

The German Research Ombudsman: An Instrument Dealing with Scientific Misconduct

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Society and the science system depend on the integrity of scientists. “The conduct of science rests on basic principles valid in all countries and in all scientific disciplines. The first among these is honesty towards oneself and towards others. Honesty is both an ethical principle and the basis for the rules, the details of which differ by discipline, of professional conduct in science, i.e. of good scientific practice. Conveying the principle of honesty to students and to young scientists and scholars is one of the principle missions of universities.

Good scientific practice is the foundation for trust. Unfortunately, trust can be destroyed all too quickly by dishonest conduct and rebuilding it is then a long and arduous process.



The causes of misconduct are manifold and cannot always be readily rectified. However, where misconduct is due to ignorance, to a lack of training and/or a lack of communication, preventative measures can be taken. It is therefore important to alert young scientists to the problem early on in their training. In this situation, not just senior staff and their working groups, but all scientists need to be able to trust one another more than ever before.

The memorandum also suggested the installation of a national three-membered body of elected scientists: The German Research Ombudsman. As a member of the committee, I will focus on the role and the works of the German Ombudsman in safeguarding good scientific practice.