

NTNU's guidelines for handling of scientific misconduct allegations

Adopted by the Rector on 11 March 2024 [unofficial translation]

§ 1. Purpose and scope

These guidelines apply to handling cases of possible scientific misconduct. The Research Ethics Act [forskningsetikkloven] defines scientific misconduct as falsification, fabrication, plagiarism and other serious violations of recognized ethical standards for research that have been committed intentionally or with gross negligence in the planning, implementation or reporting of research.¹ In the guidelines, such circumstances are collectively referred to as scientific misconduct.

NTNU shall handle cases relating to its own employees or candidates. Notification, investigation, and case procedures must normally take place in the line organization, through the department and the faculty. *The Research Integrity Committee*, which is NTNU's 'redelighetsutvalg' under Section 6 of the Research Ethics Act, must assess all cases concerning possible scientific misconduct.

§ 2. Reporting suspected misconduct

As a rule, someone who suspects scientific misconduct should notify the head of department. The notification must be in writing and include an explanation of the circumstances. The head of department considers whether the report should be investigated further.

If the person reporting suspected misconduct cannot or does not wish to contact the head of department, the notification can be addressed to the faculty instead. In exceptional cases, the notification can be sent directly to the Research Integrity Committee at NTNU; see § 6.

Regardless of who receives the notification, the case must be dealt with as quickly as possible.

§ 3. Investigation and handling of the notification

After first assessing their own impartiality, the head of department is responsible for investigating whether the reported concern should be examined on its merits as a case of misconduct. The head of department shall clarify whether the suspicion is due to errors or misunderstandings or whether the reported concern should be handled as a personal conflict. More serious personal conflicts must be handled in accordance with NTNU's [guidelines for handling difficult personal conflicts](#) [PDF, in Norwegian].

If it is obviously not a question of scientific misconduct, but an issue of less concern, or when academic disagreement is at the heart of the notification, the head of department must seek to resolve the matter amicably between the parties involved. In all cases, the head of department must inform the faculty of the content of the notification and the conclusion, with a copy to the Research Integrity Committee.

¹ Section 8, second paragraph of the Research Ethics Act [Forskningsetikkloven].

If the case cannot be resolved amicably at the department level, the dean must reach a conclusion and inform the Research Integrity Committee about the case and the conclusion. The parties to the case can ask the Research Integrity Committee for an independent assessment. If the Research Integrity Committee chooses to make a statement, this will be anonymized, public, and only of an advisory nature with respect to the faculty.

If there is in fact reason to suspect scientific misconduct, the faculty, through the dean, must take over the responsibility for dealing with the case. As much information as possible must be provided about the case in line with NTNU's procedures; see Section 4 below.

§ 4. Procedures at the faculty

Cases relating to suspected scientific misconduct must be documented and filed in NTNU's records management system. The case must be handled keeping in mind that it must be possible to document all steps in the procedures if necessary. The people dealing with the case must constantly consider whether documents can be exempted from public disclosure in accordance with the [Personal Data Act](#) [personopplysningsloven] and the [Freedom of Information Act](#) [offentleglova].² In cases of alleged misconduct, it must be assumed that most documents will not be exempt from public disclosure after the case procedures have been completed.

All meetings in the case must take place after being convened in writing and minutes must be written. Meetings are conducted separately with the parties. All parties must be heard. If a person who has reported a concern is not a party to the case, the person must be informed in accordance with NTNU's whistleblowing procedures. If the person who has reported a concern is a party to the case, they are protected according to the provisions of Chapter IV and V of the [Public Administration Act](#).³ The parties must be informed that they may be accompanied by an employee representative or an advisory assistant. The parties have the opportunity to read and comment on the draft minutes and have the right to access the documents in the case. They have the right to respond to allegations made against them.

If the case involves scientific publication, the faculty must consider whether it is necessary to inform editors, partners, funding sources and co-authors that an investigation of possible misconduct is taking place. This must be done in consultation with the parties to the case.

It is burdensome both to report concerns and to be accused of scientific misconduct. All information that is shared about the case must be neutral and correct so that the parties perceive the proceedings as fair.

² Act relating to the processing of personal data (The Personal Data Act) [Lov om behandling av personopplysninger - personopplysningsloven], LOV-2018-06-15-38; Act on the right of access to documents held by public authorities and public undertakings (Freedom of Information Act) [Lov om rett til innsyn i dokument i offentlig verksemd (offentleglova), LOV-2006-05-19-16

³ Act relating to procedure in cases concerning the public administration (Public Administration Act), LOV-1967-02-10.

The faculty should designate an independent investigative committee that is trusted by the parties to the case. The investigation must result in a written justified statement. The statement must always take a position on

1. whether the researcher has committed scientific misconduct or not,
2. whether there is a system failure at the institution, and
3. whether a scientific work should be corrected or retracted.

If the investigative committee concludes that no scientific misconduct has taken place, this must be clearly and unequivocally expressed in the statement. This should not prevent the committee from pointing out issues of concern.

The parties must be given the opportunity to comment on the facts of the case in the statement, and the committee may choose to take the comments into account before the statement from the investigative committee is finalized and submitted to the faculty.

The faculty submits the investigative committee's statement with its assessments to the Research Integrity Committee at NTNU for consideration and a statement before the dean makes a final decision; see § 5 below. The final report in the case with the dean's decision is submitted to the Rector through the secretariat for the Research Integrity Committee.

Statements concluding that a researcher has committed scientific misconduct can be appealed to the National Commission for the Investigation of Research Misconduct [Granskingsutvalget]; see Section 6, last paragraph and Section 7, second paragraph of the Research Ethics Act.

[§ 5. Procedures in the Research Integrity Committee](#)

As quickly as possible, the Research Integrity Committee must assess cases of alleged misconduct that are being handled by the faculties before the dean makes a final decision. The secretariat of the committee prepares the case and can ask the faculty, the department or the parties for supplementary information before the case is considered by the committee.

The Research Integrity Committee must ensure compliance with the procedures in § 4 for handling the case. In special cases, the Research Integrity Committee can re-examine the faculty's assessment. The Research Integrity Committee can also advise on measures in the academic environment. The committee sends its assessment to the faculty with a copy to the parties and the Rector before the dean makes a final decision in the case.

The Research Integrity Committee must prepare an anonymized public statement on cases involving suspected scientific misconduct that the faculty has addressed.

[§ 6. Handling of reported concerns that are addressed directly to the Research Integrity Committee](#)

Cases for the Research Integrity Committee are generally submitted from the dean responsible for the case in accordance with § 5. In addition, the Rector may ask the committee to deal with a case involving research ethics.

In terms of § 2, a researcher or others who suspect scientific misconduct can notify the Research Integrity Committee directly if, for various reasons, the case cannot or should not be reported to the department or the faculty.

The committee then decides whether the case should be considered on its merits or rejected. If it is rejected, it must be returned to the person who reported the case, with reasons for the rejection. If the case is to be considered on its merits, the committee may choose to send the case to the faculty for the initial handling of alleged misconduct, if this is justifiable based on the nature of the notification. Otherwise, the committee may itself choose to investigate the case, possibly with the help of an independent investigative committee, and make a statement without an investigation being available from the faculty.

The further proceedings are as described in § 4.

§ 7. Reporting

The departments must report to the faculty on all notifications regarding alleged violations of good research practice, with a copy to the Research Integrity Committee. The faculty reports to the Rector through the secretariat of the Research Integrity Committee on all cases of possible misconduct that are to be dealt with, regardless of the conclusion.

The Research Integrity Committee reports to the Rector with ongoing information about cases related to scientific misconduct, whether they are in progress, rejected or concluded.

Through the Rector, the institution must report to the National Commission for the Investigation of Research Misconduct on cases of possible serious violations of recognized ethical standards for research, according to Section 6, fourth paragraph of the Research Ethics Act. The Rector may authorize the Secretariat for Research Ethics at NTNU to report on the institution's behalf.

§ 8. Consequences of violating integrity standards

On the basis of the faculty's investigation and the statement from the Research Integrity Committee, the dean must consider and implement measures regarding the parties in the case. If the case is followed up as a personnel matter, the faculty and possibly NTNU's central HR and HSE Division must be involved.

If recognized research ethics standards have been violated, measures or sanctions may apply to the institution's own employees or candidates, such as:

- notification of the publication channel for the purpose of retraction or correction of scientific work,
- reporting of the case to the public authority that supervises the area relevant to the case,
- personnel reactions,
- reporting of any criminal offences to the police.

Only the Rector can report the university's own employees to the police; see Section 4.2 of the regulations on delegation.