Research integrity in practice

Promoting research integrity and preventing and handling violations is the responsibility not only of researchers themselves, but also of research groups and institutions.

Promoting research integrity

Research integrity, along with the two other pillars of research ethics and professional ethics, contributes to the quality of science and the robustness of the knowledge that is produced. The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (revised in 2017) is the reference text and identifies four fundamental values: accountability, respect, honesty and reliability.

All the actors contributing to research activities, whether individually or collectively, must adopt these values and strive to promote them in order to prevent misconduct.

Preventing misconduct

The prevention of misconduct requires individual, collective and institutional action based on the values of research integrity. These values must:

- be taught to future generations of researchers and citizens,
- receive particular attention in the evaluations organised by Hcéres (institutions, clusters, research entities, study programmes) and in the four-yearly evaluation of researchers.

This focus should be reinforced in researcher recruitment and promotion processes and in research funding. The institutions adopt a general policy on research integrity which is monitored by an officer reporting to the head of the institution. Within the framework of this policy, the institutions encourage, support and organise all the initiatives designed to make the values of research integrity central to their processes: San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment, servers for filing data and publications, organisation of training courses and conferences, etc.

Handling misconduct

Each research operator (university, institution, agency, etc.) is and remains responsible for handling any misconduct brought to their attention within their organisation, and ensures that appropriate action is taken.

When a suspected violation is reported (plagiarism, falsification or fabrication of data, conflicts of interest, questionable research practices), the institution acts promptly to implement a procedure similar to an administrative investigation, under the operational responsibility of its research integrity officer. The investigation collects, examines and appraises the facts pertaining to the report, hearing witnesses and calling in experts where applicable. This investigation is conducted objectively, with due process and in a manner that respects the presumption of innocence and protects all those involved.

The results of the investigation are made public, ensuring the right balance between transparency and the protection of the persons involved (sources, witnesses and other people concerned, including the accused).
If the investigation confirms the allegation, all necessary measures are taken promptly from the academic (correction or withdrawal of the articles, for example), disciplinary and civil points of view, where applicable. In liaison with the OFIS, all the possible lessons are learned from each situation that is analysed, in order to improve the prevention of violations in the future.

Alongside OFIS, the role of the Professional Ethics Board set up on 7 May 2018 within the Ministry for Higher Education, Research and Innovation is to draw particular attention to the articulation between the rights and obligations of public agents and the practices and particular demands of academic life. It focuses especially on conflicts of interests and plural activities.

### Training as a driver

Training is a fundamental driver in the development of a culture of research integrity. The commitment of the institutions requires the mobilisation of the community and training at all levels of involvement in scientific activities. This process begins by awareness raising on research integrity from the moment of admission to higher education. The Ministerial Order of 25 May 2016 establishes the national training framework and procedures for delivery of the national doctorate diploma (Article 3-3). Doctoral schools are therefore responsible for ensuring “that each doctoral student receives training in research ethics and research integrity.” These training courses are accessible in a variety of formats specific to each site and use participatory teaching methods.

In time, the aim is that this training should raise the awareness of all the men and women who contribute to research activities: researchers (doctoral students, postdocs and confirmed or experienced researchers) as well as technical and administrative staff.

### The actors: research integrity officers

The circular issued by the Secretary of State for Higher Education and Research in March 2017 demands that all research operators endow themselves with a general policy for the promotion of research integrity that “addresses awareness raising, training, prevention and control at one and the same time.” It also demands that heads of institutions appoint a research integrity officer who will report to them and oversee the effective implementation of this policy.

#### Their missions

The research integrity officer is a recognised researcher who is relieved of their scientific management and research duties.

Their missions are defined in the 2017 Guidelines drawn up by the authors of the Corvol Report:

- ensuring the effective implementation of the general research integrity policy of the institution,
- ensuring that the systems and procedures for preventing and handling violations of research integrity are introduced,
- reporting to the head of the institution.

He or she is the first contact person for any actors in research who might have any questions on research integrity and for all those who think they may have witnessed a violation worthy of attention.

- [List of research integrity officers](#)
- [Guide pour le recueil et le traitement des signalements relatifs à l'intégrité scientifique](#)

#### Their network

In addition to their main activity in their own institution, these officers share their experiences (anonymously) and coordinate their action in a national network, RESINT, grouping together all the French officers, coordinated by Michel Pernot (Université Bordeaux-Montaigne) and Michelle Hadchouel (Inserm).

#### Testimonial
A word from Anne Fogli
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See the testimonial