

3<sup>rd</sup> September 2020

Dear Ms Hollingsworth,

We have received the negative answer to our appeal for you to reconsider the suppression of Forensic Science International-Genetics from the 2019 JCR.

We profoundly regret your decision. However, we are kindly asking you to reconsider this decision since it is, in our opinion, based on premises that do not fully reflect the situation in our field of science.

Firstly, let us clarify that we were aware of the high self-citation rate of the journal. As we outlined in our earlier letter of appeal, we have analyzed this fact and implemented corrective actions in all the editorial board meetings we have had during the last 5 years, which is why the self-citation rate has steadily been coming down according to your own published figures (from 61.2% in 2015 to 45% in 2019).

We understand from your first message that the methodology used by Clarivate to detect outliers has recently changed to focus on within-category comparisons rather than across the entire JCR edition.

The category with which we have the greatest interaction is “Medicine, Legal”. We strongly believe that you should take into account the characteristics of this area, which is very different from other scientific areas. The connection of the different specialties (genetics, pathology, toxicology, general forensics) is due to the fact that different experts usually apply their scientific expertise to specific criminal cases and therefore rarely have scientific interaction with those in main stream sciences nor do they commonly cross-reference each discipline’s work. The disciplines underpinning forensic science are so disparate that it is impossible to draw individual comparisons (e.g. the expanding FSI family which you cite in your reply contains journals which focus on digital forensics, or forensic criminology for example, which have no relevance to forensic genetics). To further emphasize this point, regulatory aspects are also included in your list of journals in this category. We humbly ask you to see how many cross citations there are between the journal now ranked first in this category, *Regulatory Toxicology and Pharmacology* and our journal (ranked first until last year). This journal does not appear in either the Cited or Citing journal relationships as compiled by Clarivate in InCites and this phenomenon is not likely to happen in any other JCR areas.

For all these reasons we implore you to reconsider your decision. The damage to this area of science and indirectly, to the justice system will be real and drastic, as the petition you received recently demonstrates.

During the last five years we have worked hard to consistently reduce the self-citation rate, which we acknowledge is still high but we will maintain these clear strategies for reduction. By continuing to implement the measures we outline here, this trend to decrease the self-citations will continue. That said, we cannot expect a drastic reduction

in the self-citation rate for the next few years as these strategies will take some time to have an effect.

We have reached the conclusion that our high self-citation rate is due to a combination of two factors: the specific niche of our discipline and the success of the journal within this niche discipline. Although we still do not understand why this means we should be punished with exclusion from the JCR, we have implemented the following measures:

1. Our editors have been vigilant in checking for “salami” publication and this type of paper has always been excluded from the journal. We will continue to uphold the highest publication ethics as a journal.
2. We have opened the journal to related areas (forensic molecular pathology and toxicogenetics) and will be commissioning Special Issues in these areas. Although these fields are not of primary interest for our readers, we are regularly receiving a few manuscripts on these topics; this measure is going to have an effect in the medium-long term to increase the incoming citation base.
3. We are continuing to support the publisher’s initiative to open a ‘brand’ series of journals across every area in forensic science (mentioned in the last letter). This is going to have an impact in reducing our journal’s self-citation rate but only in a few years' time - since they have only recently launched and therefore do not account for the IF (still not included in the JCR).

Recently we implemented an additional measure and we have asked our editors to pay close attention to any articles going through FSIGEN which include methodological citations to any set of guidelines or society documentation published in FSIGEN, of which there are several. As these represent mandatory “gold standards” for methodological guidelines across the discipline of forensic genetics, authors frequently cite them to signify that they have followed them appropriately. This may in turn be boosting the self-citation rate. As such, we will be asking authors simply for a declaration that they have followed necessary guidelines without providing a regular citation. We feel strongly that the reasons and the measures we have implemented should be sufficient to address the issue.

We thank you for taking the time to engage in an open dialogue around this issue and look forward to your considered review of the measures taken.

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*