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British Editors Form Misconduct Panel

Frustration with the United Kingdom's lack of policies on scientific misconduct has spawned a grassroots effort to manage the problem. The editors of nine prestigious British medical journals announced last week that they are forming a Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) to help each other deal with fraudulent papers submitted to their journals. "We often consult each other over the phone. So we decided to formalize the process," says Richard Smith, editor of the *British Medical Journal*.

United effort. U.K. journal editors are joining forces to fight fraud.

According to Smith, the formation of COPE was sparked by the experience of Michael Farthing, dean of medicine at St. Bartholomews' Hospital in London, who, in his first year as editor of the journal *Gut*, has already had to handle four cases of apparent misconduct. "It's getting harder to say this is just the occasional nutter," says Smith. "It ain't going away," adds David Sharp, deputy editor of *The Lancet*.

Because the United Kingdom has no formal mechanism for investigating research fraud, journal editors often don't know how to deal with papers that appear to contain fraudulent data. Complaints are left to a scientist's institution or the company or agency that funds them. As a result, institutions often suppress cases to avoid adverse publicity.

COPE's main function will be for editors to present the details of alleged fraud cases to the committee anonymously and seek advice on how to handle them. Britain's libel laws would not allow the committee to carry out any kind of investigation. The committee may also draft guidelines on investigating complaints, promote research into publication ethics, and perhaps provide training in good practice.

Smith says the group may also campaign for setting up a more formal body, involving funding agencies and scientific societies, to advise on misconduct cases or even investigate them itself. "If we don't do something, there will be heavy-handed regulation eventually," Smith says.

Will NSF Answer in the Affirmative?

Even as Texas, California, and the federal government struggle to cope with new restrictions on affirmative action (p. 633), Congress is urging the National Science Foundation (NSF) to fund two new campus-based programs to give minorities a leg up in science. "Yes, it is an apparent contradiction," says NSF's Luther Williams, who heads the education directorate. "And I don't know what we're going to do."

The instructions come in reports accompanying two bills that set NSF's 1998 budget. The House version adds $5 million to NSF's request "to develop a comprehensive plan for graduate education of underrepresented minorities" in science. The Senate language orders NSF to shift $6 million from other programs for grants to boost the number of undergraduates studying math, science, and engineering at historically black institutions.

The proposals must survive a conference next month to iron out a compromise spending bill. Meanwhile, NSF is awaiting word from the Justice Department on whether any of some two dozen existing programs violate the Administration's new policy on affirmative action, dubbed "mend it, don't end it." But NSF officials are hoping that their mission to boost science education will give them enough room to navigate the tricky political waters. Says General Counsel Larry Rudolph, "If the language sticks, we will have to use our best judgment about what is appropriate."

Ouster at French Research Agency

Catherine Bréchignac, the new head of France's Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) (*Science*, 18 July, p. 308), is wasting little time in shaking up the huge research agency. According to sources within the CNRS, cancer researcher Pierre Tambourin will soon be stepping down after 4 1/2 years as director of the CNRS life sciences department, which encompasses about 25% of the agency's 11,600 researchers.

The news came as no surprise to researchers contacted by *Science*, who noted that Bréchignac—previously head of the CNRS's physics and mathematics department—had often clashed with Tambourin over the agency's scientific priorities. Bréchignac declined to comment, but cell biologist Jean-Paul Thiery of the Institute Curie in Paris says he hopes Tambourin's replacement will be able to boost funding for the CNRS's best labs. "We spend our lives just searching for money," says Thiery.

Ax for Australian Research Centers?

The Australian government is weighing advice from an outside panel to kill its acclaimed Cooperative Research Centres (CRCs) linking industrial, academic, and government labs (*Science*, 27 June, p. 1966). While the review last week urged continued use of government R&D funds to foster economic growth, its chair, transportation executive John Mortimer, said that such efforts should be "market-driven" rather than targeted at specific industries or technologies, limited to 7 years, and focused on individual research projects.

The panel, formed at the request of Industry Minister John Moore, reviewed all industry assistance programs. It suggested that the $146-million-a-year CRC program, which funds 65 centers, should be trimmed to $20 million for "public good CRCs" that cover such topics as aboriginal health.

Mark Sceats, deputy chair of the CRC association, is flummoxed by the findings. "The CRCs seem to fit every one of the report's stated principles" for a wise government investment, Sceats says, such as significant industrial support. Gustav Nossal, president of the Australian Academy of Sciences, says the report also fails to appreciate the contributions of the CRCs to Australian science.

Data Release Proposal Raises Alarm

As *Science* went to press, the House appropriations committee was poised to vote on a controversial amendment that would force many scientists to release their raw data to the public. A 25 July version of the amendment, to the 1998 Treasury/Postal spending bill, would require researchers funded by federal grants or contracts to make publicly available in a specified location "all underlying data ... not later than 90 days after the first public use of the research." Only defense-related research would be exempt. The proposal is sponsored by Robert Aderholt (R–AL) partly in response to industry demands for data from an air pollution study (*Science*, 25 July, p. 467).

Policy officials at several federal agencies told *Science* they were working with the White House to oppose the proposal, which they said could prove very costly and threaten proprietary agreements. House Science Committee minority ranking member George Brown (D–CA) wrote Appropriations Chair Bob Livingston (R–LA) on 28 July to express his "deep concern about" the amendment, saying it would "create a legal nightmare for universities and researchers."