

# QRPs and the limitations of the FFP definition of research misconduct

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Project “Discussion Hubs to Foster Research Integrity”,  
as part of the German Research Ombudsman,  
funded by the DFG (German Research Foundation)

# Structure of the German Research Ombudsman

**The Office: first point of contact for questions and enquiries, confidential advice**



Dr. Hjördis Czesnick  
Head of Office



Fanny Oehme  
M.Sc.



Michaelae Kahlert  
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**Project: Discussion Hubs to Foster Research Integrity**



Dr. Katrin Frisch



Dr. Felix Hagenström



Dr. Nele Reeg

**The Committee: assessing enquiries, solution-orientated conflict mediation**



Prof. Dr. Eric Steinhauer (Spokesman)  
Director of the University Library  
University of Hagen

Prof. Dr. Renate Scheibe  
Plant Physiology  
University of Osnabrück



Prof. Dr. Daniela N. Männel  
Immunology  
University of Regensburg



Prof. Dr. Roger Gläser  
Technical Chemistry  
University of Leipzig



# Discussion Hubs to Foster Research Integrity

(funded by the DFG)



Discussion hub: „Authorship criteria and best practices in authorship conflicts“

Project coordination: Dr. Nele Reeg



Discussion hub: „Dealing with research data“

Project coordination: Dr. Katrin Frisch



Discussion hub: „Dealing with plagiarism in academia“

Project coordination: Dr. Felix Hagenström



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Located on the boundary  
between *research* and the  
*work of the German  
Research Ombudsman*.

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Translation and sharing  
expertise from the German  
Research Ombudsman  
with others.

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# Discussion Hubs to Foster Research Integrity

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## Main Aims of the Project



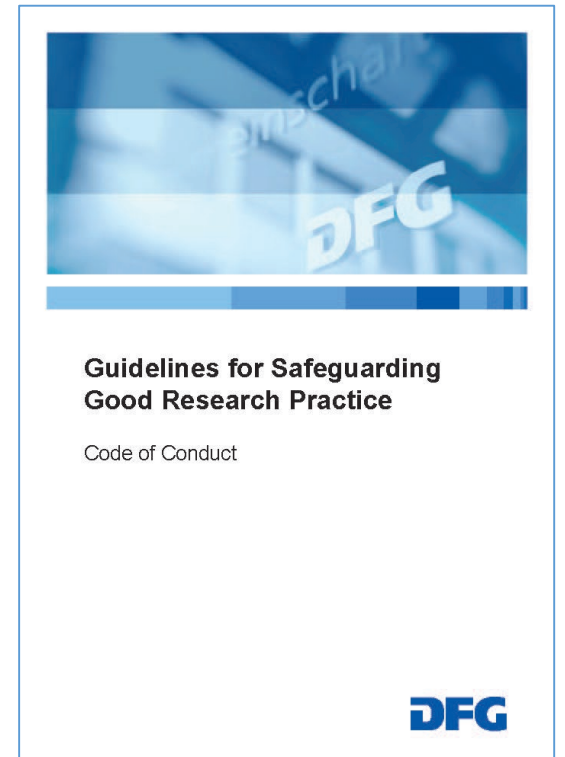
Book *Fairness in Science*:  
commentary on current challenges  
(due to be published in autumn 2022)



**Bringing together** diverse experts and stakeholders for interviews, workshops and panel discussions.



**Developing guidelines** supplementary to the standards of good research practice formulated in the DFG Code of Conduct.



DFG Guidelines for Safeguarding  
Good Research Practice, 2019

# Research Misconduct vs. QRP

**Research Misconduct:** comprises *fabrication, falsification, and plagiarism* (FFP) → most common definition.

**Questionable Research Practices:** do not fall under misconduct, but still are at odds with Good Research Practice (GRP).

*Examples:*

- Idea, conception or design: e.g., insufficient review of current literature, deselecting appropriate methods.
- Data acquisition, analysis or interpretation: e.g., hypothesizing after the results are known, ignoring negative results, cherry picking of data, lack of validation.
- Publication: e.g., salami slicing, self-plagiarism, inappropriate attribution of authorship, selective reporting of results (cf. Ravn/Sørensen 2021; Hall 2019).



**From the point of GRP,** both research misconduct and QRPs constitute a deviation, if not a violation.

➤ Fostering research integrity needs to give consideration to QRPs.

# Negative Impact of QRPs

## Impact on Science

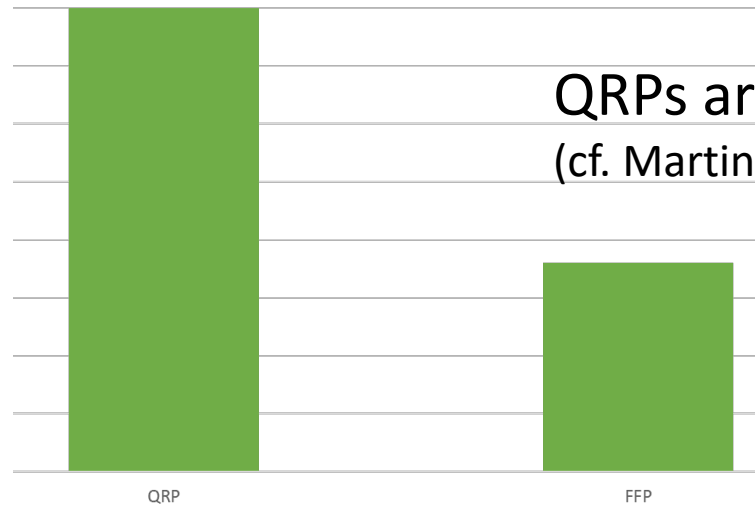
- Cluttering the literature with science that's neither robust nor replicable
- Loss of trust in science and its findings
- Misallocation of credit
- Waste of money and resources

## Impact on Society

- Waste of taxpayer money
- No improvement of knowledge, but instead impairment of gathering robust knowledge
- Negative effects on policy making and discourses in society as well as on decisions by people who rely on science for their professional duties

- Acknowledging the *detrimental impact* of QRPs voids the argument that QRPs are less serious than FFP
- Detrimental aspect should not only be tied to the specific category of deviation from good research practice (misconduct or not) but also to the *outcome* of said deviation

# Prevalence of QRPs



QRPs are way **more prevalent** than FFP

(cf. Martinson et al 2005; Fanelli 2009; Gopalakrishna/Riet/Vink et al. 2022)



**Precise numbers** are hard to come by

(cf. John/Loewenstein/Prelec 2012; Fiedler/Schwarz 2016)



Despite the lack of precise numbers: **serious issue** that needs addressing

# Unresolved issues

## No consensus on:

- what constitutes QRPs
- what constitutes misconduct
- assessing the severity of QRPs



## Lack of:

- guidelines that explicitly address QRPs and their distinction from misconduct
- discipline-specific debates on QRPs
- guidelines that specify rules for specific research contexts

## Practical difficulties

### for research integrity officers and institutions:

- in mediating cases of conflict
- in determining appropriate sanctioning and preventive measures



## What adds significance to these issues

- With more international collaboration, a cross-cultural, cross-national understanding becomes increasingly important
- QRPs can also be read as a symptom of science being broken



# Recommendations

**Change of terminology** around misconduct and QRPs: establishing the term “**detrimental research practice**” (DRP) (as suggested by the NASEM report 2017) – at least for some QRPs (where “questionable” might be seen as euphemistic)



Development of **recommendations** for handling cases of conflict: in form of guidelines, FAQs or case examples including adequate solutions (esp. useful for research integrity officers and institutions dealing with such cases)

**Preventive measures:** Apart from training and rising awareness, addressing the incentive structures in academia is of crucial importance. Currently, QRPs are rewarded. Better instead: **rewarding research practices in line with GRP.**



# Thank you for your attention!

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