

Wednesday late morning session Track C, Wednesday, Sep 24 2025, 11:30-13:00

Location: Seminar 5

Session: Reports from different countries

Chair: Michaela Lenčářová

OR-55

Law and Order for RI?: Research Integrity Governance in Austria on the Move

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How do we ensure that research is conducted according to the highest standards of quality and integrity? Countries and research communities usually strive to accomplish this through a mix of laws, and national, regional or institutional regulations and soft-law guidelines. These may be historically grown and, therefore, not necessarily systematic and well-coordinated. How does the mix of issues governed by laws and through self-regulation mechanisms of the research community influence the research integrity landscape and what does it mean for research integrity processes and practices? Through the introduction of a section on research integrity in the Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education (HS-QSG) in 2024, Austria has become a showcase for possible effects of juridification of research integrity concerns.

Before 2024, Austria had one soft-law guideline for Good Scientific Practice issued by the Austrian Agency for Research Integrity (OeAWI) on which its member institutions had agreed. In addition, institutions either had their own guideline or just referenced the OeAWI guideline. Finally, the Universities Act 2002 (UG) prohibited ghostwriting and plagiarism, making these the only two types of research misconduct included – at least for higher education institutions – in law. Although not completely logically consistent, this set-up focused on self-regulation of the research community and institutions.

In 2024, the government updated the laws governing higher education institutions, most notably the HS-QSG. The section on research integrity now includes a definition of integrity for education, teaching, and research (at education institutions), the requirement to foster a “culture of integrity”, and a definition of good scientific and good artistic (!) practice as the adherence to legal regulations, ethical norms and the state-of-the-art expectations of one’s field. The section further includes as research misconduct not just plagiarism and ghostwriting but now also sabotage of research or artistic activities of others, the use of unauthorized aids (e.g., AI tools), and the fabrication and falsification of data. Finally, the law requires institutions to include more details on integrity, good practices, and processes and sanctions regarding possible misconduct in their regulations.

This new law has already set a number of developments and debates in motion. First, what is artistic integrity and good artistic practice? Although meant to provide visibility to non-research, art-focused degrees at universities of music and the arts, the law has created a term the meaning of which is hotly debated. Second, what will the juridification of large parts of existing research integrity guidelines mean for responsibility and competence to both facilitate good practices and process cases of misconduct? We will present an update on consequences and developments.