

A special world conference and the time of Greece¹

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In the last two decades, debates surrounding the so-called "Reproducibility Crisis", have led to the development of a framework of knowledge that aims to codify good research practices and study the underlying drivers responsible for producing and publishing unreliable research results. This body of knowledge, which is an interdisciplinary research field, is called "Research Integrity".

The causes of the crisis of reproducibility and the consequent concern about a potential decline in society's trust in science are both directly related (e.g. errors in the design, execution, analysis and interpretation of an experiment) or indirectly related (e.g. pressure for more and more publications) to the conduct of research. The above can be considered, in turn, symptoms of deeper causes, such as insufficient training in research methodology, the dominance of quantitative indicators to assess the value of a researcher or a research organisation, or the job insecurity of an increasingly large portion of researchers globally.

The World Conferences on Research Integrity

The relatively nascent field of Research Integrity is staffed by a small, but highly active, cross-cultural and multidisciplinary research community with an international presence. The largest gathering of this research community occurs every two years within the framework of the "World Conferences on Research Integrity" (WCRI). Because it is the only conference series that gathers experts on Research Integrity from all over the world, it is also the most important gathering of the relevant scientific community.



An overview of the places where the eight WCRI took place.

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WCRI started in Lisbon in 2007, and since then, seven conferences in total have been organised, with the last one being held in Cape Town in 2022. The world map shows all the cities that have hosted WCRI, as well as the host city of the upcoming WCRI that will take place in 2024. The WCRI's are never held on the same continent twice in a row, a policy that emphasises their international character. Indeed, it is recognised that hosting such a conference provides a strong impetus to reinforce the importance of Research Integrity in the host country and effectively stimulates research and education on responsible research practices there.

Since the field of Research Integrity concerns research in general, WCRI's aim for equal representation of the research community regardless of gender, ethnic, racial and geographical background, or of the stage of the professional career of the participants. An effort is also made for the equal representation of all research areas (Humanities, Biomedical, Natural, and Social Sciences), which is reflected in the program, in the Keynote speakers, in the members of the various committees that help to make these conferences happen, but also in the participants this important conference attracts.

WCRI's give special attention to young researchers, but also to professionals working in institutions that interact directly with the research community (funding organisations, publishing houses of scientific journals, governmental bodies, research ethics committees and research integrity offices), who are in the first stages of their careers. For this purpose, a forum of PhD candidates and young professionals is organised, as well as their meetings with world-class experts during the WCRI's.

Each conference emphasises a particular theme, described below, but all cover the full spectrum of the field of Research Integrity. This means that developments in Research Integrity training, tackling of all kinds of inequalities in research workplaces, recruitment, assessment and development procedures for researchers, challenges arising from international collaborations, best methods of supervision of doctoral candidates and young researchers, ways of dealing with deviations from good research practices, fairer and more transparent practices in scientific writing, and more transparent practices in scientific publishing, are presented and discussed.

In other words, the drivers of individual and collective researcher behaviour that affect Research Integrity are always in focus. These drivers relate to the skills and responsible behaviour of researchers as individuals, to the professional "microclimate" that exists in the universities and research centres in which they work, and to the professional ethos that is cultivated in the wider, systemic, national or international research environment.

The "legacy" of the WCRI

As mentioned above, each WCRI emphasises a particular theme, which is considered particularly important at an international level. This theme is put up for open but structured discussion in more than one session during the conference, the results of which are collated into a concise statement, which very quickly becomes a reference document around the world.

The 2nd WCRI (Singapore, 2010) produced the "*Singapore Statement on Research Integrity*" (<https://www.wcrif.org/guidance/singapore-statement>). This document sets out a set of principles that constitute the first international effort to encourage the development and implementation of common policies, guidelines and codes of conduct. This effort has the long-term goal of promoting Research Integrity worldwide. Many Universities have formally endorsed the Singapore Statement and it has set a rough agenda for the objectives of the WCRI series.



From the 6th WCRI that took place in Hong Kong. By courtesy of the World Conferences on Research Integrity Foundation.

The 3rd WCRI (Montreal, 2013) produced the "*Montreal Statement on Research Integrity in cross-boundary research*" (<https://www.wcrif.org/guidance/montreal-statement>). This document proposes a framework of principles for research collaborations not only between countries, but also between different Universities and Research Centres, between different research fields, and between academic and private (SMEs and industry) research entities.

The 5th WCRI (Amsterdam, 2017) produced the "*Amsterdam Agenda*" (<https://www.wcrif.org/guidance/amsterdam-agenda>), which focused on the epistemological content of Research Integrity. For example, the Amsterdam Agenda promotes, among other things, research processes such as pre-registration of research methodologies, as well as the development of reliable methods for evaluating the impact of research. Overall, the Amsterdam Agenda is a programmatic document aimed at increasing the quality of research.

The 6th WCRI (Hong Kong, 2019) produced the "*Hong Kong Principles for assessing researchers*" (<https://www.wcrif.org/conferences/6th-wcri-hong-kong-2019>). This document is an attempt to apply additional indicators that can be used to assess the value of a researcher and their work, when it comes to recruitment or promotion in the academic hierarchy. At the moment, quantitative indicators such as the number of scientific publications, participation in scientific conferences and success in attracting research funding predominate. The Hong Kong Principles propose a number of alternative, qualitative indicators, such as the quality of supervision of doctoral candidates, the implementation of Open Science practices or participation in Research Integrity Committees.

Finally, the 7th WCRI (Cape Town, 2022) produced the "*Cape Town Statement*" (<https://www.wcrif.org/guidance/cape-town-statement>), which outlines the conditions that can

contribute to fairer, more equitable and more diverse research, and makes the link between fair and equitable research and research integrity.

The Foundation for the World Conferences on Research Integrity

The entity that takes care of the organisation of the WCRI series, in collaboration with the local organisers, is the "*World Conferences on Research Integrity Foundation*" (WCRIF), which was established in July 2017 as a non-profit organisation with its official headquarters in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. The WCRIF Governing Board (<https://www.wcrif.org/foundation/governing-board>) is peopled by Research Integrity experts of international caliber.

The WCRIF Board of Directors is chaired by Lex Bouter, Professor Emeritus of Epidemiology, Research Methodology and Research Integrity at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and Amsterdam University Medical Centers. It is worth noting that Lex Bouter (<https://www.wcrif.org/persons/lex-bouter>) has been particularly active in promoting Research Integrity in the Netherlands, and is one of the most influential individuals in academia in promoting Research Integrity internationally.

The time of Greece

The international "torch-relay" of the WCRI will continue with the 8th WCRI conference to be held in Athens from 2 to 5 June 2024 (<https://wcri2024.org/>). Apart from WCRIF, the co-organisers of the 8th WCRI are the National Technical University of Athens and the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. These two Greek universities participated in the particularly rigorous bidding process, which they successfully completed.

The main theme of the 8th WCRI in Athens will be: "*Catalysing the translation of research into trustworthy policy and innovation*". The aim of this theme is to convincingly showcase the fundamental value of Research Integrity for producing trustworthy innovation in all research fields, from Social Sciences to Biomedicine and from Natural Sciences to Humanities, as well as trustworthy policy decisions.

The long-term goal is that the research results produced should be trustworthy, not only by the scientific community, but also by society, both nationally and internationally. At a time when the effects of the pandemic have tested this trust, such a vision is more timely and necessary than ever.

The 8th WCRI is also a great opportunity for the field of Research Integrity to become widely known both by the Greek research community and by the stakeholders directly involved in science and innovation in our country. The 8th WCRI has the potential to create activities that promote Research Integrity at the national/systemic and institutional level as well as at the level of individual researchers, who will have recognised that such initiatives are inextricably linked to the quality of the research they produce, to the accountability of the research community towards society, and to the strengthening of society's trust in science in general.

The "harbinger" of the 8th WCRI

On June 8, 2023, one year before the 8th WCRI, an international symposium on Integrity in Research was held at the Kaftantzoglou Hall, at the historic building complex of the National Technical University of Athens, with the participation of leading experts from all over the world. The Symposium was entitled "*Why Research Integrity matters*" and was held in English.

The symposium could be attended both in person at the Kautanzoglou Hall and online. The aim was to inform the Greek research community about the programme and aims of the conference, as well as about the key issues of Research Integrity that concern researchers in their daily practice. It is worth noting that this symposium was also of importance for the international research community, with many researchers from abroad registering to attend online. The symposium programme and the excellent speakers can be found here: <https://wcri2024.org/research-integrity/>.

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