of Research Integrity at University College Dublin, Ireland, analysed - among other things - the opportunities presented for Greece by the organisation of the 8th World Conference on Research Integrity in Athens in about a year's time. Based on the experience of the panel members, the institutionalisation of policy measures, as well as the change of mindset on the part of the research community of a country are time-consuming processes that should be supported - first and foremost - by the stakeholders: the researchers. At this stage, even in countries with a tradition of promoting Research Integrity, such as the US or Northern European countries, there is a lot of room for improvement.

As a short comment, we would add that countries that do not have up-to-date policies or institutions for promoting Research Integrity are in an advantageous position, because they can directly benefit from studying the experience of countries with more mature Research Integrity systems, which had to develop their relevant institutions "in a vacuum", i.e., without prior knowledge of the best approach, and with an initial incomplete knowledge of the problem itself!

The symposium as a starting point

The organisation of the 8th World Conference on Research Integrity in Athens from 2 to 5 June 2024 is a golden opportunity to start a process of dialogue between researchers working in Greek universities and research centres to exchange experiences and good research practices already in place that aim at producing reliable research. In this way, the eventual – and necessary for many Greek research actors – institutionalisation of such practices and of a national Research Integrity Committee will fall on fertile ground, as such initiatives will provide answers to existing needs of the Greek research community.

Acknowledgement

P. Kavouras would like to acknowledge and give his warmest thanks to M. Hiney for reviewing the quality of the English language of the translated version.