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Ombuds Committee for Research Integrity in Germany as an Integrative Institution for Safeguarding Research Integrity

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The Ombuds Committee for Research Integrity in Germany advises researchers and research institutions on good research practice (GRP) and in cases of conflict. It also is involved in national and international networking activities and in actively shaping the discourse on GRP. In 2025, the Committee, which was installed in 1999, started to work under the umbrella of a supporting association which unites all major German science organizations. This development, which can be seen as a success story to strengthen research integrity in Germany, was accompanied by a comprehensive structural reorganization of the Committee and its office.

Our poster will present the structural and legal foundations of the upheaval of this national research integrity body as well as its interdependencies with other players in Germany, Europe and beyond. The predecessor organisation, the so-called “German Research Ombudsman” was set up back in 1999, following the memorandum ‘Guidelines for Safeguarding Good Scientific Practice’ published by the German Research Foundation (DFG). However, it did not have its own legal form and was financed through project funding. In 2015, the German Council of Science and Humanities published ‘Recommendations on Research Integrity’ and advocated the establishment of a cross-institutional platform at national level that should act as forum for exchange and standardisation. This platform should also make recommendations for quality assurance at universities and scientific institutions. The idea arose, that the “Research Ombudsman” could take over these tasks, but before that, it needed a stronger legal foundation.

The idea took off and in 2021, strategic deliberations were stepped up, aiming at legal independence as a registered association and financial institutionalisation. To achieve this challenging task, the DFG contacted diverse stakeholders, underlining the importance of maintaining GRP as a permanent task. In 2022, the German Bundestag (the parliament) agreed that the DFG could institutionally support the intended association. Simultaneously, the members of the Alliance of Science Organisations – a collaboration of the major German research funding and research performing organisations – agreed to become the founding members of this supporting association. Eventually in 2024, the association ‘Ombuds Committee for Research Integrity in Germany e.V.’ (OWID) was officially registered. OWID e.V. now acts as a supporting organisation, all over strengthening the Ombuds Committee’s work.

We present this pathway to building a legal body to promote research integrity, which required extensive political and strategic collaboration between different stakeholders and advocate a joint approach at the national level.