

# Good Research Practice

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## Guidelines for Safeguarding Good Research Practice and for the Handling of Misconduct in Research at the Centre for East European and International Studies

### Preamble

The Centre for East European and International Studies (ZOIS) is an independent, international, publicly funded research institute. It focuses on foundational and socially relevant academic research on Eastern Europe and shares the results with policymakers, the media and the broader public.

The constitutionally guaranteed freedom of research is inseparably linked to a corresponding responsibility. Academic integrity forms the basis for trustworthy research. It is a central element of the academic voluntary commitment that encompasses a respectful attitude towards peers, research participants, cultural assets and the environment and promotes public trust in research. It is an ethical norm guiding the research practice of all academics and research institutions alike. The research community itself ensures good research practice through fair and honest conduct and through organisational and procedural regulations.

These Guidelines are closely aligned with the Code of Conduct *Guidelines for Safeguarding Good Research Practice*, adopted by the German Research Foundation (*Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* – DFG) in August 2019, and include additional provisions of specific institutional relevance to ZOIS. Phrasing from the Code of Conduct has been incorporated, directly or indirectly, into these Guidelines.

In fulfilment of its research responsibilities and the associated objectives set forth in its Articles of Association, ZOIS has ensured that procedures are in place to deal with allegations of misconduct in research. ZOIS thus guarantees the responsible management and appropriate use of public funds and other grants and safeguards compliance with research standards.

All members of staff at ZOIS are required to adhere to these Guidelines in their research practice.

## Part 1 - Principles of Good Research Practice

1. The principles of good research practice aim to safeguard the integrity of research, i.e. the attainment and publication of research results.

All researchers at ZOIS have a duty to comply with the principles of good research practice and scholarly inquiry, with due regard for the type of research undertaken in the relevant subject area. The principles of good research practice include, in particular:

- ▶ working *lege artis*,

- ▶ documenting all results in full,
- ▶ consistently reviewing the validity and replicability of the research design and all research results,
- ▶ permitting critical discourse within the research community,
- ▶ maintaining strict honesty in attributing one's own contributions and those of others,
- ▶ avoiding and preventing misconduct in research.

2. At ZOIS, researchers at all career levels have a responsibility to comply with the principles and standards of research. This responsibility is communicated to early career researchers, in particular, at the earliest possible stage. To that end, all researchers engage in regular dialogue and update their subject-specific knowledge about the standards of good research practice and the current state of the art.

3. The Institute management establishes the legal and ethical frameworks for research. It communicates the principles of good research practice and monitors compliance with them. Its leadership role also includes the provision of support to all researchers in respect of their academic careers. This includes transparent written procedures for staff selection and development as well as appropriate early career support. ZOIS is committed to ensuring a work/life balance; the Institute management gives due consideration to gender equality and diversity.

4. The heads of the Research Clusters and project coordinators are responsible for their respective work units. They create frameworks for achieving the necessary collaboration in which all members of a Research Cluster and project understand their roles, rights and duties. In performing their leadership role, the heads of Research Clusters and project coordinators place particular emphasis on ensuring individual supervision of early career researchers and on career development for researchers and research support staff. Early career researchers benefit from a balance of support and personal responsibility appropriate to their career level. Formalised dialogue and exchange formats involving the research staff, heads of Research Clusters and the Institute management are in place to prevent the abuse of power and exploitation of dependent relationships.

5. The Institute management at ZOIS applies various criteria to assess the performance of its research staff. Assessment is based primarily on qualitative factors; quantitative aspects play a subordinate role. Alongside purely academic performance, other activities, such as providing early career support, teaching – insofar as the universities make opportunities available – and research communication are also taken into consideration. These matters are dealt with in individual agreements with all researchers.

## Part 2 - Research Process

1. In all phases of the research process, researchers are required to work *lege artis*. As a multidisciplinary research institute, ZOIS attaches particular importance to compliance with subject-specific standards and established methods. Replication and replicability are core elements in quality assurance relating to

research findings. All sources, data and software used in the research process are disclosed and cited. Researchers at ZOIS are required to ensure that the reuse of their research data and materials is clearly indicated in their project's data management plan. For legally compliant reuse of certain research findings, appropriate licences are provided in accordance with research standards.

The high standards of quality assurance also apply to all the formats in which research results are made available in the public domain.

If inconsistencies or errors are detected post-publication despite the quality assurance measures in place, prompt efforts must be made to correct the mistakes or errors, or the publication must be retracted. Information from third parties must be duly considered in this context.

2. The roles and responsibilities of all participants, researchers and research support staff are defined at the start of each research project. Over the course of the project, there is regular dialogue on any changes in responsibilities and work priorities, where relevant.

3. ZOIS establishes the organisational frameworks within which researchers acknowledge and take into full account the current state of research (state of the art) when planning a project; this must be based on careful research and evaluation of existing research in the public domain. Researchers are required to examine whether and to what extent gender and diversity dimensions may be of significance to their research project (when selecting methods, analytical categories, etc.).

4. ZOIS develops binding ethical guidance and policies and defines procedures to assess ethical issues relating to its research projects. It establishes appropriate organisational structures to ensure that research practice at the Institute complies with legal requirements.

Drawing on their expertise, researchers ensure that risks associated with their research projects are recognised and their impacts assessed and evaluated. In accordance with legal and contractual requirements, they must seek the necessary approvals, ethics statements and agreements on usage rights relating to data and results, which must be documented in writing in order, in particular, to regulate collaborative projects with third parties, including any change or withdrawal of participants. It must be ensured that in the event of any institutional change, usage rights relating to data are assigned to the person(s) who collected the said data. Participants' rights to use research data and results must be documented in writing at the earliest point in time and updated in all phases of the research process.

5. Standards for the selection of methods, the collection of research data and the description of research results are essential for the comparability and transferability of research outcomes. Against this background, researchers at ZOIS use scientifically sound and appropriate research methods that meet the standards applicable to their subject area. This includes the use of methods to avoid (unconscious) distortions in the interpretation of research data. When developing new methods, they attach importance to quality assurance and the implementation of standards.

6. In accordance with the requirements of their subject area, researchers at ZOIS document all information relevant to the production of a research result and thus ensure the replicability of their research findings. This also includes documenting individual results that do not support the research hypothesis. Selective

documentation is not permitted; the same applies to the manipulation of documentation or research results. If the documentation cannot satisfy these requirements, the reasons for this are clearly explained.

7. The decision to publish research results is a matter for the researchers involved in their production; this decision must not depend on third parties. As a rule, the research results should be made available in the public domain, with due regard for the conventions of the relevant subject area. The participating researchers are responsible for selecting the publication medium and format. In the publication, the results are presented clearly and in full, including the research data, materials and information on which the results are based, as well as the research design and software used. Researchers provide full and correct information about their own preliminary work and that of others. They avoid the repetition of the content of their research findings in multiple publications unless this is necessary for an understanding of the context. They also avoid splitting research into inappropriately small publications. Results previously made publicly available are cited in accordance with the general conventions of the discipline. The FAIR principles (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable) apply to the publication of research data.

8. The researchers are responsible for archiving research data and research findings that are made publicly available, as well as the research data (raw data and research software) on which they were based, for a minimum period of ten years in accordance with the standards applicable in the relevant subject area. The data may be archived at ZOIS or in a cross-location repository. Project leaders ensure the proper archiving of the data. This matter is regulated in more detail in ZOIS's Research Data Policy.

9. Authorship is justified if a person has made an independent, academic and identifiable contribution to a research publication of text, data or software. What constitutes a genuine and identifiable contribution constituting authorship must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis and depends on the subject area in question. A leadership or supervisory function does not itself justify co-authorship.

The consent of all authors is required for publication. Unless otherwise stated, the authors share responsibility for the publication and adhere to the required citation style. The decision as to the order in which authors are named is made in good time, normally no later than when the manuscript is drafted, and is based on clear criteria that reflect the practices within the relevant subject areas.

Consent to publication may not be refused without sufficient grounds. Refusal of consent must be justified with verifiable criticism of data, methods or results.

Any support provided that is not sufficient to justify authorship should be properly acknowledged in the foreword or footnotes. Honorary authorship is not permissible.

10. The authors are responsible for selecting an appropriate publication medium in accordance with the generally accepted principles of their particular discipline. A key criterion in selecting a publication medium, particularly in the case of a new or unknown publication medium, is whether it has established guidelines on good research practice. Researchers who assume the role of editor carefully select where they will carry out this activity. The scientific/academic quality of a contribution arises from the contribution itself and does not depend on the medium in which it is published. Academic repositories, data and software repositories, and blogs may also be considered.

11. ZOIS researchers who evaluate submitted manuscripts, funding proposals or enquiries relating to personal qualifications are obliged to maintain strict confidentiality. This precludes any sharing of the material with third parties or making personal use of it. Facts that may justify concerns about a conflict of interest must be disclosed. These obligations also apply to ZOIS staff who are, or become, members of advisory and decision-making bodies.

## Part 3 - Research Misconduct

Research misconduct is deemed to occur if, in a research-relevant context, individuals intentionally or with gross negligence make misrepresentations, infringe intellectual property rights or interfere with the research activities of third parties. Research misconduct includes, in particular:

### 1. Misrepresentation:

- a) by fabricating data,
- b) by falsifying data (e.g. by selecting desirable or omitting undesirable results or evaluation processes without disclosure thereof, or by manipulating an illustration or figure),
- c) by making inaccurate statements in an application, publication list or grant proposal (including false statements regarding the publication medium or publications in print),
- d) by using the same data or texts in multiple publications, without disclosure thereof.

2. Infringements of intellectual property rights pertaining to copyrighted work created by others or to significant research findings, hypotheses, teachings or research approaches by other persons, including, in particular:

- a) by incorporating or making other unauthorised use of others' content without appropriately indicating the source (plagiarism),
- b) by using others' research approaches and ideas without consent, particularly when acting as a reviewer (idea theft),
- c) by claiming, or assuming without justification, authorship or co-authorship (honorary authorship), or by refusing to allow justified co-authorship,
- d) by falsifying content,
- e) by publishing an unpublished work, finding, hypothesis, teaching or research approach, or otherwise making it available to third parties, without authorisation,
- f) by asserting the (co-)authorship of another person without their consent,
- g) by passing off texts written by third parties as one's own with their consent (ghostwriting).

3. Interference with others' research, in particular:

- a) damaging, destroying or manipulating equipment, documentation, hardware, software or other items required by others for research purposes,
- b) deletion of raw data, insofar as this violates legal provisions or accepted principles of research practice. This also applies to unlawful non-deletion (particularly of personal data).

#### 4. False or malicious allegations

The information disclosed by the complainant must be provided in good faith. Knowingly false or malicious allegations may themselves constitute misconduct.

#### 5. Shared responsibility for misconduct may arise, in particular, from:

- a) intentional participation in the misconduct of others,
- b) gross negligence of supervisory duties by the Institute management or of supervisory responsibilities by the Research Cluster heads,
- c) co-authorship or editorship of falsified publications.

## Part 4 - Dealing with Research Misconduct

### 1. Ombudspersons

ZOiS investigates each specific indication of possible research misconduct. The procedure for examining cases of alleged research misconduct as defined in Part 3 consists of a preliminary inquiry and a formal investigation.

Researchers at ZOIS elect an independent ombudsperson, i.e. a neutral and qualified contact person who can offer advice on issues relating to inconsistencies, potential misconduct and disputes. Persons who have sufficient professional experience, including in the management of research projects, are eligible to be selected as ombudsperson. The Institute management is responsible for conducting the election of the ombudsperson by secret ballot. In addition, the Academic Advisory Council elects a further ombudsperson from among its members. ZOIS researchers may contact one of these ombudspersons or the German Research Ombudsman, which is a cross-regional body. The two ombudspersons deputise for each other if there is any concern about conflicts of interest or if one ombudsperson is unable to carry out their duties. The Institute management ensures awareness of the ombudspersons at ZOIS and gives them the support they need to perform their duties.

The term of office of each ombudsperson is three years. Re-election or re-appointment for one further term is permitted.

The ZOIS ombudsperson acts when a matter is brought to their attention by a researcher. The ombudsperson may also take action in justified cases if they receive information from a third party about suspected research misconduct. Contact with the ombudsperson is treated confidentially.

## 2. Preliminary inquiry

The ombudsperson is in charge of the preliminary inquiry.

In cases of inconsistencies or disputes over behaviour which may constitute research misconduct, the ombudspersons elected by ZOIS and the Academic Advisory Council and the cross-regional German Research Ombudsman may be requested to provide advice and mediation. This process is confidential. All persons involved in the process at ZOIS must take appropriate measures to protect both the complainant and the individual who is the subject of the allegations (the 'respondent'). This includes the presumption of innocence, which is respected at each stage of the process.

- a) Allegations of research misconduct must generally be submitted to the ombudsperson in writing. The ombudsperson may consider whether to investigate anonymous allegations. In principle, a proper preliminary inquiry requires the complainant's identity to be known.
- b) The disclosure must not disadvantage the research or professional career prospects of either the complainant or the respondent. Should research misconduct not be proven, care must be taken to protect the complainant, assuming that the allegations cannot be shown to have been made against their better knowledge.
- c) The name of the complainant must be treated confidentially and may not be disclosed to third parties without consent. This also applies in cases where the complainant's identity is known. Their identity may be disclosed to the respondent in individual cases if the respondent would otherwise be unable to defend themselves properly. However, the complainant's name may be disclosed only if this does not disadvantage their research or professional career prospects.
- d) The ombudsperson confirms to the complainant within one week of receipt that the communication alleging misconduct has been received. The individual who is the subject of the allegations of misconduct is notified of the incriminating facts promptly and given the opportunity to respond; their statement must be submitted within two weeks.
- e) After the respondent's statement has been reviewed or the deadline has expired, the ombudsperson decides within two weeks whether further investigatory measures are required as part of the preliminary inquiry and what these measures should be; the ombudsperson then initiates the implementation of the measures without delay.
- f) As the outcome of the preliminary inquiry, the ombudsperson may discontinue the investigation for lack of evidence or due to insignificance. All parties are notified of this decision without delay. The decision is communicated to the complainant first. If the complainant disagrees with the discontinuance of the inquiry, they have the right to remonstrate with the ombudsperson within two weeks. In this case, the Commission of Inquiry is consulted. The Commission decides whether to launch a formal investigation.
- g) If the preliminary inquiry confirms that there is reasonable suspicion of misconduct, the case is referred for formal investigation.

### 3. Formal investigation

- a) If the procedure cannot be discontinued by the ombudsperson after the preliminary inquiry, or if the complainant exercises their right to remonstrate, the case is referred for formal investigation. The ombudsperson reports the alleged case of research misconduct to the Institute management. The Institute management then convenes a Commission of Inquiry without delay. If the allegation of misconduct relates to the Institute management itself, the following measures must be taken by the Academic Advisory Council in consultation with the Foundation Board.
- b) The Commission of Inquiry consists of the Chair of the Academic Advisory Council, the ombudsperson, a legal adviser, the head of the relevant Research Cluster and a colleague of equivalent standing. The Commission of Inquiry appoints one of its members as its Chair. The Commission of Inquiry may also appoint external researchers as Commission members to examine the individual case, or request other persons to investigate individual aspects. Should a Commission member be suspected of having a conflict of interest in the case in question, a replacement must be appointed by the Commission of Inquiry. The same procedure applies in the event that a Commission member is unable to carry out their duties.
- c) The members of the Commission of Inquiry have equal voting rights. The legal adviser and the ombudsperson sit on the Commission in an advisory capacity. The Commission is quorate if at least half the voting members are present.
- d) As part of the formal investigation, the Commission's task is to deliberate the findings of the preliminary inquiry and, within an appropriate time frame, to determine conclusively whether and to what extent research misconduct has occurred in the case in question. The Commission freely assesses the evidence presented. The Commission of Inquiry deliberates orally and in private and may request further information or statements. The Commission gives the individual who is the subject of the allegations and the complainant the opportunity to make a statement. The statements may be made in writing or orally. Both parties may involve a trusted person as counsel.
- e) The members of the Commission of Inquiry and all persons involved in or informed about the investigation are bound by the duty of confidentiality.
- f) In general, the Commission of Inquiry's investigation should be concluded within a maximum of three months after the Commission's constituent meeting.
- g) The Commission compiles a report which either provides justification for the discontinuance of the investigation or determines that research misconduct has occurred.
- h) If the Commission of Inquiry concludes that research misconduct has occurred, i.e. a majority of the Commission finds that research misconduct has been sufficiently proven, the report should state, in particular, whether such conduct occurred intentionally or with gross negligence; it should also assess the severity of the misconduct and propose appropriate sanctions.

The report should also address the question of whether the research misconduct may be sufficient to warrant the revocation of academic degrees. Lastly, the report should state whether any other research organisations were affected by the misconduct and should therefore be notified accordingly.



#### 4. Conclusion of the procedure

- a) The submission of the report concludes the investigation and marks the end of the Commission of Inquiry's work.

The Institute management notifies all persons involved of the findings of the investigation and, based on the Commission's report, decides on the further procedure. Options include the discontinuance of the inquiry or a referral for disciplinary proceedings.

- b) Based on the established facts and depending on the severity of the misconduct, disciplinary proceedings may lead to the imposition of various sanctions:

- ▶ measures provided for under labour law, such as a reprimand, warning or dismissal,
- ▶ enforcement of compensation claims,
- ▶ criminal charges.

- c) If the Commission of Inquiry's report concludes that the research misconduct may warrant the revocation of academic degrees, the Institute management refers the matter to the university which conferred the degree. The same applies to any research organisations that may be affected.

- d) The investigation and all factors of relevance to the decision must be documented in full. The Commission will determine on a case-by-case basis whether there is a well-founded public interest in anonymised publication of the details of the investigation, with due regard for the privacy rights of all persons involved.

These Guidelines shall enter into force in accordance with the decision of the Academic Advisory Council, having been duly noted by ZOIS's Foundation Board, following their announcement on the ZOIS Intranet and publication on the ZOIS website. The Guidelines for Safeguarding Good Research Practice and for the Handling of Allegations of Misconduct in Research at the Centre for East European and International Studies, dated June 2018, are therefore no longer valid.

Berlin, 11 January 2022