

Review of the process Wiley followed in reviewing the issues raised by the publication and removal of an essay in the journal *Angewandte Chemie*

Introduction

[COPE](#), a membership organisation that supports journals, publishers, and others with handling ethical issues in their publications, was asked by the publisher Wiley, a member of COPE, to review the process Wiley followed when investigating the issues contributing to and arising from the publication of a paper in the journal [Angewandte Chemie](#) by Tomas Hudlicky, particularly those relating to diversity, equity, and inclusivity.

Background

An opinion essay, ‘“Organic synthesis—Where now?” is thirty years old. A reflection on the current state of affairs’ by Tomáš Hudlický (the author), was posted online as an author accepted manuscript in [Angewandte Chemie](#) on 4 June 2020. The piece drew a lot of negative attention from the chemistry community, particularly on social media, and particularly focused on concerns that anti-diversity opinions had been published in the journal. The essay was taken down almost immediately, followed by a note from the journal’s editor-in-chief. The German Chemical Society (GDCh), owners of Angewandte Chemie, released a statement to the journal’s community on 8 June. On 9 June, the Vice-President and Managing Director, Wiley-VCH, published an open letter to the community detailing the actions that have been taken following the incident, and what the journal and Wiley pledge to do moving forwards to improve diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I) at *Angewandte Chemie*.

Aim

COPE agreed to form a panel to critically evaluate the process which Wiley followed when investigating the issues contributing to and arising from the publication of the paper in

[Angewandte Chemie](#) by reviewing the report provided by Wiley. The panel agreed to provide their report of recommendations for Wiley to adopt in their handling of investigations of this nature, along with any more general recommendations arising from this case that Wiley may wish to consider in their broader practices.

Scope of the review

The details and terms of the scope of the COPE review, as agreed by Wiley and the panel in advance, are outlined below.

Scope of review of the process Wiley followed when investigating the issues contributing to and arising from the publication of a [paper in the journal Angewandte Chemie by Tomas Hudlicky](#), particularly those relating to diversity, equity, and inclusivity.

- COPE will form an independent, external panel consisting of six members: three COPE representatives, and three members independent of COPE.
- COPE will Chair the panel and provide administrative support as needed.
- COPE will secure the three additional members who are independent of COPE.
- The panel will review the process which Wiley followed when investigating the issues contributing to and arising from the publication of the essay by Tomas Hudlicky in [Angewandte Chemie](#) (paper now withdrawn) by reviewing a report provided by Wiley. The report to be held in the strictest confidence.
- The panel will convene via conference call to discuss their findings together.
- The panel, via the Chair, will relay any questions to the publisher via Chris Graf, Director of Research Integrity at Wiley.
- On receipt of a response to the questions, the COPE panel will review and produce a final report which will:
 - Provide a critical evaluation of the *process* which Wiley followed when undertaking their investigations.
 - Provide any recommendations for Wiley to adopt in their handling of investigations of this nature, along with any more general recommendations arising from this case that Wiley may wish to consider in their broader practices around diversity, equity, and inclusivity.
- Wiley will be given 10 working days' advance notice (ie, 2 weeks) of the report before it is published on the COPE website.

Panel

As Wiley is a COPE member, COPE considered that objectivity would be better served if COPE representatives made up half of the panel with the addition of independent external representatives. COPE agreed to Chair and form the panel.

COPE members of the panel

Caroline Porter, COPE Trustee and Chair of the pane

Deborah Poff, COPE Chair

Daniel Kulp, COPE Vice-Chair and Chair-Elect

External members of the panel

Nicola Nugent, Publishing Manager, Quality and Ethics, Royal Society of Chemistry

Camisha Russell, Editor of Hypatia

Karin Wulf, Executive Director, Omohundro Institute of Early American History & Culture, Professor of History, William & Mary

Panel members were required to review the confidential, and not publicly available, report of Wiley's investigations into the issues around the publication of the article, along with related Material.

Panel members were expected:

- To critically evaluate the process Wiley followed.
- To provide objective comments on what worked, what didn't, and any recommendations for Wiley.
- To be willing to be a named author of the final report.
- To maintain strict confidentiality.
- To commit to an agreed timeframe as determined by the panel members.

The role of the panel was to review this investigation and any implications arising for Wiley's broader practices. The panel was not in a position to review Wiley's entire approach to matters of diversity, equity and inclusion.

Process and considerations

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| 31 July 2020 | Wiley provided COPE with the confidential triage report and final report for complaint and investigation. |
| 9 October 2020 | Panel formed by COPE |
| 21 October 2020 | Panel met, by conference call, to discuss their thoughts and comments with the other panel members. |

The panel considered:

- What worked and what could be improved in terms of the way Wiley handled the investigation.
- Comments on the recommendations made in the Wiley report, including any omissions.
- How accountability could be enhanced in situations such as this, with multiple stakeholders involved.
- What recommendations Wiley should take forward in relation to the following:
 - Education of staff and journal editors on matters of diversity, equity and inclusion
 - Oversight of editorial practices (and any potential tensions arising in relation to the principle of editorial independence)
 - General approach to diversity, equity and inclusion in journal content.

The panel agreed on points of clarification, in the form of questions, to raise with Wiley.

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| 3 November 2020 | Questions for clarification sent to Wiley |
| 24 November 2020 | Panel formed by COPE |
| 16 December 2020 | Panel met, by conference call, to discuss their thoughts and comments with the other panel members |
| 8 February 2021 | Draft report shared with the panel |
| 24 February 2021 | Final version of the report agreed with the panel |
| 25 February 2021 | Report shared with Wiley for information |
| 12 March 2021 | Report published on the COPE website |

Conclusions and recommendations

1. Wiley recognised the seriousness of the situation in terms of unsubstantiated and problematic claims. They were right to act quickly and to put the investigation in place. They also acted in accordance with their procedures, which state that author accepted manuscripts (AAMs) can be removed. However, in the panel's view, the fact that the paper was withdrawn rather than retracted was not sufficiently transparent. The panel therefore recommends that Wiley should review their position regarding AAMs.
 - a. The panel recognises there are inconsistencies in the scholarly publishing industry about AAMs, with some publishers viewing them as published while others do not. The panel believes clearer guidance is needed and COPE will be looking into this.
2. The panel was concerned with the transparency of the complaints procedure. The implication was that the investigation was the result of a formal complaint, when in fact the complaint originated from an internal employee of Wiley's prompted by criticisms and comments on social media sites. The panel recommends that the publisher and journal document how complaints are received and the process followed by the journal and the publisher. The process should include clarity on procedures relating to social media comments/criticisms that tag the journal or publisher.
3. There are valid reasons for publishing opinion pieces in the journal, and steps have been taken by Wiley to improve the handling of such pieces. However, the panel is not satisfied that those steps go far enough. Ideally, editorial pre-screening should be in place for opinion pieces, including invited ones, before they are sent for peer review, and care needs to be taken about unsubstantiated assertions. Also, the panel suggests that author recommended reviewers should not be used for peer review of opinion pieces.
4. The panel recommends that the journal should implement a process for identifying and handling potential conflicts of interest in the editorial processes.
 - a. More broadly, journals need to consider potential unconscious biases in peer review and editorial decision-making.
5. The panel acknowledges that the journal is strengthening its processes. With the newly formed "Executive Committee of editors" in place, the publisher has created a stronger, more transparent governance structure to oversee the journal.
6. The panel affirms the fundamental principle that editors are fully responsible and accountable for content. Editors should have independence and autonomy, as long as they are upholding sound publication practices and acting ethically. Hence

assurance is needed of editorial responsibility for content, editorial independence and autonomy, and the responsibilities for upholding best practice and acting ethically and transparently within this journal structure.

7. The panel understands the journal is formalising diversity, equity, and inclusion policies. The panel believes that the journal should be committed to correcting any long held biases in terms of diversity, equity, and inclusion. The panel understands that Wiley is actively engaged in providing resources to help with this process, which we fully support.
8. The panel recommends education or training in diversity, equity, and inclusion for the editorial board and editorial team.

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