

An Exploration of Institutional Research Integrity: Finding Synergies and Best Practices that Work

Eleni Spyrou¹, Leonidas Ananiadis¹, Eleni Flack-Davison², Shaun Schoeman², Sidney Engelbrecht³, Rob Anderson³, Costas A. Charitidis¹

¹Research Unit of Advanced, Composite, Nano Materials and Nanotechnology, School of Chemical Engineering, National Technical University of Athens, Greece

²Office of research Integrity, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg (Wits), South Africa

³Research Compliance, King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST), Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

OUR OBJECTIVES

Via a comparative study, we aimed at exploring the practices promoting responsible and ethical conduct of research followed by three universities located in different time zones and continents (NTUA in Greece/host of the 8th WCRI, Wits University in South Africa/host of the 7th WCRI, KAUST in Saudi Arabia),

THE METHOD

- Exploring the established practices and the challenges experienced by our institutions regarding the promotion of research integrity, and the potential synergies.
- Comparing the national laws or guidelines governing specifically research integrity, as well as the extent to which our institutions rely on WCRI statements and other international guidelines and best practices.

INSTITUTIONS' IDENTITY



NTUA

Founded in 1837

- 9 Schools, 40 Departments

Civil Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, Electrical & Computer Engineering, Architecture, Chemical Engineering, Rural, Surveying and Geoinformatics Engineering, Mining & Metallurgical Engineering, Naval Architecture & Marine Engineering, Applied Mathematics & Physical Sciences

- Total 23.914 students (1.950 postgraduate)
- Funding Sources: National and International Funding



WITS

- Founded in 1922

- 5 Faculties

Health Sciences (houses the Wits Steve Biko Bioethics Centre), Sciences, Engineering and the built Environment, Commerce, Law and Management, Humanities

- Total 39.867 students (2024): 14.847 undergraduate, 25.020 postgraduate
- Funding Sources: Local, National and International Funding



KAUST

- Founded in 2009

- 3 Divisions

BESE - Biological, Environmental Sciences and Engineering, CEMSE - Computer, Electrical and Mathematical Sciences and Engineering, and PSE - Physical Sciences and Engineering

- Graduate University : 1649 Postgraduate students, 540 Postdoctoral Fellows, 119 countries/nationalities

GOVERNANCE & STRUCTURE

	NTUA	WITS	KAUST
Centralised/Decentralised	Centralised approach via the Vice-Rectors' Offices. No separate Office dedicated to Research Integrity	Centralised Research Office with a Research Integrity Office	Centralised Office of the Vice President with a Research Compliance Office
National oversight body	National Commission for Bioethics & Technoethics (Not for research integrity)	National Health Research Ethics Council - for RECs (Not Research Integrity)	National Committee on Bioethics - for RECs/IRBs (Not for research integrity)
Policy Framework	Research Conduct Policy, no distinct Research Integrity Policy	Research Integrity Policy supported by a Research Integrity Procedure	Research Integrity (RI) Policy supported by a Research Misconduct (RM) Procedure and Questionable Research Practices Procedure
Institutional Guidelines	Research Ethics and Deontology Guide	Guidelines on Authorship / Plagiarism Policy / Research Data Management Policy / Data Management Plan / Conflict of Interest	Guideline on Publication Ethics and Authorship, Guideline on Internal Research Collaboration and Data Management
Committee Documentation	Standard Operating Procedures, Code of Conduct, The Operational Guide of Ethics Committee of Research	Each Research Ethics Committee / IBC have an approved Terms of Reference and Standard Operating Procedures. Code of Conduct for each REC member	Each committee (listed below) has a Charter and Terms of Reference, Standard Operating Procedures, Safety Manuals, etc.
Research-related Committees	Research Ethics and Deontology Committee, Research and Management Committee	Advisory Committee on Ethics Wits HREC: Non-Medical Wits HREC: Medical Wits Biobank Ethics Committee (BEC) Wits Animal Research Ethics Committee (AREC) Wits Institutional Biosafety Committee (IBC)	IBEC - Institutional Biosafety and Bioethics Committee IACUC - Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee DCB - Dive Control Board IRSC - Institutional Radiation Safety Committee
International Guidelines	Additional Protocol to the Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine, concerning Biomedical research by the Council of Europe (2005), EU Regulation 1946/2003, EU 679/2016 - GDPR, Oviedo Convention, EU 63/2010 on research animals' protection	Belmont Report, CIOMS, Hong Kong Statement, Singapore Statement, Montreal Statement, NIH Guidelines for IBC	Belmont Report, CIOMS Guidelines, Hong Kong Statement, Singapore Statement, Montreal Statement, NIH OBA Guidelines
Accreditations	Hellenic Authority for Higher Education	FWA (HREC - Medical), NIH (IBC), NHREC accredited Wits HREC: Non-Medical, Wits HREC: Medical and Biobank Ethics Committee (BEC), Wits AREC	AAALAC - Our Animal Program is AAALAC-accredited
Responsible Persons	Vice-Rector of Research, Innovation and Extroversion, the Research Ethics and Deontology Committee, the University's Integrity Advisor	Deputy Vice Chancellor: Research and Innovation	University President, Vice-President for Research
Research Misconduct Procedures	The Student's Advocate, Research Ethics and Deontology Committee (REDC)	Research Integrity Policy supported by a Research Integrity Procedure / Student Academic Misconduct Policy	Guided by RI Policy and RM Procedure, Procedures: (i) Preliminary Review of the Allegations (ii) Investigation Committee
Whistle blowing	The Student's Advocate, Research Ethics and Deontology Committee (REDC)	Wits Integrity - Via University website, email and mobile number and each REC and IBC has a process for whistleblowing through the Research Integrity Office	EthicsPoint - via university (KAUST) website

CONCLUSIONS

- Variations in terminology used (in institutional structures and documents).
- Challenges in having research integrity high on the research agenda and promoting research integrity realistically, primarily driven by a research management function. This may be due to a shortage of funding or capacity.
- Challenges in the efficiency in handling research misconduct when it arises. Possibly due to a lack of resources and understanding and appreciation for the adjudication of research misconduct matters.
- In Greece, it seems that research ethics and research integrity overlap but are kept separate, whilst in South Africa and Saudi Arabia ethics and integrity are integrated together and are not separate.

