



**Guidelines to ensure good scientific practice at the  
University of Natural Resources and Life  
Sciences, Vienna**

## **Preamble**

Scientific work serves to generate knowledge, and the activities of researchers at the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences are based on a high sense of responsibility towards fellow human beings and the environment, in accordance with our mission statement. Research activities, which contribute to safeguarding the livelihood of future generations and to the sustainable use of natural resources, are guided by the constant application of the precautionary principle. In addition, the integrity of the scientist is an indispensable basic element for a high ethical status of scientific activity in society. In contrast to error -which is sometimes difficult to delimitate- dishonesty in scientific work contradicts the nature of science and the scientist's responsibility to society. No set of rules can replace honesty. With these regulations, the University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences aims to establish a framework for good scientific practice in order to prevent misconduct, to intervene and to regulate and to mediate in the event of such misconduct or, in serious cases, to punish it accordingly.

## **A) General principles for scientific work**

Scientists and junior scientists at BOKU undertake to act in accordance with the general principles of good scientific practice.

This includes, among other things

- to work *lege artis*,
- to document results in a comprehensible manner,
- to consistently question all results oneself,
- to maintain strict honesty with regard to the contributions of partners, competitors and predecessors,
- Collaboration and leadership responsibility in working groups,
- the supervision and promotion of young scientists,
- the safeguarding and storage of primary data and compliance with the FAIR principles
- the mandatory citation of sources and transparency regarding the generation of results when using AI (e.g. ChatGPT).

In this context, §2 of the Standards of Good Scientific Practice of the GWP Guidelines of the Austrian Agency for Research Integrity (OeAWI) (<https://oeawi.at/richtlinien/>) and the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (DOI: 10.26356/ECOC) must also be observed.

Violations of good scientific practice are to be dealt with for students in accordance with the statutes of the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences. Adherence to the principles of good scientific practice is a duty of service for scientists at the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences in accordance with the Compliance Guidelines.

## **B) Scientific misconduct:**

1) Scientific misconduct is deemed to have occurred if, in a scientifically relevant context, false statements are made deliberately or through gross negligence, the intellectual property of others is infringed or their research activities are impaired, in particular through

a) false statements such as

- the fabrication of data,
- falsifying data, e.g. by selecting and rejecting undesirable results without disclosing them, or by manipulating a representation or figure,
- providing incorrect information in a letter of application or an application for funding (including false information about the publication medium and publications in print),

b) infringement of intellectual property rights in relation to a copyrighted work created by someone else or to essential scientific findings, hypotheses, doctrines or research approaches originating from others, such as

- the unauthorized exploitation under presumption of authorship (plagiarism),
- the exploitation of research approaches and ideas, in particular as a reviewer (theft of ideas),
- the presumption or unfounded assumption of scientific authorship or co-authorship
- falsification of the content,
- unauthorized publication and unauthorized making available to third parties as long as the work, finding, hypothesis, teaching or research approach has not yet been published, or

c) claiming the (co-)authorship of others without their consent,

d) sabotaging research activities, including damaging, destroying or manipulating experimental set-ups, equipment, documents, hardware, software, chemicals or other items that others need to carry out an experiment, and

e) the removal of primary data, insofar as this violates statutory provisions or recognized disciplinary principles of scientific work.

2) Scientific misconduct also consists of behavior that results in joint responsibility for the misconduct of others, in particular through active participation, joint knowledge of falsifications, co-authorship of falsified publications or gross neglect of supervisory duties, this applies in particular to the supervision of scientific work by students.

### **C) Main principles of the ombudsman's office:**

- 1) Protection of the dignity and good reputation of all involved must have top priority. The legal requirements must be taken into account.
- 2) The ombudsman's office is open to all members of BOKU, as well as to others who feel affected by violations of good scientific practice by members of BOKU.
- 3) The Ombuds Office shall initiate and conduct an investigation procedure as soon as it is notified of scientific misconduct. This procedure is to be carried out independently and without regard to the position of the accused.
- 4) The accused must be given the opportunity to make a statement in the course of the proceedings.
- 5) Any bias of persons involved in an investigation against the accused must be reported immediately.
- 6) When investigating violations of good scientific practice, the head of the ombudsman's office must ensure that neither the members of the investigative commission nor the appointed experts show bias towards those involved in the proceedings.
- 7) Until culpable misconduct is proven, the information on the parties involved in the proceedings and the findings to date must be treated as strictly confidential.
- 8) The internal procedure does not replace any relevant legal proceedings (e.g. under civil or criminal law).
- 9) The University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences is a full member of the Austrian Agency for Research Integrity (OeAWI) and can therefore refer suspected cases of research misconduct to the agency. This should be done in particular in the case of particularly serious cases of scientific misconduct, or if the impartiality of members of the ombudsman's office and/or expert advisors cannot be established in the case under investigation, or if one of the parties concerned requests that the OeAWI be consulted.

## **D) Bodies to be established:**

Establishment of an ombudsman's office at the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna

- 1) The ombudsman's office is headed by an ombudsperson. The ombudsperson serves as a contact person for university members who have allegations of scientific misconduct to make and for others who feel affected by violations of good scientific practice by members of BOKU. As a person of trust, the ombudsperson advises those who inform him/her of suspected scientific misconduct or fraud and takes up relevant information of which he/she becomes aware on his/her own initiative.
- 2) Only a professor with academic experience may be appointed as ombudsperson.
- 3) The ombudsperson has 4 deputies in the event of bias or absence. The work of the ombudspersons is honorary. The members of the ombudsperson's office perform their duties independently and without being bound by instructions.
- 4) Members of the Rectorate and the Chair of the Senate cannot be appointed as ombudspersons or their deputies. The ombudsperson and the 4 deputies are elected by the Senate for a period of 3 years on the basis of a joint proposal by the Rectorate and the Senate Chair.
- 5) Establishment of an investigation committee.

In the event of a report of academic misconduct, the head of the ombudsperson's office will set up an ad hoc investigation committee for the respective case (subject-specific). Care must be taken to ensure that the proposed members of the commission are impartial and independent of the parties concerned. The investigating committee examines whether scientific misconduct has occurred and draws up a proposal for further proceedings, also with regard to safeguarding the rights of others. The commission consists of four habilitated university lecturers, at least two of whom are professors, and a chairperson. The ombudsperson or the deputy chairperson chairs the commission.

## **E) Procedure:**

### I) Preliminary examination:

- 1) The ombudsperson receives allegations of academic misconduct or fraud. Anonymous allegations will not be pursued. The ombudsperson may also take action on his/her own initiative or at the request of the Rectorate, Senate or the Research Working Group (departmental research spokespersons).
- 2) Determining whether there are any justified indications of academic misconduct (see point Academic misconduct) and whether it could potentially be serious misconduct.
- 3) If there is reasonable suspicion, the Rectorate is informed. In the event of suspected serious misconduct, the ombudsman's office will forward the case directly to the agency (OeAWI) for further handling or, in less serious cases, will initiate an internal investigation.
- 4) If the suspicion proves to be unfounded, the proceedings will be discontinued. However, if the accused wishes the investigating commission to be set up anyway, this must be guaranteed.

### II) Investigation by the commission:

- 1) The person concerned must be given the opportunity to comment on the allegations within 3 weeks. In the event of absence, this period must be extended accordingly by the commission if necessary. The incriminating and exonerating facts and evidence must be documented in writing.
- 2) The Commission shall meet for deliberation no later than 14 days after the expiry of the deadline.
- 3) The Commission's deliberations shall be oral and shall not be open to the public.
- 4) The commission may call in experts in an advisory capacity.
- 5) The accused must be given sufficient opportunity to justify him/herself.
- 6) The accused may call in a trusted person to assist him/her.
- 7) The commission of inquiry must take all steps necessary to clarify the facts of the case. To this end, it may obtain all necessary information and opinions.
- 8) Decisions of the commission are made by simple majority.
- 9) The Rectorate and the Senate shall be informed if misconduct is established. Decisions on punishment and consequences are made depending on the circumstances of the individual case.