

Codes of Conduct in other scholarly associations

EASA Briefing Note, September 2020

Scholarly associations take a range of approaches to promoting professional practice amongst their members, and responding to accusations of misconduct or a failure of research integrity. Those societies with clear compliance and sanctions procedures tend to be in fields where practitioners are awarded a licence to practice, and are thus accredited via a professional register. This include the UK's [General Medical Council](#), or the [American Society of Civil Engineers](#) (see Appendix 1).

The British Psychological Society has detailed [Practice Guidelines](#), and a [members code](#) which authorises the Society to remove membership where there is clear evidence of illegal behaviour or plagiarism. It does not rule on fitness to practice. A social science society with a compliance and disciplinary framework is the [Market Research Society](#), where commercial interests ensure that members have an interest in upholding professional reputations and agreed shared standards.

The narrow field of publication ethics is rapidly developing in importance. COPE – the Committee on Publication Ethics – is a membership organisation, and our journal, like all Wiley journals, is a member. It has published a clear set of [12 guidelines](#) for every aspect of the publication process (including [authorship guidelines](#) for new researchers), along with flowcharts for dealing with cases of likely misconduct, as well as, in extremis, a [sanctions procedure](#) overseen by its Facilitation and Integrity Committee. Most useful is an extensive (600+) set of [case-studies](#) submitted to its Forum (see also Andree-Jacob 2019), each of which usually leads to the issuing of advice. [One case](#) details with a complaint about an author bullying a journal editor. COPE sees its role as primarily educational, and presents its sanctions procedure 'as a last resort in responding to egregious behaviour by members, and only after failed remediation attempts'. It also has guidelines on [ethical journal editing](#). EASA may wish to commit SA/AS to membership of COPE in future.

Most professional associations in the social sciences have not implemented sanctions and grievance procedures, because of the breadth of issues that arise and the challenges of litigation. The American Anthropological Association removed its grievance procedure in 1995 (Levy 2009). The AAA has instead focused on education and learning through dialogue. Its lively online Ethics forum includes [a post](#) justifying the Committee of Ethics's decision to not adjudicate on disputes.

Other societies encourage public dialogue but also offer specific advice and guidance to members. The [Ethical Forum](#) of the Social Research Association provides a confidential space for members to raise concerns. The Forum consults amongst itself and then offers advice to members as a Consensus report. It has also produced a [set of case studies](#).

There are a number of ongoing 'responsible research' initiatives from which EASA could benefit. These include the Horizon 2020 [PRO-RES project](#) (in which EASSH is a core partner) that is seeking to promote research integrity through an Accord, a set of resources and case

studies. The aim is to develop a shared European framework for addressing ethical issues, building on previous initiatives (eg the [UK Academy for Social Science discussions around generic principles](#)). Its key message is 'Continuous Discursive Engagement' at every stage of research. One of the PRO-RES collaborators, Prof Ron Iphofen, strongly warns against EASA adopting a compliance-led approach (such as an Ombudsman committee) because of specifically defining professional malpractice. His work instead emphasises the importance of creating formal spaces for facilitating ongoing engagement and dialogue.

Appendix

Committee on Professional Conduct of the ASCE (American Society of Chartered Engineers)

The ASCE has had a committee on professional conduct (CPC) at least as far back as the 1950s. Over half of decisions are based on a clear record of professional misconduct (eg. a criminal conviction, a disciplinary action by a licensing board, or a civil judgment). The others are personal disputes, eg around authorship, or competitive behaviour.

The CPC is met quarterly by phone, and see maybe 20 cases per year. At least a handful of these are dismissed either as out of its purview (e.g., legal rather than ethical) or because the CPC simply did not feel the conduct violated the ASCE code of ethics. Many are handled less formally, with a letter of caution or with the member's agreement to apologize/stop the behaviour/etc.

Only about 2-3 cases per year end up in "formal" disciplinary action--i.e., a recommended suspension or expulsion. This type of action requires a hearing before ASCE's leadership, but hearings are very rare. In most cases when the CPC makes this recommendation, the member either resigns or drops his/her membership.

The CPC itself ensures good practice among members, and is most effective when handling a problem that's internal to our membership (e.g., harassment or improper conduct at an ASCE event, misconduct by a volunteer).

The CPC Chair commented that 'the greatest impact on our profession was created when we started writing up [anonymized case reports](#) in our Society magazine, which are mostly based on CPC cases. It's one of the most popular columns in the magazine, engineering professors and presenters often mine our cases for educational material, and practitioners browse through these cases when they have an ethical quandary'.

References:

Jacob, M.-A. (2019). Under repair: A publication ethics and research record in the making. *Social Studies of Science*, 49(1), 77-101. doi:10.1177/0306312718824663

Levy, C. (2009). Life is Full of Hard Choices: A Grievance Procedure for the AAA? . *Anthropology News*, September 2009. 8-9