

## Memo on duplicate publication and text recycling

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### Introductory remarks regarding rules and regulations

In 2015, Aarhus University adopted a general *Code of Practice to Ensure Scientific Integrity and Responsible Conduct of Research at Aarhus University* which applies to all scientific and scholarly research performed at the university, and which replaces a previous set of rules from 2000. As a supplement to the general code of practice for research integrity and RCR for the university as a whole, in 2015, the Faculty of Health adopted a set of *Standards for Responsible Conduct of Research* which apply specifically to health science research.

The university's general code of practice for research integrity and RCR refers to the central national rules on research misconduct as laid down in Ministerial Order no. 306 of 24 April 2009 (as amended by Ministerial Order no. 144 of 20 February 2012) which are administered by the Danish Committees on Scientific Dishonesty (DCSD) cf. Chapter 7 of Consolidation Act no. 354 of 10 April 2014 on research consulting etc.<sup>1</sup>

Internationally, there exist several important and generally recognised documents (statements, codes of practice, etc.) containing guidelines and recommendations aimed at promoting good research conduct and research integrity, and the Danish Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (November 2014) was developed in accordance with these international guidelines. Unlike the Ministerial Order on DCSD, the Danish Code of Conduct for Research Integrity is not in itself a legally binding document. Rather, it lays out a set of generally accepted standards for scientific ethics in order to give institutions a common basis for developing policies and procedures which promote research integrity in all fields of research, cf. the foreword to the Danish code of conduct.

Naturally, every attempt must be made to ensure that Aarhus University's rules and guidelines to ensure scientific integrity and the responsible conduct of research, including in relation to plagiarism and text recycling, are in agreement with the Danish and international rules and codes of conduct named above. For this reason, it is both natural and necessary to base local guidelines (in this case local guidelines on text recycling) on these rules and codes of conduct, in particular with reference to the Danish Code of Conduct for Research Integrity.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ministerial Order no. 306 of 24 April 2009 is currently in the process of amendment, cf. 'A report on the Danish research misconduct system' submitted in December 2015 by an expert committee appointed by the Danish Agency for Science, Technology and Innovation, the Ministry of Higher Education and Science.

<sup>2</sup>In addition, the supplementary Standards for Responsible Conduct of Research for the Faculty of Health are related to (and refer to) the document "Guidelines for Good Scientific Practice: with special focus on health science, natural science, technical science" published by DCSD in 2009.' Subsequent to the publica-

### THE RESEARCH PRACTICES COMMITTEE

(The Committee for  
Responsible Conduct of  
Research)

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Page 1/6

For the record, it should be noted that text recycling does not in itself constitute a violation of the Danish Consolidated Act on Copyright, but that text recycling, in the form of republication of previously published material, may be a breach of the contract regarding publication which the author has concluded with journal or a publisher. This special legal issue will not be discussed further here.

### **The Danish Code of Conduct for Research Integrity**

The Danish code of conduct is based on the three fundamental principles of research integrity: *honesty, transparency and accountability*.

Regarding responsibility for *publication*, the Danish code of conduct states (Chapter II, section 3.1):

- i. Research results should be published in an honest, transparent and accurate manner.
- ii. Publishing the same results in more than one publication should only occur under particular, clearly explained and fully disclosed circumstances.
- iii. Recycling or reuse of primary materials, data, interpretations or results should be clearly disclosed.
- iv. If access to and analysis of data are subject to limitations, this should be declared in a clear manner to the readers of the publication. Detailed information about any role of the study sponsor concerning research design, collection, analysis and interpretation of data, and publication decisions should be provided in the manuscript.
- v. When using one's own work and the work of other researchers in a publication, appropriate and accurate references to such work should be provided.
- vi. The right of researchers to unrestricted publication of their research should be respected.

As is evident, several of these standards address the question of duplicate publication and/or reuse of data, results, etc. On the other hand, the concept '*text recycling*' (self-plagiarism), which falls into the same category, is neither named nor defined directly here. In fact, there exists no consensus, either internationally or nationally, regarding this phenomenon, not even regarding under what circumstances the recycling of text qualifies as dishonest or simply 'questionable' research practice. However, item v does state that "when *using one's own work...in a publication*, appropriate and accurate references to such work should be provided".

### **Different types of text reuse/recycling**

Operating with the following categories of text recycling, which have been used in a variety of presentations of, standards for, and codes of conduct for the responsible conduct of research, may be advantageous:

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tion of the new Danish Code of Conduct for Research Integrity, however, DCSD considers these guidelines as an historical document, cf. the website of the Ministry of Higher Education and Science.

- *Straightforward duplicate publication*: The publication of the same manuscript in different places.
- *Duplication of research data, etc.* The publication of different manuscripts based (wholly or partially) on the same research findings or other primary material, possibly with overlapping conclusions.
- *Text recycling*: Duplication in a new manuscript of passages from one's own previous publications.

None of these practices is necessarily problematic from the perspective of research ethics, *as long as* the new (secondary) publication takes place in an *honest, transparent and accountable* manner.

*Duplicate publication* (of the same manuscript) can be both acceptable and desirable, for example when a previously published article is reissued via a different publication channel in order to reach a different audience or to recontextualise the article's conclusions in a different or broader perspective, such as publication of a translation to a different language or a reprint in an anthology along with other contributions about the same general topic. In all cases, the requirement that *it must be clearly stated* that the manuscript has been published previously must apply. In other words, normally only *covert* duplicate publication is impermissible.

By the same token, *duplication of research data* (in a new publication) can be acceptable and desirable depending on circumstances, for example when the material is completely or entirely reused/reanalysed, with the result that new results and new knowledge are produced. This is also the case even where the new results to a (limited) extent overlap with previously published results.<sup>3</sup> Again, the requirement is that this must be accounted for openly and honestly, so that the relationship between the publications is handled with complete *transparency* whenever pertinent. The Danish code of conduct requires that the recycling or reuse of "primary materials" be <sup>4</sup>"clearly disclosed". The rather broad definition of "primary materials" and "data" in the Danish code of conduct includes notes, literature, and so on. In the opinion of the Research Practices Committee, this passage should be interpreted with due regard for the limitations of relevance and proportionality, and with due regard for the unique characteristics of the field of research in question. (cf. below).

*Text recycling* (self-plagiarism), in which a researcher recycles individual *passages* from previously published scientific and scholarly works in a new context can, to a certain extent, be regarded as duplicate publication in miniature. Therefore, it appears that the question of the permissibility of this can be answered in an analogous manner, which may be seen to be ex-

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<sup>3</sup>There can be good reasons for using the same material as the basis for several publications, when it is a question of responding to relevant research questions (or when the journals in question simply set a maximum length of manuscripts). However, it *may* also be a case of *salami slicing*, in which a researcher separates the various aspects of one and the same study and publishes them in several articles, even though they could be contained in a single manuscript. In itself, however, this is normally not considered a violation of responsible conduct of research.

<sup>4</sup>According to the Danish code of conduct (page 9) "primary material" is defined as "any material (biological material, notes, interviews, texts and literature, digital raw data, recordings, etc) that forms the basis of the research." "Data" is defined as "detailed records of the primary materials".

pressed in the Danish code of conduct's requirement of "appropriate and accurate references". Once again, the centrality of the principles of *openness and transparency* is confirmed. In the event that a research result (even if only implicitly in the form of the absence of a reference) is *presented as new* without being so, this is at the very least 'questionable' research practice. Conversely, in the event that the reuse of passages is presented openly, it cannot be assumed to be problematic *in this regard* (the question of the scientific merit of repeating oneself aside!). *The extent to which it may be required* that a researcher includes a reference to his or her own previously published work or previously presented research result on the grounds that the new publication would otherwise mislead the reader with regard to the originality of its content and the nature of the research involved, would appear to rest *in part* on the established and generally recognised praxis in the research field in question (what can be reasonably expected), and *in part* on whether the work in question is an 'ordinary' research publication or a dissertation produced to be assessed for an academic degree, cf. the paragraphs below.

### **Differences among fields of research**

Although the Danish Code of Conduct for Research Integrity is at the most general level intended to apply to all fields of research, without a doubt, the standards it sets out must not be applied in a completely uniform fashion within all fields, which is also clearly stated in the code. (page 5) Both DCSD's 2009 guidelines (with a special focus on health and natural science) as well as the guidelines developed by the Faculty of Health in 2015 reflect this as well. Because this is a question of standards, which unlike rules are characterised by flexibility in adapting to circumstance and context, it should and must be possible to take differences in traditions and conditions in the different fields of research into account.

Within natural science and health science, where research is to a large degree based on natural laws/natural constants and *exact empirical regularities*, in connection with the repeated use of the same raw data or the same 'primary materials' in more than one study, due regard for the necessary degree of openness and transparency will typically require a *declaration of such repeated use*, especially regarding any overlap in method or results between the 'prior' and the 'new' work. Thus, especially if it contains or builds on previous studies, the new work should distinguish between previously achieved results on the one hand, and on the other hand the new way of handling the raw materials employed in the work, as well as the new results derived from this. In this context, the *reuse of one's own research data* will typically raise more questions than literal text recycling (self-plagiarism), and in practice, the required openness and transparency will relate to this aspect.

The situation is different in at least some fields within the social sciences and the humanities which are not exact sciences. In these fields, it is a common occurrence – and not in conflict with generally accepted ethical norms – for an author who has previously analysed a text, for example a legal provision or a work of literature (and published the results of the analysis), to *present the same interpretation or evaluation based on the same source material* in a later publication without reference to the fact that he or she has previously presented and argued

the same ‘result’ on the basis of the same material – perhaps even in identically worded passages. Thus far, it has never occurred to anyone to characterise this practice *in general* as scientifically questionable – on the contrary, it may be perceived as superfluous or even as a form of inappropriate self-promotion to repeatedly reference one’s own work in contexts in which argumentation has greater weight than references to previous exact studies. However, literal *text recycling* (self-plagiarism), whereby the author directly copy-pastes from his or her own work without informing the reader of this, may under certain circumstances – but not as a general rule – be characterised as ‘questionable’ in the above sense.

### **Reuse of previously assessed work**

The question of cases involving the partial or total reuse of material which has previously been assessed in connection with the attainment of a Master’s or PhD degree in a subsequent dissertation submitted with a view to attaining a PhD or higher doctoral degree must be considered separately. The question is particularly relevant in regard to fields in which it is rather the rule than the exception for PhD dissertations to be written on more or less the same topic as the student’s Master’s degree thesis, or in regard to which the academic regulations themselves (as is generally the case in the 4+4 schemes) encourage this practice.

If the work in question has been published, the new dissertation should contain precise references to the published work in accordance with the guidelines which apply to all academic publication. Regardless of whether the author’s previously assessed work has been published, it should always be possible to require of a dissertation which is intended to earn its author an *academic degree*, and which therefore should exhibit a certain degree of *originality*, that any reuse of previously assessed material should be clearly indicated to readers/assessors. If the previously assessed work is *unpublished*, this may normally be done in general terms, for example by stating that the section in question ‘builds on’ the author’s Master’s degree thesis (or another work for which the author has previously received academic credit). If the previously assessed work is published, it must be possible to require clearer and more precise references.

Overall, when a manuscript is submitted for assessment with a view to earning an academic degree, the duty to provide clear and reliable information on the inclusion of one’s own works may thus be assumed to be *higher* than in relation to other (‘ordinary’) types of academic publication.<sup>5</sup>

On behalf of the Research Practices Committee

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<sup>5</sup>Analogously, in connection with an exam paper, if a Bachelor’s or Master’s degree student is guilty of ‘hidden recycling’ of texts and other material he or she has produced and used previously in connection with a different exam (without providing references to such texts/material), this will be considered *cheating at exams*.

Palle Bo Madsen  
Chairman

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