

Procedure in case of alleged breaches of research integrity
(approved Executive Board 24.02.2026)

Readers should be aware that only the Dutch version of this regulation has legal force. This English translation is strictly for reference and cannot be invoked as a legal tool.

Preamble

This regulation describes the procedure to be followed in case of suspected infractions of research integrity, committed by researchers who are affiliated to the University of Antwerp. A researcher of the University of Antwerp is anyone who conducts or has conducted scientific or scholarly research within the framework of the University of Antwerp, regardless of his or her statute (ZAP, OP, AAP, BAP, ATP, ...).

The procedure is part of good scientific practice and serves primarily to support, remedy and to put an end to the violations in question. It is not intended as a disciplinary or legal procedure. In the event of serious violations, however, it is provided that the committee in its advice may ask the institution to initiate disciplinary proceedings in accordance with the disciplinary regulations applicable to the involved researcher. The committee takes on an advisory role within the university. If desired, the committee can also seek advice from the Flemish Commission for Scientific Integrity.¹

Acting with research integrity implies acting in accordance with the *European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity* (ALLEA 2023), as described as an appendix to this procedure. Furthermore, researchers at the institution are also expected to adhere to institutional guidelines regarding research integrity, with the [Ethical code of conduct and principles for Scientific Research](#) being the most important example, but also the [General PhD Regulations](#), the [institutional authorship guidelines](#), the [guidelines regarding the use of AI in research](#), etc.

Clear cases of research misconduct are: the unrightful appropriation of the intellectual property or contributions of others (plagiarism), the fabrication or falsification of data, the deliberate publication of wrongful conclusions and all sorts of conduct through which researchers, carrying out research on behalf of an external party, jeopardize their independence and/or impartiality. Other research practices that can affect research integrity include self-plagiarism, withholding research results, citing selectively to enhance own findings, misusing seniority, or unjustifiably increasing or decreasing an author's contribution to a scientific publication.

It is the moral duty of all staff members of the University of Antwerp to report perceived violations of scientific integrity.

¹ The VCWI is authorised to advise on general issues relating to scientific integrity, on its own initiative or at the request of scientific institutions or the government. A second piece of advice. The VCWI is also authorised to issue a second opinion on request in connection with alleged violations of scientific integrity, to an institution that recognises the VCWI as an advisory body in accordance with the Flemish Research Integrity Commission Regulations, Articles 11 and 12.

A suspected infraction of research integrity can take place during all stages of scientific and scholarly research: in acquiring funding, collecting data or drawing up theories, developing software, conducting experiments, processing, analysing and publishing results, assessing others' project proposals or publications, etc.. Errors and mistakes that were committed in good faith (honest error) and differences of scientific opinion are not regarded as infractions of research integrity

Composition of the Committee for Research Integrity

Within the University of Antwerp, the Executive Board has set up a Committee for Research Integrity, with the following composition:

- two members per scientific domain (of which at least one senior lecturer member, or an emeritus with assignment) with extensive experience in research,
- A member of the tenured academic staff from the Faculty of Law

One of the members takes on the task of the chair of the committee.

The members are appointed by the Executive Board, on the proposal of the Research Board, for a one-time renewable mandate of four years. The mandate of the Chair is renewable twice in order to ensure the necessary continuity within the Committee. Members whose membership is coming to an end are given the opportunity to complete ongoing investigations of reports.

For each case that arises, the Committee is entitled to designate two ZAP members who are familiar with the domain of the case under investigation to provide further assistance.

All members of the Committee for Research Integrity, as well as its secretary and contact point, are bound by an obligation of confidentiality and objectivity.

Committee membership is incompatible with that of the ZAP/AAP disciplinary committees, membership of the Flemish Committee for Research Integrity, or deanship. The same holds true for the assisting ZAP members designated by the Committee. Members of the Committee for Research Integrity who have formulated a prior opinion about the necessity to forward the case to the authorised disciplinary committee are not allowed to express an opinion on the same case as a member of the respective disciplinary committee or of the Executive Board, which acts as the body of appeal for disciplinary issues.

The committee members are free, from the outset or at any time during a procedure at the CWI, to invite an expert to advise the investigation committee, in general or with regard to specific questions. The experts involved in this way do not participate in the decision-making of the committee. However, they are bound by the same obligation of confidentiality and objectivity as the members of the committee in the performance of their duties.

The Research Affairs Office of the Department of Research, Innovation & Valorisation Antwerp (RIVA) arranges the secretariat of the committee on behalf of the Executive Board.

Contact Point for Research Integrity

The Contact point for Research Integrity, also to be appointed by the Executive Board, acts as an independent reporting point within the university and takes on the following tasks:

- The Contact point acts as the first he hotline acts as the first point of contact for raising research integrity issues.
- The Contact point functions as a conduit to the Committee for Research Integrity if someone wishes to file a formal complaint.

Confidential Counselor for Research Integrity

During the course of the procedure, both the complainant and the defendant will be given the opportunity to contact a confidential counselor for research integrity. This confidential counselor knows the procedure and the sensitivity of a report to this committee and focuses solely on assisting the complainant and the defendant during the course of a formal CWI procedure. The role of confidential counselor for research integrity is taken up by a member of the Research Affairs Office of the Department of Research, Innovation and Valorisation Antwerp.

Responsibilities of the Committee for Research Integrity

The Committee for Research Integrity's responsibilities comprise:

- conducting an investigation in the event an alleged breach of research integrity is reported;
- acting as much as possible as a mediator in this context;
- formulating an advice to the institution regarding the occurrence of a violation of research integrity;
- advising the university on general issues concerning scientific and scholarly deontology and ethics;
- Advising and sensibilizing researchers within the university to make them aware of research integrity, if necessary assisted by Research, Innovation and Valorisation Antwerp for the practical details.

In any case, the following issues are outside the scope of the proposed procedure:

- For ethical issues addressed in 'experiments with human beings', issues directly related to patient-centred research, such as 'informed consent' and the use of patient material, 'experiments with laboratory animals', 'survey research in which audio-visual data are collected from vulnerable groups' or research in which the knowledge or technologies intended for use in civilian applications could be used in military applications and/or be at misused, one can contact the Committee for Medical Ethics, the Ethics Committee for Animal Experiments, the Ethics Advisory Committee for Social Sciences and Humanities or the Ethics Committee for Misuse, Human Rights and Security, respectively.
- Intellectual property right issues related to scientific discoveries and their application, such as problems with patents, as well as conflicts of interest regarding spin offs. These issues are tackled by the Valorisation Office within Research, Innovation and Valorisation Antwerp.
- Conflicts that occur between a PhD researcher and their supervisor with regard to the mutual rights and/or obligations as stipulated in the General Charter for PhD researchers. For this, the General PhD Regulations of the University of Antwerp should first be considered. Given the importance of mediation, it is preferable that an ongoing mediation procedure via the General PhD Regulations is first completed before submitting a complaint to the Committee for Research Integrity.
- Interpersonal conflicts. Researchers can contact the institutional confidential counsellors or the institution's department for Health and Safety at work for this.
- Differences in scientific insights or differences of opinion about the interpretation of research results. They are part of the normal and necessary academic debate. Only if there are indications that the principles of research integrity are being violated (e.g. by deliberately withholding or distorting data), the committee can include this.

Course of the proceedings

The procedure can only be initiated for suspected transgressions in which a researcher of the University of Antwerp is involved. When, at the time of the suspected transgression, the researcher was affiliated to (an)other institution(s), the Chair of the CWI will contact the relevant authorities of the other institution(s) to discuss where the procedure should be conducted.

In the event a complaint concerns a researcher from one of the university colleges within the Antwerp University & University College Association, the university college in question can submit a request for advice to the Committee for Research Integrity of the University of Antwerp to handle the case. However, this possibility is only provided if the university college itself does not have a similar committee. In this case, the university college concerned delegates an ad hoc member to the committee who attends the meetings.

Notification

Alleged violations of research integrity by researchers at the University of Antwerp will be reported to contact point to be designated by the Executive Board. The person who makes the report is referred to as the complainant. The person to whom the report relates is called the defendant. Anonymous complaints are inadmissible. The identity of the complainant must at least be known to the contact point. The identity of the complaint can only be disclosed to third parties and/or to the defendant if the complainant gives explicit and formal permission to do so. If the committee determines that communicating the name of the complainant to the defendant is necessary in order to be able to conduct the investigation in an adequate manner (for example in the case of an authorship dispute), the complainant will be consulted about this.

By submitting a complaint, the complainant in turn accepts the confidential nature of the CWI's handling of a report.

At the explicit and formal request of the complainant, the identity of the complainant remains known only to the contact point, without others being informed. In that case, the complainant can be represented in the further proceedings by the contact point.

The university strives to ensure that complaints made in good faith do not have any adverse consequences for the complainant. Anyone who fears negative consequences can turn to the contact point for research integrity, the central ombudsperson or a confidential counselor within the institution.

After receiving the complaint, the chair of the committee evaluates, in consultation with the secretary, whether the complaint is reasonable and sufficiently substantiated and, if desired, contacts the complainant. To be admissible, a complaint must contain at least the following information: the identity of the complainant (unless representation through the contact point), the date or period of the alleged facts, and the necessary substantiation such as a factual description and the motivation of the objections raised. The complaint must be clear and sufficiently structured. Complaints that are manifestly unreasonable or contain insufficient evidence can be rejected by the chair, stating reasons. The chair of the committee can, in consultation with the secretary, propose to initiate a mediation in this phase. If this is accepted, the chair may decide to temporarily suspend the handling of a complaint by the CWI in whole or in part pending the outcome. If a report is considered inadmissible, the secretary of the committee will inform the complainant of this.

Reports that do not fall within the competence of the Committee for Research Integrity are referred by contact point in consultation with the chair of the Committee for Research Integrity to the appropriate authority (dean of the faculty concerned, individual doctoral committee, central ombudsperson, ethics committees, RIVA's Valorisation Office, etc.).

Reports that fall within the competence of the Committee for Research Integrity are usually dealt with by the full committee. The specific course of the procedure will be communicated to the complainant by the secretariat of the committee. A member of the committee who is in any way involved in the complaint does not participate in the activities of the committee in connection with the complaint.

Further procedure

The complainant will be given the opportunity to clarify their complaint to the full committee.

If the claim is deemed to be unfounded, a well-argued dismissal report is drawn up by the entire committee. The Chair in any case informs the complainant, who is given access to this report.

If there are grounds for further action, the defendant shall be informed of the procedure to be followed and heard by the full committee. The secretary will notify the defendant by e-mail that a complaint has been submitted. The content of the complaint is described as accurately as possible.

The procedure must be completed within a reasonable time. The committee prefers to reach a conclusion with regard to the facts by consensus. The secretary then draws up a report that is read and approved by the members of the committee.

If, on the basis of the investigation conducted, the violation of research integrity is clearly established, the Committee will describe in its report whether it concerns mildly problematic behaviour or seriously problematic behaviour and will take this distinction into account in its advice to the institution for remediation.

The complainant and the defendant will be informed of the conclusions of the assessment report by the secretariat of the committee.

The reporter and the person(s) concerned have the right to inspect the assessment report within the limits of *the Decree of 26 March 2004 on the openness of government*. They also have a right of reply to elements of the assessment report.

The right of reply is exercised as follows:

The complainant and the defendant may submit a response to the chair of the committee within one month of becoming aware of the decisions in the report. The chair of the committee submits these replies to the committee for discussion, which can hear the complainant and the defendant. The committee will decide whether there are grounds for revising the report. If this is the case, the committee decides on the procedure for revising the report. The complainant and the defendant will be informed about this and will receive a final version of the findings report. There is no longer a right of reply to a final assessment report from the CWI.

Each communication to the complainant and the defendant regarding the final findings report mentions the periods within which the [Flemish Commission for Scientific Integrity](#) (VCWI) can be asked for a second opinion. In the event that a second opinion has been requested from the Flemish Commission for Scientific Integrity, the VCWI advice will be sent to the members of the Committee for Research Integrity for information.

With a view to the follow-up of the committee's reports by the institutional board, the committee's secretariat will provide them to the rector and vice-rector for research & impact of the university after exercising the right of reply. If desired, the rector can delegate the further follow-up of the file (for example, in cases where the file requires a mainly operational follow-up; or includes policy or coordination questions that do not strictly fall within the rector's competence).

External communication

All procedures are confidential. The chair and the rector are responsible for external communication. In the event of external communication to third parties, we always strive for maximum protection of the privacy of all parties involved.

The contact point and the Committee for Research Integrity are listed on the Research website of the University of Antwerp. The same website also describes the procedures for reporting alleged breaches of research integrity and for handling the reports. In the interests of transparency, the committee's annual reports are also published on this website. These contain an anonymised summary of the cases handled by the Committee in the relevant calendar year. These are also submitted annually to the Research Board and the Executive Board for notification.

Annex I: Statement on Dealing with Allegations of Research Misconduct Under United States Public Health Service (USPHS) Research-related Activities for Foreign Institutions.

University of Antwerp has incorporated into its policies and procedures the following approach for dealing with and reporting possible research misconduct when USPHS funds are involved.

1. University of Antwerp will designate an official to receive allegations and develop procedures for use by research employees or others who wish to make an allegation of research misconduct involving USPHS funds. This designated official will notify the U.S. Office of Research Integrity (ORI) when an allegation of research misconduct involving USPHS funds is received. Phone: (240) 453-8800. Fax: (301) 594-0043. Email: AskORI@hhs.gov.
2. University of Antwerp will then work with ORI or other appropriate offices of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to develop and implement a process for responding to the research misconduct allegation that is consistent with U.S. Federal regulation, 42 CFR Parts 50 and 93.
3. University of Antwerp will submit appropriate reports (in English) to ORI that describe the process followed in conducting the investigation, the evidence on which the conclusions of the investigation are based, and if a finding of research misconduct is made, the administrative actions that are taken against the respondent.
4. University of Antwerp will inform research employees about the official who is designated to receive allegations and the procedures for the employee or other individuals to make an allegation of research misconduct involving USPHS supported research. This information will also be posted on the organization's web site.
5. University of Antwerp certifies that this statement will be a permanent amendment to the institution's procedures for responding to allegations of research misconduct.
6. University of Antwerp will submit the "Annual Report on Possible Research Misconduct" to ORI by April 30th of each year. The report is submitted electronically through the ORI web site at <https://ori.hhs.gov>.