

Summary of LOWI opinion 2015-07

The Petitioner complained to the Board about an alleged violation of the principles of research integrity in a book authored by the Interested Party. The Board declared the complaint unfounded.

The first question is whether the book in question should be regarded as (verifiable) research. The LOWI believes that it should, pointing out that the Interested Party was a researcher when he wrote the book and that the publicity surrounding the book's publication consistently and explicitly emphasised the Interested Party's standing as a researcher. Because these circumstances raised the expectation that the Interested Party had adhered to the general principles of professional research practice, it must be considered whether those principles have in fact been observed.

The second question is whether the book should be categorised as a scientific publication or as a popular science publication. The LOWI is of the opinion that the latter is the case, pointing out that the author's own description of a work is not the definitive factor. The Metis criteria are the yardstick that should be applied when asking whether a publication is scientific or popular. Having applied the Metis criteria, the LOWI has concluded that the book must be regarded as a popular science publication.

The third question is which assessment framework should be used in the case of this particular popular science publication. The Research Integrity Committee (RIC) has assessed whether the Interested Party acted "in good faith". In the LOWI's opinion, that assessment is too limited in nature. After all, the rules of research integrity can also be applied to popular science publications. At most, categorising a publication as popular science might mean conducting a more marginal assessment of its compatibility with the principles of the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Scientific Practice, in the sense that the assessment would consider whether the publication had adhered to these principles to a reasonable extent, in view of its popular nature.

The LOWI has advised the Board to review its preliminary decision and to reconsider the Petitioner's complaint as regards content, whereby the Interested Party's use of sources should be assessed – perhaps marginally – for compatibility with the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Scientific Practice.

The Board has decided to act on the LOWI's opinion and reopen its investigation of the complaint.