

Overview:

Principles and procedures for reporting and investigation of research misconduct allegations at ISTA

1 Inquiries to Ombudspersons at ISTA

- The Ombudspersons are available for advice and information regarding research integrity to all employees of ISTA. Further, the Ombudspersons can be addressed if there are any grievances regarding scientific or academic behavior. In particular, they are the points of contact at ISTA for reporting of complaints or possible incidences of misconduct related to research, teaching, and/or scientific supervision.
- The Ombudspersons are independent in their work as contact persons for confidential meetings.
- The information that the Ombudspersons receive in any advisory meetings stays confidential unless agreed otherwise, with the complainant, with the following two exceptions:
 - The complainant will be informed beforehand if the following applies: The Ombudspersons have to inform each other about submitted allegations of research misconduct (see the Guidelines for Good Scientific Practice for definitions). Protection of the whistleblower, and maintaining confidentiality as much as possible are important principles for the Ombudspersons at ISTA.
 - Inquiries to Ombudspersons are summarized in anonymized form in an annual report to the President of ISTA.

2 Handling allegations of research misconduct

- Allegations of suspected research misconduct have to be brought to the attention of one of the Ombudspersons.
- The Ombudspersons have to inform each other about submitted allegations of misconduct unless there is a substantiated reason why the second Ombudsperson should not be involved, e.g. conflict of interest or the Ombudsperson is involved in the case or accused of misconduct.
- Once an allegation of misconduct has been received, together the Ombudspersons make an initial evaluation of the allegation, and establish whether further action will be needed. The following questions have to be considered:
 - Does the allegation involve research that is/was carried out at ISTA? Is/Are the alleged person(s) researcher(s) that are/were employed at ISTA when this research was conducted? The Ombudspersons (or their appointed supplements in case of a conflict of interest, respectively) will only follow up on allegations that involve research conducted at ISTA and/or personnel that are/were employed at ISTA when this research was conducted.
 - Does the allegation fall within the definitions of research misconduct as outlined in the Guidelines for Good Scientific Practice of the Austrian Agency for Research Integrity that are in place at ISTA?
 - Is the allegation sufficiently credible and specific to warrant an inquiry?
 - How serious is the allegation? This could determine how and by whom it should be handled further.
 - Is there sufficient evidence to support an in-depth investigation, or is further documentation required before deciding on this?
 - Are there implications for notifying other research institutions, publishers, or external funders based on terms of funding agreements?

3 Preliminary investigation

- In case of serious allegations of research misconduct and/or if more evidence and information about an allegation is needed, a preliminary investigation has to be carried out by the Ombudspersons. At this stage, the President and Executive Vice-President have to be alerted to all serious allegations likely to lead to further action by the institute.
- In the course of the preliminary investigation, the concerned scientists are to be informed of the accusation and be given an opportunity to respond. The name of a whistleblower shall not be disclosed at this stage unless this is necessary, e.g. because accused persons would otherwise be unable to defend themselves properly, or the names of the involved persons are obvious due to the circumstances of the case.
- The Ombudspersons have to inform everyone involved in the investigation in writing about the need for confidentiality of all aspects related to the preliminary investigation. Any transferred information should be confined to details that are relevant for the case and, if this subsequently becomes necessary, the persons relevant for the procedure.
- Possible outcomes of a preliminary investigation:
 - Allegation of research misconduct is untenable or unsubstantiated:
If the Ombudspersons decide that all currently available information has been obtained and no further follow-up is possible or necessary at this stage, the Ombudspersons can close the case after the preliminary investigation.
 - Finding of minor forms of questionable research practices or research misconduct
The Ombudspersons can conclude that no formal investigation is necessary if the type and severity of the wrongdoing constitute a minor form of questionable research practices or research misconduct. Depending on the details of the case, the Ombudspersons decide on further actions, e.g. recommendations for preventive measures or consequences to the involved persons and/or the management of ISTA.
 - Finding of substantiated allegations of serious research misconduct, such as the fabrication or falsification of results, plagiarism, or other forms of severe scientific misconduct.

4 Formal investigation

- If a preliminary investigation substantiates the suspicion of research misconduct, the President of ISTA and the member of the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees appointed as Scientific Member Responsible for Research Integrity shall be informed by the Ombudspersons, accompanied by a written report. After consulting the President, the Scientific Member Responsible for Research Integrity may decide on a more detailed internal investigation and/or to forward the case to the Austrian Agency for Research Integrity, with the request to initiate a formal investigation.
- For internal, formal investigations, detailed procedures are available that have to be followed. For formal investigations handed over to the Austrian Agency for Research Integrity (Österreichische Gesellschaft für wissenschaftliche Integrität; OeAWI), these tasks will be performed by the OeAWI.
- After the investigation has been concluded and all persons involved have been informed, decisions on disciplinary measures and any other steps to be taken, including public information, lie with the President and the Scientific Member Responsible for Research Integrity of the Board of Trustees.