

Towards Collaboration in the Investigation of International Cases of Research Misconduct: Issues and Recommendations

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On Collaboration in the Investigation of International Cases of Research Misconduct: a History

- OECD GSF (2009): recommendations for researchers in the planning stage of international projects: agree on how any (allegations of) misconduct will be handled in advance
- WCRI Montreal Statement (2013): responsibilities of individual and institutional partners in cross-boundary research collaborations: “The collaboration as a whole should have procedures in place for responding to allegations of misconduct or other irresponsible research practice by any of its members.”
- Russell Group (2018): describes desired standards for cross-institutional investigations of alleged research misconduct
- ENRIO handbook (2019): stresses the need to know more about issues related to cross-boundary investigation and for common European policies and procedures. Also, lists scenarios, process recommendations, and practical tips.
- OECD (2022): Scientific publications involving international collaborations in 2020: **28%**

Next steps: Objectives

- Gather and analyze empirical data on issues specific to the investigation of alleged cases of cross-border misconduct
- Derive implementable recommendations and develop resources for investigating bodies and whistleblowers
- Take steps toward implementation of recommended infrastructure

Method

- Established working group representing national agencies and institutional RIOs from the DACH region
- Conducted a literature review related to specific problems in investigating international cases
- Analyzed cross-border cases from the participating agencies to identify additional problems and content- and process-related specifics to known factors
- Categorized issues
- Conducted a dialogue (DACH Meeting Feb. 2024 in Vienna) to sharpen the issues identified and seek practical solutions

We thank all contributors

- Raffael Iturrizaga (ETH Zurich): special thanks for his contributions to the working group
- Anna K. Rothwangl, Markus Seethaler, Mirjam Meindl (Austrian Student Ombuds Office): special thanks for organizing the DACH-Meeting in Vienna together with OeAWI
- Additional contributors at the DACH-Meeting:
 - Martin Steinberger, Kirsten Hüttemann, Philip Ridder (DFG)
 - Christina Baumann (Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research, Switzerland)
 - Claudia Stermsek (University of Vienna)
 - Balomiri Horea (AQ Austria)



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Issues Identified by the DACH Working Group on Cross-Border Cases

- Based on analysis of 88 cross-border case investigations of alleged research misconduct

Issue categories identified:

- General national differences
- National and/or institutional differences specific to GSP
- General problems that can be exacerbated in cross-border cases

General national/cross-boundary differences

- Communication
 - Language barriers hinder
 - Fact finding/research
 - Evaluation of documents
 - Oral communication
 - Level of digitalization
 - Infrastructure: e.g., reliable internet connection
 - Digitalization of documents, e.g., in archives, university libraries
 - Availability of digitalization upon request

General national/cross-boundary differences

- Different legal systems governing education, research and other contexts relevant to GSP
- Cultural differences: expectations concerning
 - Forms and channels of communication
 - Roles of parties involved
 - Rights and obligations of individuals and institutions

National and/or institutional differences specific to GSP

- GSP basics:
 - Definitions: e.g., what are the responsible bodies called and what is their scope?
 - How is GSP defined and how the various types of violations against it?
- In that context: how is science/research defined? Which research findings are expected to be public?
 - E.g., how is the discourse on GSP related to science security?
- GSP infrastructure: absence of or relevant differences between
 - National laws and/or institutional regulations (e.g., on data protection)
 - National and/or institutional guidelines
 - Responsible bodies (national and/or institutional)
 - Contact persons (national and/or institutional)

National and/or institutional differences specific to GSP

- Competence
 - How is competence for a case defined?
 - What happens if the competence-definitions of institutions overlap?
 - What happens if cases fall into gaps between competence-territories?
- Confidentiality
 - Who is a party to the investigation?
 - Who can/has to be informed of what and at what stage?
- Interpretation of GSP guidelines:
 - E.g., in regard to rights to data use, author rights

General problems that can be exacerbated in cross-border cases

- Institutions without commitment to GSP guidelines or not implementing them (e.g., some publishers, journals, museums)
- Whistleblowers or accused persons not employed by a responsible institution
- Non-responsive parties
- Internationally active malicious whistleblowers
- Alternative priorities that compete with those of GSP

Deliberation of Implementable Solutions: Results

Considerations:

- Options for direct collaboration between institutions are limited by confidentiality requirements
- Information on existing resources needs to be
 - easily findable for local staff and up-to-date
 - for case investigators and whistleblowers

Planned Actions:

- Create a guideline for institutional investigators and whistleblowers on options related to processing/reporting cross-boundary cases
- Establish a referral-network with one central information hub per country
- Intensify exchange related to structures and processes to identify paths to collaboration

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The background features a dark blue gradient with intricate, flowing patterns of light blue and green. These patterns consist of thin, wavy lines and clusters of small dots, creating a sense of movement and depth. The overall aesthetic is modern and digital.

Thank you!

Any questions?

questions beyond the conference: sabine.chai@oeawi.at