

Network of Research Integrity Offices in Germany

Professionalizing Ombuds Work in Academia: A Practical Guide for Ombudspersons

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Ombudspersons at German universities & non-university research institutions

- Tasks:
 - Advice on questions related to research integrity
 - Solution-oriented conflict mediation
 - Acceptance of reports of suspected research misconduct
- Requirements by the DFG Code of Conduct (2019, Guideline 6):
 - At least one ombudsperson and one deputy per institution → ombuds office as honorary position
 - At maximum two terms of office
 - „Persons of integrity“ with „management experience“
- Training opportunities for ombudspersons:
 - 1.5-day workshop by DFG & Centre for Research Management (ZfM)
 - Every 2 years: symposium of the *Ombuds Committee for Research Integrity in Germany*

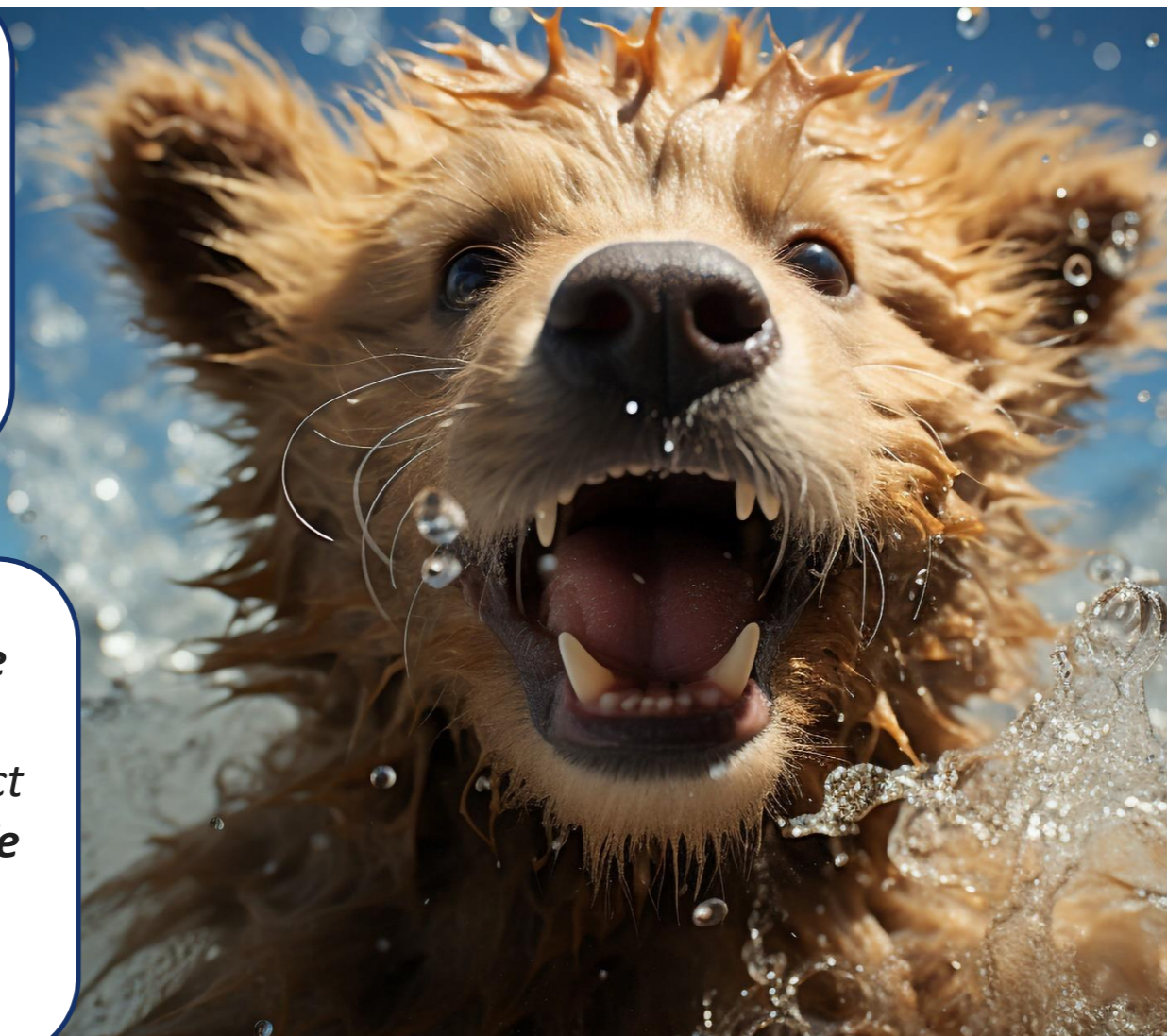
The reality of becoming an ombudsperson: It often starts with a jump into the deep end

“I only received an email with two links to guidelines when I took office. Training would [...] be good at the beginning.”

“Many problems can be solved through mediation. Further training would be desirable.”

“Training on how to handle typical cases correctly and efficiently, training in conflict management/mediation. We have not yet received any further training.”

“A general problem at the small university is that there is no community with which to consult on a specific case.”



Picture by [gmarc](#) at [Freepik](#)

Why support for ombudspersons is needed

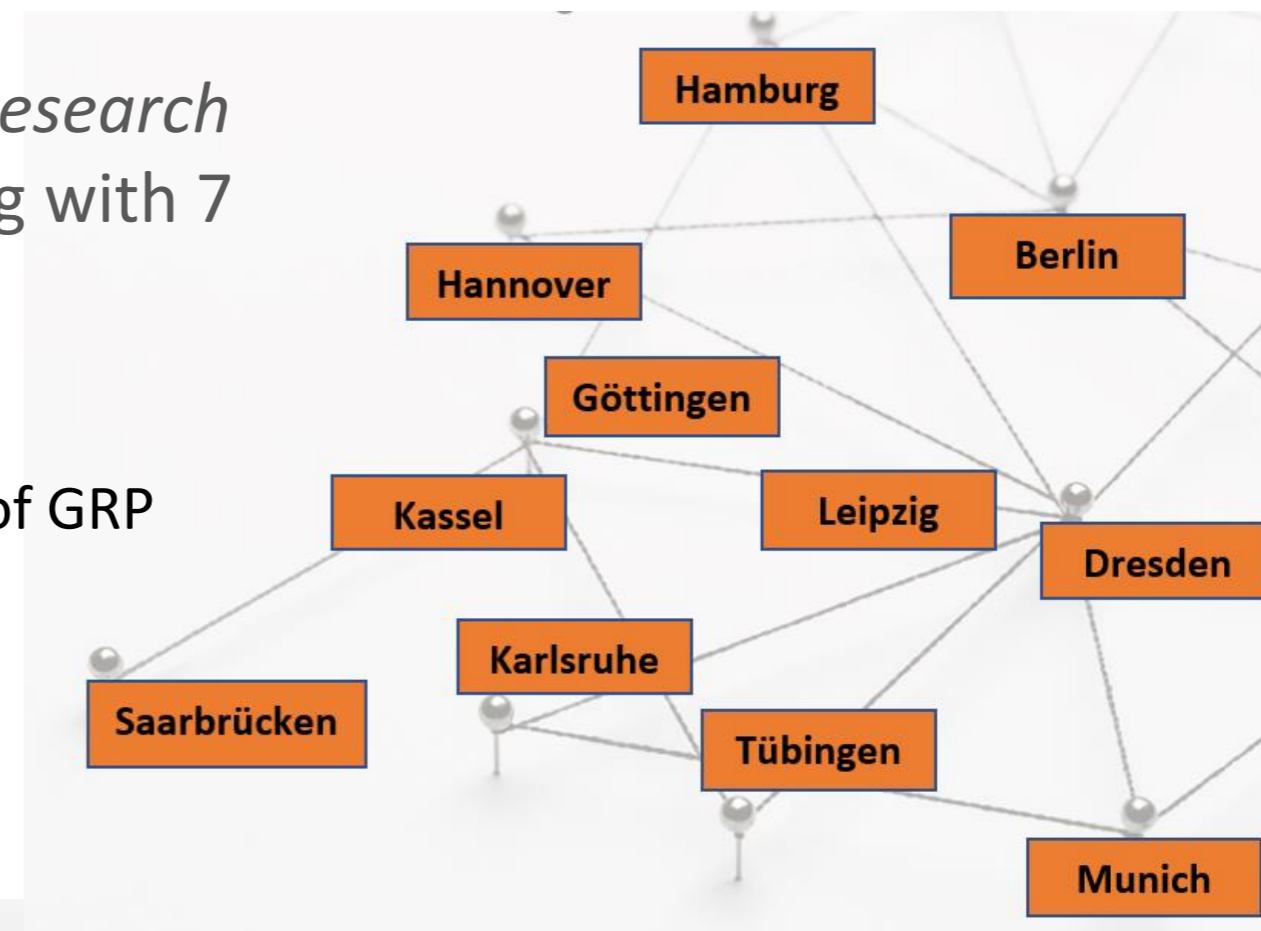
- Case work is subject to confidentiality → makes “learning by doing” difficult
- Handling different subject cultures
- Challenging communicative situations:
 - Mediation in conflicts
 - Dealing with contradictory information from conflict parties
 - Holding critical discussions (e.g., with colleagues)
- Limited term of office → requires onboarding of new ombudspersons in regular intervals



[Picture: Nikola Johnny Mirkovic at Unsplash](#)

Network of Ombuds Offices for Research Integrity in Germany

- At some institutions, volunteer ombudspersons are supported by **Research Integrity Offices** → e.g., initial counselling, support for preventive measures, etc.
- 2020: foundation of the *Network of Research Integrity Offices in Germany* → starting with 7 offices, current: 14 offices at 11 cities
- Objectives:
 - Exchange on developments in the field of GRP
 - Peer counselling on anonymized cases
 - Professionalization of ombuds work



Practical guidance for ombudspersons

- So far no systematic introduction to the basics of ombuds work in academia
→ ombudspersons often as “lone fighters” at their institution
- July 2023: release of **Handbook for Ombudspersons** → available here:
<https://zenodo.org/record/8081268>
- Goals:
 - Making the role and tasks of ombudspersons transparent
 - Archiving the (implicit) knowledge of ombuds work
 - Providing practical guidance for counselling & dealing with conflict situations
 - Providing information & suggestions for networking
 - Making suggestions for setting up an effective ombuds system → possibility to adapt handbook to local conditions
 - Encourage discussions about approaches and strategies

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**HANDBOOK
FOR OMBUDSPERSONS**
at higher education institutions &
non-higher education research institutions

***English version
forthcoming soon!***

 **Netzwerk der
Ombudsstellen**
in der Wissenschaft

Topics of the Handbook

| | | |
|-------|--|---|
| 1. | Central documents & contacts for the ombuds work..... | 7 |
| 2. | General conditions of ombuds work..... | 9 |
| 3. | Tasks & limits of ombudspersons..... | |
| 4. | Legal basis for ombudspersons..... | |
| 4.1 | Applicable law..... | |
| 4.2 | Special provisions..... | |
| 4.2.1 | Impartiality..... | |
| 4.2.2 | Confidentiality..... | |
| 5. | Practical aspects of the work of ombudspersons | |
| 5.1 | Dealing with whistleblowers & those affected by allegations..... | |
| 5.2 | Holding discussions with colleagues..... | |
| 5.3 | Frequent ombuds cases..... | |
| 5.3.1 | Authorship..... | |
| 5.3.2 | Use of research data..... | |
| 5.3.3 | Plagiarism..... | |
| 5.3.4 | Supervision during research..... | |
| 5.4 | Documentation, archiving..... | |
| 5.5 | Networking with other ombudspersons..... | |
| 6. | Understanding conflicts | |
| 7. | Ombudspersons' role & approach in GRP-conflicts..... | |
| 7.1 | The ombudsperson as mediator | |
| 7.1.1 | Conducting a mediation meeting | |
| 7.2 | The ombudsperson as counsellor | |
| 8. | Counselling & networking | |
| 9. | Ombuds offices for research integrity | |
| 10. | Misconduct/investigation commission..... | |

Conclusions

- Handbook as a tool for professionalizing ombuds work in Germany:
 - Proactively equip future ombudspersons with the necessary skills and knowledge
 - Raising awareness of the various framework conditions for ombuds work & promoting institutional learning
 - Creating areas for ombudspersons' exchange
 - Identifying opportunities to relieve the burden on ombudspersons, e.g. through Ombuds Offices for Research Integrity



[Picture at Freepik](#)

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Ombudskommission

**Technical
University
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Thanks for listening!

**OMBUDSMAN
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