

Tackle science fraud, China urged

By Doreen Walton
BBC News

The British medical journal the Lancet has urged China's authorities to do more to tackle scientific fraud.

Recently, dozens of papers were found to be faked. "China's government must assume stronger leadership in scientific integrity," the Lancet says.

China ranks second behind the United States in the number of academic papers published every year.

Following a wave of scandals in 2006, China's government announced reforms aimed at preventing misconduct.

Richard Horton, editor in chief of the Lancet, believes the authorities have not gone far enough and the pressure on academics to publish papers for degrees and job promotions creates problems.

"In China, unfortunately, there are great incentives to commit fraud," he said.

"The measures haven't got to the root cause which are these conditions which encourage scientists to lie.

"When you make prestigious jobs and large amounts of money closely tied to publication, that creates conditions for fraud."

" If science in China cannot be trusted in certain areas, that undermines China's economic growth "

Dr Richard Horton The Lancet

Last December, two teams of researchers at Jingtangshan University in central China were found to have falsified 70 papers published in 2007.

"It's very tricky. The problem has existed for a long time," says Dr Lu Yiyi, Associate Fellow at Chatham House's China programme.

She believes universities need to teach about the importance of honesty but that the government will have a very difficult job stamping out fraud.

"There weren't strict rules established in the first place so a large number of people went through the system and got their professorship.

"If you apply stricter rules retroactively then their past work would be vulnerable to criticism," said Dr Lu.

China wants to become a research superpower and its influence is booming economically and scientifically.

Dr Horton said it is vital China's government takes action.

"Science in any country is a major source of economic growth," he said.

"The concern is if science in China cannot be trusted in certain areas that undermines China's economic growth."

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