Author’s response to reviews

Title: Development of research integrity in France is on the rise: the introduction of research integrity officers was a progress

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Development of research integrity in France is on the rise: the introduction of research integrity officers was a progress
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Research Integrity and Peer Review

Dear Editor, Dear Maria Kowalczuk, PhD
Research Integrity and Peer Review
https://researchintegrityjournal.biomedcentral.com/

We would like to thank you for the quality of the reviewers’ comments. We improved the paper. We got all complementary information that was requested. Please find below our responses, with two formats of the manuscript: a draft with the corrections appearing in the text, and a CLEAR copy with the corrections.

It seems that reviewer #2 did not read the table on page 8. We took his comments into account anyway.
Reviewer reports:

Reviewer #1: Interesting topic to write and particularly, useful information to the field of research integrity and ethics. However, I do have some queries to make and I hope the author can make justify it & make some changes accordingly.

Introduction

Pg3/L21: You mentioned "developed recommendation and reflections on research integrity..."

- I want to know, what do you mean with 'reflection on research integrity' and 'developed recommendation' such as what? It is not so clear what do you mean with this part of the OFIS's objective. Do elaborate as I believe reader will want to know.

We replaced the sentence and detailed the OFIS missions as follows (page 3, end of second paragraph of the CLEAR version):

The OFIS has three missions: Platform for reflection (it contributes to the definition of a national policy on scientific integrity); observation (it leads a national observatory on the implementation of the commitments of the charter); and animation (it leads and promotes the work of the network of RIOs of the institutions).

Pg3/L29: You wrote, "...and observe the practice of senior researchers..".

- What do they observed? Senior researchers engage in QRP? Is that what this mean? Who observed it?

We explained and wrote and have difficulty maintaining the boundary between responsible research conduct and QRP when they observe the practice of senior researchers. See page 3, third paragraph of the CLEAR version.

Pg3/L38: You wrote "...There is no national registry of the cases of misconduct.."

- Are you saying that there is no National Registry in France that specific to cases of research misconduct or are you saying that such registry exist but so far no research misconduct cases are reported? You need to make this clear because it a bit confusing.

We replaced the sentence that was not clear by: There is no annual report as yet on cases of misconduct, either at the level of each RIU or by the OFIS (page 3, fourth paragraph of the CLEAR version)
Methodology

This section is clear & good.

Thanks. We completed the information requested by reviewer #2.

Results

Pg4/L36: You wrote."58 of them are active RIOs while 2 of them occupied fulltime RIOs position."

- What are the status of the other 36 RIOs?

- Are you saying that these 58 RIOs are from the 68 male RIOs or from the total of 96 identify RIOs?

That was unclear and we clarified this part (see page 4, second paragraph of the Results section of the CLEAR version) Out of the 96 RIOs, 58 were active (< 65 years old) and had an RIO function added to their usual laboratory activities. Two of the 58 active RIOs occupied a full-time RIO position.

Pg4/L38: ",means of 96 RIOs (6 missing data)."

- That will make 97 RIOs, is it 96 or 97 RIOs?

Thanks for your help. We checked the data, and corrected the mistake.

Discussion

Pg4/L52 - Pg 5/L4: comparison findings with the UK

- Why UK? Normally we compare with country that show a positive progress but not equally slow progress?

We have chosen to compare the United Kingdom because our two countries are quite similar in terms of population and RIUs in the perimeter of national organizations (142 RIUs in France versus 130 in the United Kingdom). No other country on the European continent have similar published data, and E Wager's analysis has similarities with our work? There are data in the USA, but our countries are very different, and the USA started to develop integrity a long time ago, so the comparison is less logical. No change in the text.
- If you want to highlight that implementation of research integrity authorities/unit/policies/actions are usually taking a long time for example in the UK, so it is not surprising that the progress is also slow in France, it be better if you highlight some of the reasons that it is slowly progressing in the UK and whether France is facing the same hindrance? Because just compare both and say that it is normal that it takes time to implement something like RIOs, it reflects that you do not really read your literature review thoroughly. I believe UK & France scenario may posed different challenges when implementing RIOs.

I know the United Kingdom, and although there are differences between our countries, the implementation of research integrity has similarities. I added the following sentence (page 5, second paragraph of the discussion of the CLEAR version): As in the United Kingdom, we have observed a variability in the profiles of the RIOs, and most RIOs in professional activity do not have time clearly dedicated to their activity. On the other hand, retired RIOs seem to have a lot of time for their mission.

Pg5/L7-8: "France does not have an institution similar to the US ORI, which investigate and make decision."

- But you mentioned earlier of Inserm, that have power to investigate research misconduct. How is Inserm different that ORI? If there is differences, you need to provide explanation what Inserm can do and cannot do or different between Inserm & ORI since you already mentioned it in the earlier page.

We have preferred not to complete this paragraph because Inserm is an institution considered by the OFIS. Inserm has a national mission within its organisation, but does not have a mission to analyse cases of misconduct in universities.

Pg5/L13: "The US does not have an organization equivalent to the OFIS".

- Are you sure? Because ORI does have a division of education and integrity which if you read clearly, may have similar objectives as OFIS. ORI also conduct RCR training for their RIO. Do read

We are in partial agreement, and this is the remark detailed in the report cited in the reference 6 (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. Fostering Integrity in Research. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press). Yes, the ORI has an education department, but the ORI has no responsibility for training in universities at the local level. Among its missions (see correction above), the OFIS must harmonize practices in France.
Pg5/L29-32: "because the science of 2019..1980"

- I suggest that you rephrase this to.."The practices of scientific research ..." Perhaps?

Good remark. Done

Pg5/L31-32: "... is it possible..with?"

- It is not really good to end a sentence of paragraph with a question unless you provide answers for the question. I suggest you rephrase the question to a statement.

- For this issue (the task & training of RIOs) I suggest you can read on RCR instruction.

Agree, and we rephrased the sentence. Thanks for the good comment. In the CLEAR version, page 6, first paragraph, we wrote: “Because the practice of scientific research in 2019 is not the same as the science of the 1980s, early-career-researchers could not easily accept a senior RIO investigating practices that he or she had never experimented with. “.

Pg5/L35-39

- Is this a suggestion (L35-36) and is this what currently happening or the situation now (L36-39)? Or you merely stating a reason why the specification for RIUs for the policies is important?

Pg5/L39-40:"The system..necessary"

- I suggest this sentence to be place in Conclusion or consider removing it all together.

Done

Conclusion

- Again do not end a sentence with a question.

- I am wondering why is this question keep on appearing, "..is it possible for early career researcher to easily accept that a senior can investigate practices that she/he has never experience with?" (pg5/l53-55), again previously at pg3/L32-34, again it was mentioned in pg5/L29-32.

-why do I ask this, it is because 1) If this is the research question, then the objective do not answer this question, which it suppose to, 2)What does RI development & RIOs profile has
anything to do with the credibility to be RIOs? If you want to know this require an investigation,
3) if this is the research question, then where is the answer? The result only showed general data
on the RIOs and do not highlight anything regarding the details of their experience, 4) There are
no references include in this articles that touches on the criteria of RIOs, 5) therefore, if the
author do not wish to provide the answer for this question or it is not included in this part of the
research (probably author is planning to do it on the next research), please remove the question
from the article. Author can put in in recommendation though.

We deleted the sentence (see version with corrections) and reorganized the conclusion. Our
research question was to observe RIUs, and not to investigate relationship between early-career
and senior researches. We corrected the manuscript (see page 6 of the CLEAR version, Conclusion)

Reviewer #2: Dear author(s),

Thank you for your effort in the compilation of the data for this piece and for the clean
composition. This is a fine piece of reporting on the state of Research Integrity in France, but it
lacks sufficient analysis to be as strong as some of your contentions suggest. These comments
are meant to point you in some directions for additional analysis that make this a piece that could
be more easily supported and more useful to the study of RI globally or within the EU.

We thank you for these comments, which are adapted to our work. We have already provided
answers to reviewer #1 that may correspond to your comments. We have also completed them
based on your comments. THANK YOU

The introduction lays out the topology of RI in France, but the link between the establishment of
the CNRS and Inserm and the authorship of the national charter on ethics is not clear. Did the
charter come out of a concern expressed by CNRS or Inserm? When OFIS what established, was
it to be a partner with CNRS? Please elaborate on the relationships here so that the reader has a
fuller sense of the landscape.

We added the information (page 3 first paragraph of the CELAR version). We clarified as
follows: Inserm and CNRS are two leading research institutions in France. They were the driving
force behind the promotion of the national charter, together with university representatives. It is a
partnership to develop research integrity, without a position of authority between institutions.
While the link between concepts of RI and QRP is obvious for individuals well steeped in this practice, could you clarify how you relate RI, QRP, reproducibility, integrity and plagiarism for the purpose of this analysis. Your search terms were integrity and plagiarism and your reporting is on QRP, RIOs and RI. The links need to be explicated more clearly for your reader to follow the story of how these results were generated.

We added a sentence (page 4, second paragraph of the methods of the CLEAR version): We believe that integrity and plagiarism are the most common terms used by students and researchers who are not familiar with verbiage related to integrity (for example: QRPs, RIOs, reproducibility ) and who are looking for information on a site. We have chosen these terms for the search on the websites.

For the RIUs, which were finally included in the sample? What was the final N of RIUs? Was integrity and plagiarism found on the sites of all of them? What was the distribution of findings? Particularly for integrity, what was the incidence of false positives?

The numbers are in the table: 142 RIUs, Do you mean that false positives represent the retrieved information related to structure integrity of materials and not to research integrity for example? We had few difficulties, and limited the information to research integrity.

Regarding the RIO's, there needs to be some clarification in this sentence: "When age was not retrieved (for researchers over 70 years), we got the PhD thesis date, and made that it was passed at 27 years old (sciences), 30 (law, economy), or 34 (social sciences), according to French data.4 We estimated their age based on the date of obtaining the PhD thesis." I do not understand what is said here, despite a few re-reads.

What was the incidence of inactive/ retired RIOs?

Thanks for the comment and we added two sentences to clarify. The paragraph is now (page 4 of the CLEAR version, end of the Methods section): We determined the age of the RIOs from the resumes available on the Internet (RIUs site and/or social networks). When age was not retrieved (for researchers over 70 years), we found the PhD thesis date, and assumed that it was passed when they were 27 years old (sciences), 30 (law, economy), or 34 (social sciences), according to French data.4 We estimated their age based on the date of obtaining the PhD thesis and since we had their age at the date of their PhD, we extrapolated their age to 2019. We considered 65 years as the retirement age in the public system, and that the RIOs who were below this age were active.
In your results, a table would help tremendously for the organization of this information.

See page 8

In your discussion, the first paragraph is largely a re-hash of the information you presented earlier. Please consider developing the implications of the distribution or RIOs as primarily male. Or, report on their age and disciplinary affiliations so that additional implications could be explored by the reader (although, it would be a stronger article if you developed these for the reader).

Age and disciplinary affiliations are in the table page 8.

We changed the first paragraph of the discussion (see page 5):

There is a lack of information about RI on the websites of French universities and research organizations, which may reflect a lack of information and commitment in the institutions themselves. We have demonstrated that few RIUs among the 142 provided information about plagiarism/integrity on their websites, and only 13 RIOs out of 96 were clearly named on the RIU website. Nearly 40 % (38/96) of the RIOs were older than 64 years and had probably retired. The fact that RIOs are retired can be an advantage for the institution because they have time for their mission and do not have any agenda that conflicts with their priorities. However, there are disadvantages as well because they tend to protect the institution to avoid a bad image, and they lack experience in new laboratory practices. This observation requires further research.

The invitation to the reader to extend the implications to other nations is a good one. But, there isn't sufficient supporting information about the UK system to know if their distribution of RIOs or findings about integrity or plagiarism is genuinely comparable. The comparison is invited, but it's incomplete.

We commented on this remark made by reviewer #1

The remainder of the discussion is a bit speculative when you have data to support something that is not speculative. For example, while there is no national job description, there are consistencies across this population that might seem to suggest convergence by independent institutions. Could you draw those consistencies clearly for the reader?

Good comment, and we added a sentence (end of page 5 of the CLEAR version): There is no description of all the competencies required to carry out the mission of an RIO, but the national network of RIOs aims to harmonize practices. This network, which is periodically convened, is a
good initiative to set up a system of scientific integrity. Over a period of time, it will be possible to better define the profile and skills required of RIOs (for example, completing scientific integrity training).

This concluding sentence, "Because the science of 2019 is not the same as the science of 1980, is it possible for earlycareer-researchers to easily accept that a senior can investigate practices that he or she has never experimented with?" is exceptionally provocative and invites a very interesting analysis. Not only is that an analysis that I would like to work on with you, but it is an analysis that desperately needs to be done. It is not, lamentably, an analysis supported by the rest of the article above.

Agree, and it has been changed, as reviewer #1 had similar comments.

Again, thank you for this relatively clear composition. I have confidence this could be improved to be a more fruitful contribution.