

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

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 ensures that both the interests of the complainant and the researcher concerned are taken into account. This means that all the information is followed up on and examined in such a way as to avoid encouraging any premature judgments.

The person responsible for 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 a funded FWF project:

- a) If the suspicion is unfounded, it is filed.
- b) If the suspicion is not related to the FWF, the complainant is referred to the [Austrian Agency for Research Integrity \(ÖAWI\)](#).

There is an initial suspicion and a connection with the FWF:

1. The FWF requests the complainant's consent to forward the suspicion to the researcher concerned and asks him/her for a statement on the suspicion raised.
2. The suspicion and the statement of the researcher concerned will be forwarded to the appropriate [reporters of the FWF](#). They will 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 these matters require the subsequent approval of the FWF Board.

The FWF decides on how to proceed:

- 2.1. The suspicion is not confirmed
 - The process is discontinued and filed.
- 2.2. A violation has been clearly identified, is also admitted by the researcher concerned, and is a minor violation.
 - The FWF sends a cautionary letter to the researcher concerned.
- 2.3. A case of research misconduct is suspected.

→ The suspicion and the statement of the researcher concerned are generally forwarded to the research institution of the project.

2.3.1 The research institution is obliged¹ to initiate an investigation and to inform the FWF about the initiation and the result of the investigation. Suspected cases of serious misconduct must in any event be forwarded to the ÖAWI by the research institution.

2.3.2. 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 cannot resolve suspected cases definitively or within an appropriate amount of time, the FWF will take over the process and forward the case to the ÖAWI. The decision-making process of the project application in question is suspended until the decision on the suspected research misconduct has been made.

2.3.3. After the research institution or the ÖAWI has completed their investigation, the FWF decides on how to proceed:

Option 1: The statement of the research institution or the ÖAWI refutes the suspicion.

→ The process is discontinued and filed.

Option 2: The suspicion is confirmed by the research institution or the ÖAWI.

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

- a) Minor violation = usually cautionary letter (if necessary, with requests for amendments such as correction, retraction, etc.)
- b) Substantial violation = usually short- or medium-term application ban at the FWF
- c) Serious violation = usually long-term application ban, halt to the project, and/or repayment of funds already disbursed (according to the provisions of the grant agreement)

An amendment to the decision can be requested by the FWF. The decision has to be amended if formal errors have been made in the decision-making process or facts relevant to the decision have arisen after the decision has been made (= reassumption of the decision).

The FWF informs the ÖAWI about the outcome of the process.

¹ In the case of programmes that are not yet run via [PROFI](#), a recommendation is made to the research institution to initiate an investigation. If this is not possible, the FWF will take over the process.

Suspected cases and the measures taken by the FWF are published once a year on the website of the FWF in anonymised form.

Course of the procedure at the ÖAWI

- The ÖAWI investigates the suspicion and, if necessary, enlists external experts who report their findings to the [ÖAWI Commission](#).
- The commission prepares a statement; members of the commission must be independent of the Austrian scientific/academic system.
- The statement is forwarded to the FWF.
- The FWF Board decides on the further action.
- The decision of the FWF Board is also forwarded to the ÖAWI.

Miscellaneous

- In this, as in all matters, all members of the office and the decision-making bodies of the FWF are obliged to maintain strict confidentiality.
- As a rule, accusations of research misconduct relate to applications and funded projects, including the results arising from them (e.g., publications).
- In principle, suspected cases are only relevant to the FWF if they are associated with an application or approved funding. In the case of international teams, allegations are forwarded by the ÖAWI to the member organisations of [ENRIO \(European Network of Research Integrity Offices\)](#).
- Whistleblower protection: If a suspicion is raised, the complainants (whistleblowers) must provide their names to the FWF. However, the FWF can, if desired, guarantee confidentiality to the complainants. The ÖAWI usually does not pass on the names of complainants to the researchers concerned. Complainants must give their consent for the researchers concerned to be contacted. If it is a serious case, the ÖAWI will also contact the institution's management.
- Research integrity and research ethics: The rules of good research practice relate to the research process; in the case of violations of ethical regulations, points of contact with research misconduct may exist, but they are regulated by other procedures.
- Other regulations: Not every incidence of misconduct by researchers is a violation of the standards of good research practice if this behaviour can be penalised by other regulations (e.g., labour law).

Classification of suspected cases of violation of the standards of good research practice

The following list presents the most common types of cases that may but do not necessarily have to represent research misconduct. This always requires individual clarification. This list is dynamic and needs to be adapted 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 making this clear (self-plagiarism)
- Assertion of authorship without having made contribution
- Denial of authorship despite contribution
- Commissioning of a person other than the author without acknowledgement (ghostwriting)

Other

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