

EMS Ethics Committee

Comments on the EMS Code of Practice

April 2016

The *Ethics Committee* of the *European Mathematical Society* was formed in the spring of 2010. Our first task was to draw up a *Code of Practice*. This Code was adopted by the Council of the Society on 30 October 2012, and is now the policy of the European Mathematical Society. A copy of the Code is to be found at <http://www.euro-math-soc.eu/system/files/uploads/COP-approved.pdf>. This English-language version is the definitive version of the EMS Code of Practice. However, we encourage the publication of translations of the Code into other languages.

Many European mathematical societies have now formally adhered to the Code, and others have shown their support of its underlying principles. Likewise, several journals state on their web pages that they adhere to the EMS Code of Practice. We hope that publishers and editors of European journals and monographs in mathematics will conform to the Code, even if they do not adopt it explicitly.

The Ethics Committee has already considered several cases, and has reported to the President and the Executive Committee of the European Mathematical Society.

Here we make some informal comments on the Code and its application; these comments do not modify or supersede any statement in the Code itself. These comments are the responsibility of the Ethics Committee.

We welcome comments on the Code from mathematicians, from European mathematical societies, and from European publishers of mathematics; these comments should be addressed to the Chair of the Committee.

It is anticipated that a new version of the Code will be established in due course, in particular to take account of changing realities in the world of publishing, and we welcome suggestions towards this revised version. In particular, the Committee is aware that new ethical issues may arise as a consequence of moves towards ‘open access’, and expects that there will be more consideration of these matters in the next version of the Code, in accordance with the *EMS Paper on Open Access*, endorsed by the Executive Committee in December 2014.

General comments

G1 The accelerating growth in the number and volume of publications in mathematics made it apparent to the *Executive Committee* of the EMS that our community would benefit from a code to guide our conduct in matters relating to the publication of mathematics. New technology has made it easy to copy results from other papers; new pressures to publish are affecting many mathematicians; changed commercial and business practices are constraining publishers; future imposed rules on ‘Open access’ could radically change the environment in which we work. Increasingly, these developments are leading to transgressions of the existing unwritten rules concerning publication.

Our Code seeks to make explicit what expected ethical behaviour entails and to offer guidance to authors, editors, referees, and publishers with respect to the publication of mathematics and the use of bibliometric data. Its enforcement will rely on the collective moral pressure of the mathematical community on those who transgress the Code.

G2 There are many other codes of conduct in the world of science and scientific publishing. There are also codes promulgated by individual universities and by government bodies, some with the force of law. Our Code is specifically adapted to the needs of European mathematicians.

G3 The Committee is aware of the importance of ethical behaviour in the conduct of experiments and the collection and statistical analysis of data. However, our Code does not cover such matters.

G4 Our Committee is pleased to note that many mathematical societies and some publishers have adhered to the Code of Practice. We trust that, in this case, the fact will be communicated to office holders and officials of the societies, to all editors and editorial advisers of journals, and to referees who act for the journals, and that they will all be encouraged to follow the stipulations of the Code.

Comments on ‘Responsibilities of authors’

A1 The Committee notes that there is no single accepted definition of the word ‘plagiarism’. The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives the definition as: ‘The action or practice of taking someone else’s work, idea, etc., and passing it off as one’s own; literary theft’. The *National Science Foundation* of the USA defines plagiarism broadly as ‘the appropriation of another person’s ideas, processes, results, or words without giving appropriate credit’. This definition is applied to research proposals.

In scientific and mathematical publications, plagiarism normally requires a deliberate presentation, explicit or implicit, of someone else’s work as one’s own.

A2 The Committee is aware that the question whether a mathematical result or proof is the ‘same’ as another such result or proof is often a matter of dispute, and we shall normally seek expert advice on this point.

A3 The Committee is aware that many results are ‘widely known’, and it is not always possible or desirable to give detailed attribution for standard results; the Committee is also aware that variant proofs of existing results, and the recasting of results in a different setting, are of value to mathematics. Further, our subject benefits greatly from survey articles and monographs in which it is not always appropriate to give detailed references for every fact or result stated.

A4 The Committee is aware that some journals openly publish research that has previously appeared in conference proceedings or similar publications, and that reviews and surveys necessarily often repeat earlier work. Appropriate attribution should always be provided in such cases.

A5 Nevertheless, authors should not present as original and independent publications works that are essentially the same as other works of themselves, since this would constitute ‘self-plagiarism’.

A6 The Committee thinks that it is inappropriate in mathematics that the name of a person who held a formal position of responsibility, but who made no active contribution to the research, be named as an author. In particular, a supervisor of a student is usually not named as an author if his/her contribution to the work was of only a formal or general supervisory nature.

A7 Our Code states that ‘... each person who contributed to the relevant research should be named as a co-author.’ We appreciate that a person who made a contribution to the research may waive the right to be named as a co-author.

A8 Our Code states that ‘Simultaneous or concurrent submission of a manuscript describing the same research to more than one publication constitutes misconduct.’ In the same way, separate submission of a manuscript to different editors of the same journal may constitute misconduct.

Comments on ‘Responsibilities of editors and publishers’

- PE1 Those colleagues who allow their names to be used, for example as ‘Editorial advisers’, to assure the mathematical public of the quality of a journal, have an obligation to be well aware of, and content with, the journal’s goals, policies, standards, and pricing.
- PE2 It is clearly unethical behaviour for a publication to give the names of certain mathematicians, who are alleged to form the ‘Editorial Board’ of, or be ‘Editorial advisers’ to, the journal without the people concerned being fully aware of such an announcement, and having explicitly given their agreement to such a designation.
- PE3 Clause 6 of this section of the Code specifies that decisions should be communicated to the potential authors ‘in a . . . timely manner’. The Committee is aware that it is often a difficult and time-consuming task to evaluate a manuscript in mathematics, and that there may be good reasons why this takes considerable time. For this reason, we do not state in the Code any specific time for a decision on the acceptance of a manuscript. Nevertheless we would regard a period of more than one year without any communication, beyond acknowledgement of receipt, being sent to the authors as a *prima facie* case of unethical behaviour; in many cases, especially for short articles, the time from submission to decision should be much less than one year.

An editor who chooses to reject a paper without sending it to a referee should normally communicate this information to the authors within two months of the receipt of the manuscript.

- PE4 The Committee requests colleagues to consider carefully the implications of their actions before acting as editors, refereeing papers from, or submitting manuscripts to, journals which appear to have low standards of peer review, scientific integrity, or inappropriate pricing policies.
- We caution that certain self-advertised ‘mathematical journals’ appear to have no adequate means of avoiding plagiarism or the publication of manifestly incorrect results.
- PE5 The Committee hopes that publishers will retain and archive records of correspondence and referees’ reports on papers for the benefit of historians. These documents should be made available to historians after an appropriate period.

Comments on ‘Responsibilities of referees’

- R1 Referees should bear in mind the fact that they are usually anonymous to the author(s), and therefore they have particular responsibilities to be objective and courteous in their reports.
- R2 In certain cases, the final acceptance of an article by an editor might be subject to financial considerations. However, referees who comment on the scientific quality of a submitted manuscript should never allow their recommendations to be influenced by any consideration of future financial arrangements.

Comments on ‘Responsibilities of users of bibliometric data’

- B1 We note that methods of collecting and presenting bibliometric data that may be appropriate in other branches of science are often quite inappropriate within mathematics. One reason for this is that the length of time during which mathematical papers are quoted or cited is often considerably longer than in some other disciplines.

B2 Certain widely-quoted impact factors are inappropriate in mathematics. This is due partly to the fact that it may take considerable time before the impact of fundamental papers can be measured, and partly to the fact that the impact may be indirect, for example a whole line of research may be abandoned because a fundamental paper has shown that the questions considered cannot be answered. It is clear that impact factors related to a whole journal do not necessarily convey any reliable information about individual authors and articles.

B3 The comparison of mathematics with other disciplines using bibliometric data is often quite inappropriate because of the inherent differences of the subject matter and the style of publication. It is also the case that comparison of subfields of mathematics using bibliometric data can be very misleading.

B4 The Committee believes that certain quotations of alleged ‘impact factors’ given by journals in their own publicity are unreliable, and, in some cases, completely fraudulent. We are also aware that such impact factors are sometimes manipulated in clearly unethical ways.

B5 The following quotation is appropriate in this context. It is from the book

ALDO EDUARDO CARRA, ‘OLTRE IL PIL, UN’ALTRA ECONOMIA’, ROMA, 2010, page 15.

‘... tendiamo ad essere ciò che misuriamo. Ed allora decidere oggi come *misurare* il nostro futuro significa anche decidere quale vogliamo che esso sia’

‘... we tend to become what we measure. And then to decide today how to *measure* our future means also to decide what kind of future we want to have’

Comments on the ‘Procedures’ of the Committee

P1 For details on how to submit a formal case to the Committee, see <http://www.euro-math-soc.eu/committee/ethics>. Members of the Committee may be willing to give informal advice on a case before any formal submission occurs. Informal enquiries can also be made to the Chair of the Committee.

P2 The primary goal of our Committee is to mediate between parties and resolve cases privately. However, as stated in the Code, the Committee may make a formal submission to the President of the European Mathematical Society in cases where it is convinced that unethical behaviour has occurred.

P3 The Committee realises that there will be cases involving both European mathematicians and mathematicians from outside Europe or publishers based outside Europe. In these cases, we shall use our best offices.

A case submitted to the Committee may involve more than one set of authors, editors, and publishers; at least some of the parties involved should have a European connection. The Committee cautions that its communications sent to, for example, publishers based outside Europe are not likely to have great effect.

P4 The Committee will seek to liaise with the *International Mathematical Union* and with other mathematical societies in order to establish channels of communication.

P5 Members of the Committee may be willing to give talks and to lead discussions on the Code if invited to do so by appropriate organisations.