

MWS Ethics of Research Committee Rules of Procedure

Adopted by the Foundation Board on 13 May 2022

Preamble

The MWS is establishing, on the basis of the recommendations of the German Research Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, DFG), an Ethics of Research Committee (MWS Ethics Committee). The MWS lays down the following procedural rules, which take into account its institutes' range of specialised fields and the research activities abroad.

The scientists of the MWS handle the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of research responsibly. This responsibility is not limited to compliance with legal requirements, but also includes the obligation to thoroughly assess the possible consequences of their research projects and to evaluate the respective ethical aspects. The good worth protecting is the psychological and physical integrity of individuals. For this purpose alone, they obtain ethics votes in critical cases. Furthermore, they obtain approvals and ethics votes when required by legal regulations or funding agencies.

Before the Ethics Committee is asked to vote, the employee must examine together with the head of the institute whether, at the level of the respective institute or in the case of a cooperation project, one of the other institutions involved can ensure an efficient process for clarifying the ethical issue. Likewise, more specific specialised processes, for example data protection impact assessments under data protection law, are to be examined with priority.

Section 1 Duties and Basic Principles of the Ethics Committee

The task of the Ethics Committee is to advise on and assess research projects in terms of significant ethical risks to the human dignity, life, health, liberty or property of individuals.¹ Irrespective of the advice provided by the Ethics Committee, the scientists remain responsible for their own actions.

The work of the Ethics Committee is based on applicable legislation, standards for specialist science and the relevant rules of professional conduct. It takes account of national and international recommendations and takes the current state of research as its basis.

¹ See in this respect also <https://wissenschaftliche-integritaet.de/kommentare/ethische-aspekte-geistes-und-sozialwissenschaften/>

Section 2 Composition and Legal Position

Members of the Ethics Committee comprise the ombudsperson appointed by the Foundation Board to ensure compliance with good research practice, a representative of the Assembly of Directors and the MWS person responsible for data protection. The members should have research experience and/or experience in research management and be familiar with assessing issues relating to research ethics. The Ethics Committee may, also on a case-by-case basis, call on other experts as members without voting rights.

The Committee elects its chairperson from its members. Its members are independent and not bound by instructions in the exercise of their duties. They are to act to the best of their knowledge and belief. Members cannot be held personally liable for work they carry out within the Ethics Committee.

Section 3 Procedures and Method of Working

The Ethics Committee acts at the application of the Director of the respective institute or the Executive Director of the MWS if no competence of a committee of the institutes or, if applicable, of a cooperating research institution is given, or another competence cannot be clearly determined. The application is to be addressed to the chairperson of the Ethics Committee.

The application must include a generally understandable summary as well as a precise outline of the ethical aspects of the project and, if applicable, the results of examinations already carried out in this connection.

The Ethics Committee may also make third-party information part of the consultation. Such information shall be treated confidentially. The Committee is, however, not obliged to follow up on anonymous information.

The chairperson examines incoming enquiries in terms of formal and substantive competence, as well as the facts of the matter. She/he may seek advice in this respect.

The Ethics Committee deals with requests within a reasonable timeframe and produces a final written statement that records its assessment of how legally and ethically justifiable it is to conduct the project in question, where relevant with modifications and restrictions, e.g. to minimise risks. When required, the Ethics Committee asks - upon the proposal of the respective Academic Advisory Board - a designated person from the host nation to examine the project or certain parts of the project. The result is included in the final statement.

Unless otherwise provided for above, the Ethics Committee uses the DFG rules for guidance.

The Committee reports to the Director of the institute. If the Committee has acted at the instigation of the Executive Director of the MWS, it reports to him/her. The Central Office can provide support during the whole process.

Disclaimer: This English translation of the MWS Guidelines for Safeguarding Good Research Practice is provided for informational purposes. The English text was carefully translated and reviewed for accuracy. In the event that the English and German versions permit different interpretations, the German text shall prevail.