

FWF procedure in cases of suspected violation of the standards of good research practice

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A suspected violation of the standards of good research practice is raised by a person (complainant) concerning a scientist/scholar (researcher concerned) who is (allegedly) involved in an FWF application or an FWF project.

As an independent body, the FWF strives to take the interests of both the complainant and the researcher concerned into account. This means that all information is investigated without prejudice.

Suspected cases must be reported using the system <https://fwf.academic-whistleblower.at/>; reports can also be submitted anonymously.

The person in charge of research integrity and research ethics at the FWF is notified and documents the suspected case in a database.

A plausibility check is carried out by the FWF to determine whether the suspicion raised is in connection with an application to the FWF or an FWF-funded project:

- 1) If the suspicion is unfounded, it is filed and no further action is taken.
- 2) If the suspected violation of academic standards has no connection to the FWF, the complainant is free to contact the research institution of the person concerned or the [Austrian Agency for Research Integrity \(ÖAWI\)](#).

There are possible indications of grounds for concern and a connection to the FWF:

- a) The FWF requests the complainant's consent to forward the suspicion to the researcher concerned and asks them for a statement on the concerns raised.
- b) The suspected infraction and the answering statement of the researcher concerned will be forwarded to the appropriate FWF [reporters](#), who will prepare and submit a written statement. The Executive Board of the FWF discusses the case and prepares a decision. The Executive Board acts here as a standing commission of the FWF Board. The decisions of the Executive Board on such matters require approval by the FWF Board.

The FWF decides on how to proceed:

- i) The suspicion is not confirmed

→ The process is discontinued and filed; no further action is taken.

ii) An infraction has been identified, the researcher concerned admits to the infraction, and the infraction in question is minor.

→ The FWF sends a cautionary letter to the researcher concerned (if necessary, with requests for amendments such as correction, retraction, etc.) and the research institution will be notified.

iii) The person concerned denies committing the violation, and the infraction in question is major or serious.

1) In most cases, a description of the suspected infraction and the answering statement of the researcher concerned are forwarded to the research institution affiliated with the project.

2) The research institution is obliged to initiate an investigation and to notify the FWF about the investigation and its results. Research institutions are required to notify the OeAWI of all suspected infractions.

3) If the research institution does not have a regular procedure for handling suspected cases of research misconduct, or if the FWF is of the opinion that the research institution will be unable to resolve the case definitively or within an appropriate amount of time, the FWF will take over the process and forward the case to the OeAWI. The decision-making process on the proposal in question will be suspended until a decision on the suspected research misconduct has been made.

4) After the research institution or the OeAWI has completed their investigation, the FWF decides on how to proceed:

Option 1: The suspicion is refuted.

→ The process is discontinued and filed, no further action is taken.

Option 2: The suspicion is confirmed.

→ The FWF Board decides on possible sanctions for the researcher concerned, depending on the extent of the infraction:

a) Minor violation = usually a cautionary letter (if necessary, with requests for amendments such as correction, retraction, etc.)

b) Substantial violation = usually a short- or medium-term ban on submitting further applications to the FWF

c) Serious violation = usually a long-term application ban, the project is discontinued, and/or repayment of funds already disbursed is demanded (according to the provisions of the grant agreement)

An appeal for amendment of the decision can be submitted to the FWF. Decisions must be amended if formal errors were made in the decision-making process or if facts relevant to the decision have arisen after the decision has been made (reassessment of the decision).

The FWF informs the OeAWI and the research institution about the outcome of the process.

Miscellaneous

- Suspected infractions and the measures taken by the FWF are published once a year on the website of the FWF in anonymized form.
- In this, as in all matters, all employees of the FWF Office and the decision-making bodies are obliged to maintain strict confidentiality.
- As a rule, accusations of research misconduct refer to applications and funded projects, including the results arising from them (e.g. publications).
- In principle, suspected infractions are only relevant to the FWF if they are associated with a proposal submitted to the FWF for funding or with FWF-funded research. In the case of international teams, the OeAWI forwards the allegations to the respective [ENRIO \(European Network of Research Integrity Offices\)](#) member organization.
- Research integrity and research ethics: The rules of good research practice apply to the research process; violations of ethical standards may overlap with research misconduct in some cases, but different procedures apply.
- Other regulations: Not every incidence of misconduct by researchers is a violation of the standards of good research practice, for example, if the infraction is subject to penalization under other legal regulations (e.g. labor law).

Classification of suspected violations of the standards of good research practice

The following list includes the most common types of infraction that may, but do not necessarily, represent research misconduct; each case requires individual clarification. This list is not exhaustive and is continually updated to reflect to recent developments.

Fabrication / falsification

- Falsification or invention of research findings
- Alteration of research findings
- Withholding of research findings
- Insufficient documentation of research findings

Plagiarism / disputed authorship

- Use of third-party ideas without indication of origin
- Multiple use of own research results without citation (self-plagiarism)
- Assertion of authorship without having made contribution
- Denial of authorship despite contribution
- Commissioning a ghostwriter or using machine-generated text without acknowledgement

Other

- Misuse of research funds
- Influencing of research findings
- Restriction, obstruction, or sabotage of research
- Discrimination against complainants (whistleblowers)
- Discrimination in professional advancement
- Copyright conflicts
- Violations of research ethics
- Other