

3<sup>rd</sup> July, 2020

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## Suppression of *Forensic Science International: Genetics* from the Journal Citation Report 2019

Dear Mrs. Bourke-Waite,

The editors and our editorial board were shocked and dismayed by the notice of suppression of the impact factor for the journal *Forensic Science International: Genetics* (FSI:G) from this year's Journal Citation Report (JCR) for 2019. The letter received allowed no warning nor any time for us to react to ensure that our impact factor is maintained. This letter provides, we very much trust, information that will reverse suppression notification and restore the impact factor that FSI:G strove so hard to attain and is, we believe, rightly deserved.

In previous years, Clarivate had published information on journals exhibiting anomalous citation patterns.<sup>1</sup> Here, our journal was never mentioned. Given the already high self-citation rates in previous years (which have actually been coming down since 2016; see table), it would have been appropriate to include FSI:G in these warning messages, so that there would have been a chance to mitigate the risk of a suppression in time.

Year	IF	Self cites	Total cites	% Self
2014	4.604	552	999	55.3%
2015	4.988	779	1272	61.2%
2016	3.911	616	1232	50.0%
2017	5.637	781	1629	47.9%
2018	4.884	654	1348	48.5%
2019	n/a	n/a	n/a	45.0%

To aid with the reversal we provide the following helpful information. Forensic genetics is carried out by a small scientific community where research is needed to constantly adapt and integrate new processes into the criminal justice system. In the absence of a suitable

<sup>1</sup> <http://help.incites.clarivate.com/incitesLiveJCR/JCRGroup/8275-TRS.html>  
<https://clarivate.com/webofsciencegroup/essays/jcr-editorial-expression-of-concern/>

avenue to publish, and hence disseminate to the forensic genetics field, there would be stagnation in the processes of DNA profiling methods key to forensic human identification. These innovations require funding by grant money for research projects executed by dedicated scientists from renowned academic institutions. Therefore, recognition of scientific excellence is, among other criteria, also assessed based on the JCR Impact Factor.

The growth in this highly specialised area led to the launch of FSI:G in 2007 as a sister journal of *Forensic Science International* to respond to the rapidly growing interest in the field of forensic genetics. Prior to the establishment of FSI:G, articles covering this field were scattered throughout journals covering general forensic sciences and medicine. The idea for a specialized journal was brought up and supported by the International Society for Forensic Genetics (ISFG, the largest scientific society with more than 1400 members world-wide). Since the inception of FSI:G, it has been the only journal exclusively specialising in forensic genetics. No other journal accepts papers only from the area of forensic genetics – specifically relating to the criminal justice system.

The success of FSI:G as a journal for describing crucial advances in forensic DNA typing has, not surprisingly, attracted so many of the most important papers in the field. The effect therefore was an increasing trend in citations and an increasing impact factor: this was 2.421 in 2009 leading to a high of 5.637 in 2017 and 4.884 at the last impact factor release for 2018. The increase in impact factor was not in any way artificially engineered, rather a direct consequence of the success of this journal. It is therefore highly concerning that the loss of an impact factor is a consequence of the dedication of members of the forensic DNA community aiming to publish in FSI:G.

There is therefore no evidence, and absolutely no contrived activities by the editors, to deliberately increase this impact factor. The steady rise shows clearly the esteem and prominence in which FSI:G is viewed by the forensic genetics community. It should be noted that there are specific subjects in our field that are hard to publish in more general journals, such as e.g. the highly relevant problem of addressing the various mechanisms of direct and indirect transfer DNA traces found at crime scenes.

Although the possibility of a reinstatement of the Impact Factor after one year was offered by Clarivate if the situation of the journal regarding self-citations changes, this is not an encouraging perspective for us, first for the immediate consequences in the field and second since a sustainable solution is not feasible. Just as we never acted to deliberately increase the impact factor, we also cannot limit or omit references that the authors deem relevant, to decrease self-citation.

In the last few years, we have opened our journal to publications from other related fields such as forensic molecular pathology to become more multidisciplinary. In addition, we have also promoted an independent forensic genetic section in the journal *Forensic Science International*, and have worked with our publisher Elsevier to launch another journal (FSI:Reports) also accepting papers on forensic genetics. However, these measures require time to become visible, and are only slowly starting to have some impact.

The suppression of an Impact Factor for the only journal that specialises in forensic genetics is a loss to the forensic science community as a whole and the advancement of forensic genetics in particular. This is a backward step that will have deleterious consequences on the forensic community. Additionally, there will be a negative impact on career progression and capability of attracting grant funding for the forensic sciences.

The editorial team appreciates that there is a need to prevent those that artificially alter the process by which an impact factor is determined, but we are adamant that this is not the case with our journal. We collectively request that Clarivate reconsider the suppression of the impact factor for FSI:G. We would also be ready to enter into a direct dialogue with you discussing possibilities to find a sustainable solution for this problem.

Yours sincerely

The Editors of *Forensic Science International: Genetics*

Prof. Angel Carracedo, *University of Santiago de Compostela, Spain*

Prof. Leonor Gusmão, *State University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil*

Prof Adrian Linacre, *Flinders University, Adelaide, Australia*

Prof. Walther Parson, *Medical University of Innsbruck, Innsbruck, Austria*

Prof. Peter M. Schneider, *University of Cologne, Cologne, Germany*

Dr. Peter Vallone, *National Institute of Standards and Technology, Gaithersburg, Maryland, USA*