



ERC Scientific Misconduct Strategy

The mission of the European Research Council (ERC) is to support research at the frontiers of knowledge in a pan-European competition in which grants are awarded on the sole criterion of scientific excellence. This strategy is with the purpose of generating new discoveries, knowledge and ideas that will enhance European science competitiveness. This, in a wider context, may be considered a response by the ERC to pressing socio-economic challenges that Europe faces in the hope of opening ways to future applications and markets.

One of the necessary conditions to make ERC competitions fair and efficient and to maintain the trust of both the scientific community and society as a whole is to uphold ethical standards at all stages of the competitive process, and to maintain and promote a culture of research integrity.

An essential part of this task is to detect and treat vigorously any allegations of scientific misconduct and to counteract decisively all practices that involve scientific misconduct. To this end, the ERC Scientific Council has delegated to the **Standing Committee on Conflict of Interests, Scientific Misconduct and Ethical Issues (CoIME)** the responsibility for **"formulating guidelines on conflict of interest, fraud and ethical matters related to any facet of the ERC's competences, clarifying criteria and considering any particular instance or situation where ethical concerns may arise"**¹. The COIME will work closely with the ERC Executive Agency (ERCEA) to address all cases of suspected scientific misconduct that come to the attention of the ERC, with the purpose of reinforcing the capability of the ERC to take appropriate follow-up actions.

The ERC strategy is fundamentally based on the presumption that the host institutions of the ERC applicants and grant holders have the primary responsibility for the detection of scientific misconduct and for the investigation, and adjudication of any breaches of research integrity that may arise. Therefore the ERC recommends that all actual or potential host institutions will have structures in place to uphold scientific integrity, to deal with all cases of scientific misconduct that may come to the attention of the ERC, and to report to the ERC on what actions they have taken to deal with any relevant scientific misconduct problems.

Notwithstanding the above, all concerns about potential scientific misconduct or suspected breaches of research integrity concerning an ERC applicant or project will be addressed by the ERC within the applicable legal and procedural framework. **In particular, the ERC will, through its Executive Agency, take appropriate follow-up actions, such as those indicated below, whenever there is sufficient evidence that scientific misconduct has taken place.**

On this basis, the necessary administrative procedure ("Procedure to deal with incoming information on scientific misconduct") will be established by the ERCEA. The procedure will strengthen the capability of the ERC to deal efficiently and effectively with incoming information on alleged scientific misconduct, will ensure timely follow-up actions and will

¹ Minutes of the Scientific Council Plenary meeting 13-14 October 2009, Brussels

proceed along the following lines, respecting the legal framework of the Agency's operation:

- **Initial information**

Whenever a member of the Scientific Council or ERCEA staff becomes aware of any scientific misconduct concerning an ERC applicant or project he/she has the responsibility to inform in writing the ERCEA Director and the Chair of CoIME of his/her knowledge or suspicion without delay.

- **Confidentiality and fairness**

When dealing with the allegation, the ERC will protect the information, sharing it only with relevant parties, if necessary and as defined in the ERCEA procedure. Additional review of the information will be performed without unnecessary delay and in a way that is fair to the person suspected of misconduct.

- **Assessment of the allegation**

The ERCEA Director will, in consultation with CoIME, perform an initial assessment. Where this assessment suggests that the allegations received deal with issues that might involve an actual case of scientific misconduct, the Director shall proceed with a more detailed assessment in close collaboration with COIME

The CoIME, in close collaboration with the ERCEA Director, will consider whether it is within its remit and competence to assess the scientific and ethical aspects of the case, whether the evidence is sufficient or whether additional review of the information is needed in order to decide whether a breach of research integrity did occur. If necessary, the CoIME may consult other members of the ERC Scientific Council and ERCEA staff and/or nominate external experts for appointment by the ERCEA Director who would act as advisors to the ERC in dealing with specific cases of scientific misconduct.

Having reached a conclusion (with or without the help of external experts), the CoIME will inform the ERCEA Director in writing about its opinion and will offer recommendations on how to handle the case. In the event of CoIME concluding that the case is potentially serious but cannot reach a consensus on how to deal with it the matter will be brought to the attention of Scientific Council who will offer an opinion on how to proceed without delay.

Having received these conclusions the ERCEA Director will make the final decision according to his/her own discretion or judgment.

- **The ERCEA procedure**

The ERCEA procedure to deal with incoming information on scientific misconduct will include provisions that will cover the following aspects of the overall strategy described above and will be periodically monitored and if necessary adjusted in close collaboration between the Scientific Council and the Director of the ERCEA. These provisions should include, inter alia, the following elements:

- Notification to OLAF and to the Commission
- Hearing of concerned parties involved

- Follow-up actions by the ERCEA Director (e.g. suspension or exclusion of proposals from the evaluation, request for measures to be taken by the HI, suspension or termination of granting).
- Record keeping and reporting of cases in the ERCEA Annual Activity Report and in the ERC Scientific Council Annual Report.

Finally, the work of the ERC in dealing with scientific misconduct may be also reported publicly in other ways (e.g. presentations at public conferences, published articles, position papers etc.) with the purpose to make widely known the ERC determination to uphold high ethical standards in all its activities.

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