

Summary of LOWI opinion 2018-01

Keywords: publication of erratum, time lag for correction of errors.

Relevant provisions: Elaborations 1.6, 1.7, and 2.5 of the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Academic Practice

Board involved: Executive Board, University of Amsterdam

Petition

The Petition concerns the incorrect captions added by the author to the illustrations provided by the Petitioner in the author's 2010 textbook. Six years later, the author has still failed to carry out his undertaking to add an erratum to the new edition of the textbook.

Opinion of Research Integrity Committee (RIC) and decision by the Board

The Sub-RIC concludes that the author should have been more active. He did not inform the Petitioner about the erratum until 2017. The fact that there was no new edition of the textbook does not justify the lapse of time after the initial collegial warning. The author failed to act in accordance with Elaborations 1.6 and 1.7 of the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Academic Practice, but his actions do not constitute a violation of research integrity. There was no intent because the author has apologised and the textbook is now being sold with an erratum with the text as proposed by the Petitioner. The Board of the University of Amsterdam resolved to adopt the Sub-RIC's conclusions.

The Petitioner's most relevant objections are as follows:

- The Sub-RIC did not take account of how the error occurred. The author based the captions on what he observed in the illustrations. He ignored the information provided.
- The author did not add an erratum until after the Petitioner had submitted another complaint. There is no reason to assume that the author would have done so on his own accord.

The most relevant considerations in the LOWI's opinion:

- The LOWI concurs with the Sub-RIC in finding that it cannot be established that the author included incorrect captions deliberately. The accusation that the Sub-RIC paid too little attention to the origin of the errors is unjustified. After seven years, it is not easy to determine how the captions were created. The Sub-RIC cannot be expected to make binding statements on that matter.
- The LOWI also concurs with the Sub-RIC's consideration that a more active attitude could be expected from the author. Elaborations 1.6 and 1.7 of the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Academic Practice require that any errors be corrected as quickly and adequately as possible.
- Unlike the Sub-RIC, the LOWI takes account in its assessment not only of the passage of time but also of the fact that the Petitioner had to submit two complaints before the author took action. It had already become clear in the previous LOWI proceedings that there would be no new edition. It was possible to add an erratum to the hardcover version of the textbook and to the still available limited edition of the paperback version. The author did so only

after a considerable period of time and only after the Petitioner had complained twice. As a result, the author was culpably negligent. However, the consequences of his actions are not of such a nature or importance as to constitute a violation of research integrity.

LOWI ruling and opinion:

The LOWI considers the Petition unfounded and recommends that the Board adopt the proposed decision as its final decision.

Final decision by the Board:

The Board decided to confirm the proposed decision as its final decision.

The Petitioner's complaint is declared admissible and well-founded, but only to the extent that the textbook is sold with the erratum and the author thus corrects the error.

Subject the same conditions, no further action will be taken against the author.