

# The Athens Statement: Embedding research integrity in cross-sectoral research and in engagement for policymaking

Panagiotis Kavouras,<sup>1,2</sup> Daniel Barr,<sup>3</sup> Eleni Spyrou,<sup>4</sup> Maura Hiney<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Centre for Medical Ethics, Institute of Health and Society, Faculty of Medicine, University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway

<sup>2</sup> HEAL-Link Office, Library & Information Center, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece

<sup>3</sup> Research and Innovation, RMIT University, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

<sup>4</sup> School of Chemical Engineering, National Technical University of Athens, Athens, Greece

<sup>5</sup> Institute for Discovery, University College Dublin, Dublin, Ireland

## Preamble

Research Integrity (RI) provides a set of principles and a coherent set of practices that research-related stakeholders and institutions are expected to adhere to, in order to “*maximise the quality, reliability, and robustness of research and its results, and to respond adequately to threats to, or violations of, good research practices*”<sup>\*</sup> and to preserve “*the trustworthiness of the research system and its results.*”<sup>\*</sup> Research is performed by different actors in academic, industrial, and other settings and, as a result, it requires collaborations across disciplines, countries, cultures, types of institutions, and sectors. Likewise, research is being governed by policies that, ideally, should have been the output of engagement of these research actors with policymakers.

The Montreal and the Cape Town Statements have provided frameworks for acknowledging and addressing the challenges emanating from cross-boundary research collaborations, i.e. research collaborations between countries with different legal systems, organisational and funding structures, research cultures, and availability of resources for research. The Athens Statement (AS), by enriching the work done in the 6<sup>th</sup> World Conference on Research Integrity (WCRI), provides a set of recommendations to embed RI in research collaborations across sectors and in engagement with policymakers for developing research-related policies.

The AS aligns with the goal of the Singapore Statement to bring forward principles and professional responsibilities “*that are fundamental to the integrity of research wherever it is undertaken;*” and it is composed of four high-level recommendations, each of them supported by specific practices.

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\* ALLEA (2023) The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity – Revised Edition 2023. Berlin. DOI 10.26356/ECOC.

## Recommendations

### 1. Cross-sectoral research collaborations should not jeopardise academic freedom

- 1.1 Universities engaged in, or planning to engage in, cross-sectoral research collaborations should not divert resources originally allocated to basic/fundamental research toward innovation.
- 1.2 Universities should introduce measures that safeguard the independence of research from vested interests, especially in the case of research related to innovation.
- 1.3 Research Integrity Offices and Research Ethics Committees should include experts with knowledge of research translation and innovation.
- 1.4 Training and guidance in RI and Research Ethics should be applied as widely as possible to all participants across the collaborating sectors.

## 2. Cross-sectoral research collaborations should ensure fair distribution of benefits

- 2.1 Cross-sectoral research collaborations should be based on fair and equitable benefit-sharing agreements.
- 2.2 In such benefit-sharing agreements the knowledge transferred between universities and the private sector should be communicated clearly to all collaborating partners.
- 2.3 Universities and the private sector should recognise the different incentive structures applied to researchers in their respective sectors, when drafting benefit-sharing agreements.
- 2.4 Transparency/Openness must be perceived and applied with consideration for the different contexts of universities and the private sector, to ensure that Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) are protected.

## 3. Mutual trust must be promoted between universities, the private sector, and policymakers

- 3.1 Conflicts of Interest should be clearly declared, especially by academics who consult the private sector and/or who have established their own private interest companies (spin-offs, start-ups) and/or who participate in joint research projects with the private sector.
- 3.2 Audit and certification procedures used in the private sector must be communicated transparently to academic partners in cross-sectoral research collaborations.
- 3.3 Audit and certification procedures of research laboratories located in universities should be designed and developed by university researchers and communicated transparently to private sector partners in cross-sectoral research collaborations; these procedures should be appropriate and proportionate to the disciplinary context and to the nature of the research conducted.
- 3.4 Mutual understanding between universities and the private sector can be promoted through secondments of researchers from the private sector into universities and vice versa.
- 3.5 Engagement between sectoral partners should occur very early in the translation process and bring together universities, organisations representing stakeholders directly affected by the research results (such as patient organisations), NGOs, companies that will invest, and end users.
- 3.6 Pre-registration of cross-sectoral collaborative research studies should be part of the translation process (the pre-registration scheme of [clinicaltrials.gov](https://www.clinicaltrials.gov) can serve as an inspiration).
- 3.7 Researchers engaged in cross-sectoral collaborative research should publish the original data and manage biases to build confidence in the research (Cochrane systematic reviews provide inspiration on how to acknowledge the risk of bias).

## 4. Interaction with policymakers should be based on reliable assessment of potential research impact and it should be extended to the policymakers' environment

- 4.1 Universities should collaborate with policymakers to promote and monitor the impact of published research that might be translatable to the policy environment, for example, by developing a shared ex-post impact assessment framework, or by developing a reward system for impactful research.
- 4.2 When university researchers inform policymaking, the main communication target should not only be policymakers, but also the advisers, lobbyists, and think tanks that interact with the policymakers.
- 4.3 University researchers/research groups should create a portfolio to showcase to policymakers (including policy advisors, lobbyists, and think tanks) how validity, robustness and reproducibility of data are achieved.

**Acknowledgements:** The authors gratefully acknowledge the contributions of: Paula Saner and David Blades for the immense help they provided for the conduct of the two Focus Track sessions during the 8<sup>th</sup> WCRI, Daniele Fanelli for the invaluable help he provided in using the comCensus platform for collecting comments on the 2<sup>nd</sup> version of the AS, the 10 anonymous experts that were interviewed when initiating the development of the AS, those who provided their feedback before and during the 8<sup>th</sup> WCRI, and those who shared their comments via comCensus.

