

Rules for the Research Practice Committee

Aarhus University's rules regarding the Committee for Responsible Conduct of Research and Freedom of Research (The Research Practice Committee).

Part 1. Purpose and regulatory basis

Section 1.-(1) Aarhus University establishes a Committee for Responsible Conduct of Research and Freedom of Research (Research Practice Committee) to handle cases regarding well-founded suspicions of research misconduct, questionable research practices or pressure on freedom of research

(2) The committee is independent of the senior management team in all its activities, including its investigation and consideration of specific cases.

(3) The members of the committee are bound by the same duty of confidentiality as applies to public offices in respect of information received in their capacity as members of the committee. The same applies to any ad hoc members or external experts, cf. section 13(1).

2.-(1) The committee may consider cases related to research carried out at Aarhus University, cases which form the basis for an academic degree awarded by Aarhus University, or cases related to research carried out by an employee at Aarhus University, irrespective of where the research is carried out.

3.-(1) The assessment of whether a specific practice is in accordance with responsible conduct of research and respects the framework for freedom of research must be carried out on the basis of the Policy for research integrity, freedom of research and responsible conduct of research at Aarhus University, the Danish Code of Conduct for Research Integrity and the international recommendations on which these are based, the Act on research misconduct, and the provisions of the University Act regarding the right to freedom of research. In addition, there are rules specific to the individual disciplines, which are covered in faculty guidelines.

Part 2. Appointment and organization

Section 4.-(1) On nomination from the academic councils, the rector appoints two members from each faculty and an alternate for each member.

(2) Associate professors, senior researchers, professors and emeriti at Aarhus University may be appointed as members and alternates. Members of the committee and alternates may not at the same time occupy a managerial function at the university, or be appointed as responsible conduct of research and freedom of research advisers. Members and alternates must be recognised, active researchers with extensive research experience and unquestionable academic integrity. In connection with its nominations, the academic councils must seek to distribute them so as to ensure insight into as many of the faculty's disciplines as possible.

(3) Members and their alternates are appointed for a three-year term as of September 1st. Members and alternates are eligible for reappointment. If a member or alternate resigns in the middle of a term, a successor shall be appointed for the remainder of the term.

(4) The rector appoints a chair, who must be a lawyer.

(5) To the extent necessary, members must have their workload reduced in order to compensate for the time required to perform their duties as members.

5.-(1) The committee is free to organise its own work as it deems fit.

6.-(1) The rector ensures that secretarial services are provided for the committee.

Tasks

7.-(1) The committee has the following tasks:

1) to forward reports regarding research misconduct to the Danish Committee on Research Misconduct and to assist the committee in its work, cf. Part 3 and pursuant to the Danish Research Misconduct Act.

2) to consider reports of questionable research practices, cf. Part 4.

3) to consider cases regarding pressure on freedom of research, cf. Part 5.

4) together with the faculties' advisers on responsible conduct of research and freedom of research, to take initiative to ensure that the guidelines for responsible conduct of research and freedom of research at Aarhus University are regularly reviewed at Aarhus University.

5) to prepare an annual summary report on the cases considered by the committee and submit this to the Danish Committee on Research Misconduct. The report is included in the university's overall report on research integrity, freedom of research and responsible conduct of research, and is submitted to the academic councils, the faculties' liaison committees, the Research Committee, the senior management team and the university board.

(2) The committee may consider cases on its own initiative or at the request of the rector.

Part 3. Consideration of cases – research misconduct

8.-(1) Cases relating to suspicions of incidents defined as research misconduct cf. section 3 of the Research Misconduct Act, are outside the committee's purview and must be forwarded to the Danish Committee on Research Misconduct after review by the chair of the committee.

(2) A complaint may concern the person reporting the incident as a request to be cleared of allegations of research misconduct.

(3) The university must refuse to refer a complaint of research misconduct to the Danish Committee on Research Misconduct if the complaint does not contain the information set out in section 11 of the Research Misconduct Act.

(4) The secretariat must brief the committee and the rector on complaints referred to the Danish Committee on Research Misconduct.

9.-(1) If the Danish Committee on Research Misconduct has ascertained that research misconduct has taken place in a specific case, and the case relates to a researcher employed at Aarhus University, the rector may ask the committee for an opinion on the choice of sanction, cf. section 15.

Part 4. Case consideration – questionable research practices

10.-(1) After having been presented to the chair of the committee, cases involving suspicion of questionable research practices are to be referred for consideration either by the committee, by several research institutions in collaboration or by drawing on external expertise.

(2) A complaint may concern the person reporting the incident as a request to be cleared of allegations of questionable research practices.

11.-(1) The committee may decline to consider a case regarding questionable research practices if the complaint is manifestly unfounded, if the complaint does not contain adequate justification and documentation for the claim, or if the case is not deemed to be relevant to the purpose of the committee, cf. Part 1.

(2) In special cases, the committee may decide that a previously rejected or closed case is to be reopened, particularly if important new information has come to light.

(3) The committee may only in exceptional circumstances consider a case which has not been brought before the committee within a reasonable time after which the informer had or should have had the necessary prerequisites for reporting it.

(4) As a rule, the committee is not to consider cases brought before it anonymously.

12.-(1) The committee investigates a given case in compliance with the rules of the Danish Public Administration Act, including rules on the consultation of parties to the case.

(2) Cases must normally be considered in closed committee meetings, but in exceptional circumstances the committee may decide to allow oral presentation. In connection with an oral presentation, the person presenting the case to the committee is entitled to bring an observer.

13.-(1) The committee may, on an ad hoc basis, obtain the assistance of researchers at Aarhus University who can provide special insight into fields or research areas of relevance to the assessment of a specific case. When considering particular questions, the committee may also obtain expert assistance from persons outside Aarhus University who are able to provide special insight into a particular field or research area.

(2) The committee may set up an ad hoc committee of experts in the particular field(s) to which the case pertains. Persons who are not members of the committee may be members of ad hoc committees. An ad hoc committee must submit a recommendation to the committee.

14.-(1) When a case has been considered, the committee prepares a written report including a reasoned opinion on the case and if relevant a recommendation on sanctions to be imposed. The report etc. is presented to the rector and to the person to whom the case pertains.

15.-(1) If the committee concludes that the conduct described in the report can be characterised as questionable research practices, the committee may recommend the following sanctions to the rector and the responsible dean, taking into account the severity and clarity of the case:

- that the defendant be reprimanded for the unacceptable conduct (reprimand/warning);
- that the responsible dean consider whether the case should have consequences for the defendant's employment;
- that the research in question be retracted;
- that any possible injured parties be informed;
- that any private or public partners be informed;
- that other relevant public authorities in the area be informed;
- that, if a criminal offence is deemed to have been committed, the police be notified.

16.-(1) In its recommendation the committee must indicate whether its decision is unanimous. If the committee fails to reach a unanimous decision, the recommendation must also include the minority opinion.

17.-(1) Consideration by the committee of complaints of questionable research practices must generally be completed within 12 months after receipt of a complaint.

Part 5. Case consideration – cases concerning pressure on freedom of research

18.-(1) A researcher at Aarhus University may request that the committee consider a case concerning pressure on freedom of research.

(2) A prerequisite for bringing a case before the committee for consideration is that an attempt to have the case considered at faculty level has been made, if necessary with the assistance of one of the university's responsible conduct of research and freedom of research advisers.

19.-(1) Cases of pressure on freedom of research are to be considered by the committee in accordance with the rules set out in Parts 1 and 4. When consideration of a case is concluded, the committee prepares a written report including a recommendation regarding the matters described in the case. The report may contain recommendations of possible sanctions. The report etc. is submitted to the rector.

Entry into force

20.-(1) These rules were last amended April 15th 2021.