

European Centre for Minority Issues

**GUIDELINES FOR SAFEGUARDING
GOOD SCIENTIFIC PRACTICE**

February 2008

Introduction

The European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI), a public foundation established by the Governments of Germany, Denmark and the Land Schleswig-Holstein, respects the regulations and ethical principles of both countries' code of conduct in research. At the same time being a unique institution of the kind and employing researchers from the EU member countries, it also adheres to the European Union principles of scientific research.

Over the past several years there has been a growing awareness at ECMI with regard to the quality assurance and quality control of its practice-oriented research processes and products as well as products and processes of action-oriented activities, which has directed increased attention to the formalisation of such procedures.

These procedures refer in particular to good practice in research, accountability, professional responsibility, ethical principles, dissemination and exploitation of results, as well as quality control and assurance in publications.

Research freedom, which focuses on the good of the mankind, on the expanding of the frontiers of scientific knowledge, while enjoying the freedom of thought and expression and the freedom to identify methods by which problems are solved, should be implemented according to recognised ethical principles and practices. However it should take into account the limitations to this freedom that relates to the mandate of the institution, to the particular research circumstances, including supervision, guidance and management as well as operational constraints related to budgetary or infrastructural reasons and reasons of intellectual property protection.

As ECMI is an independent research institution with no formal education component, the practice of including the rules of good scientific practice in teaching or curricula can not be directly applicable as is perhaps the case in a university setting.

Yet, through its internship programme as well as through its publication activities, ECMI does indeed have the capacity to exercise these best practices in its mentoring activities as well as encouraging all young scholars working under ECMI auspices to adhere to these guidelines.

The principal sources of these guidelines, code of conduct and relevant compliance are: the EU Charter for Researchers ¹; the German Recommendations of the Commission of Professional Self Regulation in Science: Safeguarding Good Scientific Practice ²; and the Danish Committee on Scientific Dishonesty, the Sub-committee for Research in Cultural and Social Sciences (UKSF) ³.

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/eracareers/index_en.cfm?11=32&CFID=5879&CFTOKEN=9b5a23d

² http://www.dfg.de/aktuelles_presse/reden_stellungnahmen/download/empfehlung_wiss_praxis_0198.pdf

³ <http://fi.dk/site/english/the> -danish-committees-on-scientific-dishonesty

1. Good practice in research

The freedom of science in research and the responsibility of each scholar/scientist individually as well as of the institutions of science are inseparable from each other. Whoever practices science and scholarship as a profession is responsible for fostering the fundamental values and norms of scientific practice, to realize them in his/her daily activity and to defend them.

Researchers should at all times adopt safe working practices, including necessary precautions for information technology disasters, be familiar with national legal requirements regarding data protection and regulations related to confidentiality.

Rules of good scientific practice shall include principles of:

- observing professional standards (in general, and specified for individual disciplines as necessary)
- documenting results
- consistently questioning one's own findings
- practicing strict honesty with regard to the contributions of partners, competitors, predecessors
- cooperation and leadership responsibility in working groups
- securing and storing primary data
- scientific publications

1.1. Data storage

Of particular relevance is data storage, which is the basis for publications, retaining research records at the institution which were generated during the relationship with that institution. Being able to refer to original records is a necessary precaution, even more important when published results are challenged by others. ECMI is storing its data for at least 10 years, according to current national regulations.

1.2. Procedures for dealing with allegations of scientific misconduct

These procedures and internal rules are highly significant as they may be directly affecting the relationship between employer and employee, yet they must respect provisions of labour law or the law on academic degrees of the country of institutional location.

Taking account of relevant legal regulations, they should include the following elements:

- a definition of categories of action which seriously deviate from good scientific practice eg. fabrication and falsification of data, plagiarism, breach of confidence as a reviewer/referee
- jurisdiction and time limits for inquiries and investigations
- the right of involved parties to be heard and to discretion;
- exclusion of the conflict of interest
- jurisdiction of determining sanctions and the nature of sanctions depending the level of misconduct (eg. retraction of or correction of publication)

Settling a dispute on a consensual basis should be the preferable solution, but if needed, the case should be brought to a court of justice.

Proceedings and results should be clearly recorded in writing.

As ECMI is not legally part of a larger organisation, and being an interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary institution, it is subscribing to the regulations indicated in the European Charter for Researchers.

2. Professional responsibility and professional development

Researchers should make every effort to ensure that their research is relevant to society and is not duplicating research carried out elsewhere; to avoid plagiarism and abide by the principle of intellectual property and joint data ownership in case of research carried out in collaboration. In addition, the need to validate new observations by reproducible experiments should explicitly quote the data to be confirmed.

Familiarity with the strategic goals of the research environment and funding mechanisms should be the guiding principle. The researchers should seek all necessary approvals before starting their research or accessing provided resources. The researchers should inform employers, funders, supervisors and collaborators when their project is delayed, redefined or to be suspended/terminated, indicating the reason.

2.1. Contractual and legal obligations

Researchers at all levels must be familiar with the national, sectoral or institutional regulations governing the working conditions. This includes in particular Intellectual Property Rights regulations, and the requirements and conditions of sponsors, independently of the nature of their own contract. The adherence to these regulations relates to delivering required outputs such as reports, publications, etc.

2.2. Professional development

Researchers at all career stages should seek to continually improve themselves by regularly updating and expanding their skills and competencies, through formal training, workshops, conferences and e-learning.

2.3. Performance evaluation

The criteria for performance evaluation give originality and quality precedence before quantity. This applies to the degrees advancement, appointments, and to the extent possible, the allocation of resources. ECMI has a system of staff performance evaluation based on individual task sheets established for each staff and reviewed twice a year with the supervisor/leadership of the institution. This performance evaluation is filed with the personal file and serves as guide to the progress appraisal. Quantitative criteria and qualitative performance indicators are at the core of the appraisal. Since publications are the most important “product” of research, they will be taken into account, complemented by the reputation of journals in which they appear, quantified as their “impact factor”. This also relates to on-line publications and the frequency of access by users.

As ECMI is also an action-oriented implementor, successful grant proposals, supervision and managerial skills and other responsibilities such as Central Administrative Tasks (CATs) will be of relevance.

2.4. Supervision and managerial duties

The heads of the research institute are responsible for an adequate organisational structure. Taking into account the size of each scientific unit, the responsibilities for

direction, supervision, conflict resolution and quality assurance must be clearly allocated and their effective fulfillment must be verifiable. Particularly quality assurance is essential to scientific honesty.

Senior researchers are expected to devote particular attention to their multifaceted role as supervisors, mentors, project coordinators, managers and science communicators. They should perform these tasks to the highest professional standards. With regard to their role as supervisors or mentors of younger researchers, senior researchers should build up a constructive and positive relationship with early-stage researchers, in order to set the conditions for efficient transfer of knowledge and for the further successful development of the researchers' careers.

This includes keeping records of all work in progress and research findings, obtaining feedback by means of reports and seminars, applying such feedback and working in accordance with agreed schedules, milestones, deliverables and /or research outputs.

2.5. Independent mediation in conflict situations

An independent mediator (s) shall be appointed to whom the members of the institution may turn in conflict situations, including cases of suspected scientific misconduct. ECMI Scientific Advisory Council Chairperson is a designated **arbiter, acting in strict impartiality**. When required, additional qualified, impartial mediator (s) can be appointed. The mediator will be vested with a clearly specified mandate on a case-by-case basis.

3. Dissemination, exploitation of results

All researchers should ensure, in compliance with their contractual arrangements, that the results of their research are disseminated and exploited e.g. communicated, transferred into other research settings and made accessible to the public, whenever the opportunity arises, to help researchers to better understand public interest in priorities for science and also the public's concerns.

4.1. Publications

Scientific publications are primary medium through which scientists give an account of their work. Through a publication author(s) make a new finding known and identify themselves with it, at the same time assuming the responsibility for its content. Simultaneously, the authors and /or publishers acquire documented rights of intellectual property (copyright) unless otherwise established through individual contracts.

As ECMI is a publisher of an on-line journal and other collective works, it should make it clear in the guidelines for authors that they are committed to best international practice with regard to the originality of submitted papers and the criteria for authorship.

ECMI is using a group of peer reviewers to ensure the quality of submitted manuscripts, who then explicitly are bound to respect confidentiality and to disclose potential conflict of interest (eg. personal relationship with the author, etc.)

4. Accountability

Researchers need to be aware that they are accountable towards their employers, funders and/or other related public or private bodies. On more ethical grounds they are also accountable towards society as a whole. In particular, as ECMI is funded publicly, the researchers are also accountable for the efficient use of taxpayers' money. Consequently they should adhere to the principles of sound, transparent and

efficient financial management and cooperate with any authorised audits of their research, whether undertaken by their employers, donors or by ethics committees. Methods of collection and analysis, the outputs and, where applicable, details of data should be open to internal and external scrutiny whenever necessary and as requested by appropriate authorities.

As competition is one of the main driving forces in science (competition between researchers and institutions), research is more prone to the violation of rules under the pressure for success. ECMI refutes such an approach, as the motivation to gain success by breaking rules is inadmissible. Therefore the accountability of the results is a preventive measure in view of possible manipulation, falsification of financial misconduct.

ECMI as a public institution undergoes annual financial audits, periodic independent substantive, administrative and financial evaluations, and is reporting to its project donors on the basis of specific donor requirements. The results of periodic evaluations are made publicly available as well as independent evaluations of individual actions, either on the ECMI's or the donor's initiative. All research and action results are to be provided openly and fully.

5. Ethical principles

Dishonesty in science is a vector of the conduct of individuals. Honesty towards oneself and towards others is a fundamental condition for achieving new insights, and in an idealized sense is the quest for truth. Truth is opposed to dishonest methods.

ECMI practice-oriented research and action-oriented activities are carried out with regard to a social context, both in the narrow sense of the scientific community relating to the subject and the object of ECMI actions, and to the wider sense of society at large. Bearing in mind that ECMI research processes and results as well as actions may influence the life of societies and individuals with whom the actions are conducted, the transparency of ECMI findings and their applicability must take this into account.

ECMI as an institution and as individual researchers are committed to adhering to the recognised ethical practices and fundamental ethical principles appropriate to their disciplines and to ethical standards set forth in various national, sectoral or institutional codes of ethics.