



COPE European Seminar 2014

For the first time held outside London, the 2014 COPE European Seminar attracted 62 delegates to Brussels. Aptly situated at the heart of Europe, the location reflected the theme of the seminar “European aspects of publication ethics”. In addition the venue was held at the multi-regional house home to our hosts the Representation of the State of Hessen to the European Union.

After a warm welcome by the Director of the Representation, Friedrich von Heusinger, and COPE chair, Virginia Barbour, the first session was led by COPE secretary and native Belgian André van Steirteghem. He introduced the first speaker Simon Godecharle from the University of Leuven, Belgium. Godecharle had the rapt attention of the audience as he navigated us through the complex world of national guidelines of European countries on scientific integrity and publication ethics. Godecharle made some very poignant remarks about the difficulty of procuring these documents, and the conflicting guidelines particularly across borders; in some instances individual countries had even more than one guideline. Interestingly, all the guidelines analysed covered authorship, though there was no consensus for what aspect of a project authors should be responsible for in terms of integrity.

Ana Marusic, Editor-in-Chief of Journal of Global Health, was the second speaker of the session and covered differences of journal ethical policies between Eastern and Central European countries that were either part of the European Union or outside the Union. Her research showed that there were several statistically significant differences between these two journal groups, for example regarding endorsement of international standards and contributorship policy. Her concluding remarks highlighted that more guidance is needed for editors on how to present their journal’s policies, especially for journals from small scientific communities.

Following lunch Virginia Barbour, COPE chair, and Natalie Ridgeway, COPE operations manager, held the Annual General Meeting, which gave an informative overview of the activities of COPE during the last year and the planned budget and events for the coming year. COPE will hold a North American seminar in August 2014 and will also offer a case workshop at the European Association of Science Editor’s conference in June.

The first speaker of the second session, Christopher Baethge, professor in psychology, was introduced by COPE council member Mirjam Curno. Baethge is the Editor-in-Chief of the German Medical Journal, a bilingual journal and he touched upon the challenges of publishing in an English-language dominated environment for “national” journals, an issue also raised by Marusic. Baethge also covered an interesting study on the impact of a structured conflicts of interest statement for authors on the types of disclosures made. A notable side-effect of increased disclosures with the structured format was that readers were criticizing the journal for allowing articles to be published with potentially large commercial influence.

Debora Weber-Wulff, professor for media and computing at the University of Applied Sciences, Berlin, highlighted the limitations of plagiarism detection software available to editors, particularly given the different types of plagiarism encountered such as mosaic, translations, structural and so on. In a test of these programmes Weber-Wulff and her team did not classify one of them as “useful”. Her conclusion was that only humans are very good at spotting plagiarism. A software

programme can help editors, but we should never rely only on the report, and especially not on a numerical value given by the system.

After a short coffee break the delegates split into smaller groups for the case workshop, discussing four real cases presented to COPE in the past. They covered topics on image manipulation, submissions by editorial board members, serial plagiarism by an experienced author and a meta-analysis with unreliable findings. The discussions focused on grey areas for editors in these complex cases, including how to weigh the intention of authors in a decision, dealing with internal pressures and feelings of untrustworthiness towards authors following misconduct.

In the final presentation of the day, Irene Hames, former COPE council member, laid out COPE's revised case taxonomy. This analysis allows for an interesting longitudinal overview of the types of cases presented at COPE fora over the last 16 years. The new taxonomy interestingly highlighted an increase in the number of keywords assigned to cases over time. This may indicate that the complexity of cases editors deal with now-a-days is increasing. Authorship has remained high on the agenda over the years, whereas cases on redundant publications have decreased. Hames also showed that correction of the literature has very much increased in prominence at COPE fora during this time.

The seminar was closed by COPE chair Virginia Barbour with thanks to all the speakers of the day and to our host venue, as well as the delegates for their lively participation.

The evaluation of the seminar showed great satisfaction with the day, in particular the case workshop was very popular. The seminar attracted many new publishing professionals, who had never previously attended a COPE meeting. Suggested topics for future meetings demonstrated the continued need for practical guidance and discussion on long-standing issues such as authorship, plagiarism and retractions. However, there were also upcoming issues mentioned such as data availability and sharing, multi-stakeholder approach to the continuum of research integrity and ethical publishing as well as more support for non-biomedical disciplines.

Further reading:

Blog by Debora Weber-Wulff:

<http://copy-shake-paste.blogspot.com/>

Publication by Christopher Baethge:

Baethge C. (2013) The effect of a conflict of interest disclosure form using closed questions on the number of positive conflicts of interest declared – a controlled study. *PeerJ* 1:e128
<http://dx.doi.org/10.7717/peerj.128>

Publication by Ana Marusic:

Mindaugas Broga, Goran Mijaljica, Marcin Waligora, Aime Keis, Ana Marusic (2014) Publication Ethics in Biomedical Journals from Countries in Central and Eastern Europe. *Science and Engineering Ethics*, Volume 20, Issue 1, pp 99-109.

Publications by Simon Godecharle:

Godecharle, S., et al. (2013). Guidance on research integrity: no union in Europe. *The Lancet*, 381 (9872), 1097-1098.

Godecharle, S., Nemery, B., Dierickx, K. (2013). Integrity Training: Conflicting Practices. *Science*, 340 (6139), 1403.)