

Policy for research integrity, freedom of research and responsible conduct of research at Aarhus University

Preface

Aarhus University is a world-class university with an international reputation for excellent research, outstanding research-based degree programmes and value-adding collaboration with private companies and public government authorities and institutions.

The highest quality demands honesty, transparency and responsibility in all of the university's research activities, with respect for freedom of research and in a research climate characterised by lively, open and critical academic discussion within and across different fields of research and research traditions.

Aarhus University endorses the [Danish Code of Conduct for Research Integrity](#), which is based on international declarations and principles for research integrity, freedom of research and responsible conduct of research. This means that Aarhus University:

- Safeguards the freedom of research of the university and the individual researcher
- Has clearly defined standards for the responsible conduct of research, including how to ensure honesty, transparency and responsibility in the execution of research
- Instructs in and advises on research integrity, freedom of research and responsible conduct of research
- Has clear rules and procedures for handling cases regarding research misconduct, questionable research practices and pressure on freedom of research.

The policy encompasses all disciplines and contributes to a common understanding of research integrity, freedom of research and responsible conduct of research.

1. Research integrity

Research is the foundation for all activities at Aarhus University. For this reason, Aarhus University strives to ensure credibility and a high level of integrity in research by continuously ensuring the best possible framework for maintaining and developing the principles of research integrity.

Everyone involved in research at Aarhus University must integrate the basic principles for research integrity that form the foundation for all research into their work. These principles apply to all phases of the research process, and include among others the central principles of honesty, transparency and responsibility, so as to ensure that research at Aarhus university is conducted with openness and in a credible, objective, fair and impartial manner.

Ultimately, a lack of respect for and protection of freedom of research may compromise these fundamental principles to the extent that research integrity is undermined.

2. Freedom of research

Aarhus University views freedom of research as an essential prerequisite for the independence, quality and legitimacy of research. For this reason, Aarhus University safeguards the university's fundamental autonomy, the university's and individual researchers' freedom of research and research ethics.

Aarhus University has academic autonomy and is independent of special interests in its activities. It is crucial that Aarhus University ensure freedom of research in relation to the political or commercial interests of internal or external players.

Individual researchers at Aarhus University have freedom of research within their academic field of employment, with the obligations arising from the employment relationship and within the university's research strategy framework.

Freedom of research includes the right to:

- Define research problem
- Select and develop theories
- Collect empirical data and use relevant methodologies, and
- To present and discuss hypotheses, results and arguments publicly.

Individual researchers have freedom of speech and cannot be subject to a duty of confidentiality above and beyond what is dictated by legislation or binding contracts.

It is crucial for Aarhus University that both the independence and the integrity of researchers are beyond question. Any researcher who experiences pressure on his or her freedom of research can seek confidential and anonymous advice from responsible conduct of research and freedom of research advisers at each faculty.

2.1. Research collaboration with external parties

Research collaboration within and between fields and with external partners is an important dimension of research in general, and Aarhus University wishes to strengthen it.

In connection with co-funded research, commissioned research and other income-generating activities as well as research-based public sector consultancy, the central principles of the responsible conduct of research and research integrity – honesty, transparency and responsibility – apply as well. The same applies to the arm's length principle and the principle of impartiality. Research collaboration with external parties is thus based on the same key principles as all other research.

The responsibility for safeguarding the integrity and impartiality of research collaboration with external parties cannot be borne by the university alone, but presupposes that all parties involved, both internal and external, understand and respect the importance of free and independent research and research-based consultancy, and contribute to safeguarding it in every

context. This means that there must be a common understanding of conditions, roles and responsibility in research collaboration, with a view to supporting production, application and communication of impartial knowledge for the benefit of society as a whole. To this end, the partners in a research collaboration should enter into agreements on all relevant issues as early as possible in the research process, and state how the entire research collaboration will be organised so as to ensure the responsible conduct of research.

Aarhus University has laid down the rules for research collaboration with external parties in [Ground rules for responsible conduct of research and research freedom in regard to collaboration with external parties](#).

3. Responsible conduct of research

Clear standards for responsible conduct of research at Aarhus University are intended to help individual researchers and research groups initiate, execute and complete research projects with honesty, transparency and responsibility. Responsible conduct of research is an integral aspect of the work of researchers, and of the management's responsibility in relation to the individual researcher.

Aarhus University endorses the [Danish Code of Conduct for Research Integrity](#), which contains common standards for responsible conduct of research within the individual steps of the research process:

- Research planning and conduct
- Data management
- Publication and communication
- Authorship
- Research collaboration
- Conflicts of interest

3.1. Research planning and conduct

Research at Aarhus University must be carried out with due respect for the generally recognised methods of the research area in question, codes of research ethics and other professional standards.

At Aarhus University, the individual researcher or research group must describe the design and execution of the planned research in a research strategy, plan or protocol to the extent and in accordance with current practice within the individual research areas in question, regardless of the fact that research methods may differ across the different research areas in question. The division of roles and responsibilities for all participants must also be established in this document.

In the course of the research process, researchers must consider whether there is a need to make any amendments to or adjustments of the plan or protocol, as well as whether it is necessary to apply for permits, approvals or the like, for example from the National Committee on Health Research Ethics.

The faculties are responsible for ensuring that instructions are available for all fields regarding

procedures for handling research plans and protocols and amendments to these, as well as procedures for obtaining any required approvals and permits for research activities.

3.2. Data management

Within all fields, management and storage of research data must be carried out in accordance with applicable rules in order to ensure transparent and responsible research.

For research carried out at Aarhus University:

- Generation and use of research data should be carefully planned in connection with the initiation of a new research project.
- All primary material (e.g. biological material, notes, interviews, texts and literature, digital raw data, registrations, etc.) and data (detailed records of the primary material which forms the basis for the analysis that leads to the results) must be stored securely and appropriately at Aarhus University, where servers, archives etc. will be made available.
- All experimental protocols, plans and strategies for experiments/studies, notes, laboratory records, data and primary material must be stored for a period of at least five years after the publication or completion of the project, unless this is in conflict with other academic standards and legislation. There must be open access to the material forming the basis of publications ([Fair principles](#)), unless this is in conflict with contractual obligations and/or other legal rules concerning e.g. ethics, confidentiality or protection of personal data or intellectual property rights.
- Ownership of primary research material and data derived from research can be determined by legislation, for example copyright or the protection of personal data, and/or contractual agreements, for example employment agreements or agreements with third parties. Ownership can therefore lie with the researcher, Aarhus University or a third party, or it can be shared between several parties. If the material or data is owned by Aarhus University or consists of data for which Aarhus University is responsible, it can only be shared with or used by a third party or former employees outside Aarhus University following written agreement with the head of department.
- Research data and other primary research material from Aarhus University must be disposed of in a safe and secure manner with due regard for any ethical considerations and in compliance with applicable legislation.

Aarhus University's rules in this regard are described in [Instructions for storage and management of research data](#).

3.3. Publication and communication

Publication and other forms of communication are a prerequisite for disseminating, evaluating and discussing research results. Research must be communicated in an honest, transparent and accurate manner. The form, style and level of detail may vary depending on what communication channels are used.

Research publications must be subject to peer review in accordance with best practice within the research area in question.

All parties who contribute to research activities at Aarhus University must strive to communicate their research and research results by openly and honestly presenting and discussing data, research method and process as well as research results with fellow researchers and the general public.

Aarhus University is responsible for supporting researchers in this through education and training and by ensuring that staff and others understand and respect freedom of research and the special duty and responsibility of researchers.

Aarhus University endorses the [Universities Denmark principles for good research communication](#).

3.4. Authorship and copyright

Authorship is of considerable academic, social and economic importance. Correct attribution of authorship contributes to the credibility and transparency of research and is a central element in maintaining and developing responsible conduct of research.

Aarhus University recognises that the traditions and principles for the attribution of authorship vary across fields.

Contributors are defined as authors if they have made a significant contribution to the publication in question, if the contribution has been acknowledged by all other authors, and if the contribution at a minimum comprises:

1. Substantial contributions to the conception or design, data collection, analysis or interpretation of data, and
2. Substantial contributions to the drafting of the publication.

Authors must approve the final research publication, and Aarhus University expects anyone who accepts authorship to also assume responsibility for the academic integrity of the overall work. The degree of responsibility of each author is to be assessed in relation to their individual role in the research project and in relation to their expertise, experience, seniority, supervisory role and other relevant factors.

In general, copyright on research articles and academic books in which research results are published belongs to the author in question, provided that this does not constitute an obstacle to Aarhus University's ability to live up to its obligations in connection with contracts, grants or other agreements with third parties.

Copyright on computer programs and patent or utility model rights to inventions and utility models produced in an employment relationship at Aarhus University are regulated by the Danish Copyright Act and the Act on Inventions at Public Research Institutions. This means that the copyright on a protected computer program is immediately transferred to Aarhus University, and that Aarhus University may decide to take over an invention in order to submit patent or utility model notification with a view to commercial exploitation of the results of the research, and to postpone publication of these results for a limited period of time.

3.5. Research collaboration

Research collaboration within and between fields and with external partners is an important dimension of research in general, and Aarhus University wishes to promote it.

Research traditions vary across disciplines, sectors and fields. For this reason, Aarhus University must ensure that a common understanding of the principles for responsible conduct of research develops as early as possible in research collaboration, including procedures, duties and responsibilities related to responsible conduct of research within the framework of the research collaboration.

3.6. Conflicts of interest

Conflicts of interest are situations in which researchers have financial or other interests that may compromise or influence their research findings. What is decisive in this regard is not whether the research actually is influenced by the conflict of interest, but that there are grounds for suspicion, well-founded or not, that it may have been.

Responsible conduct of research involves ensuring that all potential conflicts of interest are identified at the earliest possible stage in the process; this applies in relation to all the parties involved in the research collaboration. The immediate supervisors of the parties involved must be informed of any potential conflicts of interest before the collaboration agreement is entered into, and can contribute to resolving any concerns in this regard.

All parties involved with research activities, whether as researchers or as evaluators of the research activities of others, are thus expected to be open and honest regarding any possible conflicts of interest.

These rules entered into force on 28 August 2019.

This policy was most recently amended on 8 June 2022 and replaces previous versions.