

## Case Study

# Non-Mandatory Ethics Bodies at Austrian Universities

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## Introduction

This case study analyses altogether nine non-mandatory organizations and sub-units of the Austrian university landscape that deal with questions of research ethics or – some of them, more broadly – with ethical questions of research. The paper studies these organizations' tasks, organizational set-ups, modes of operation and the extent to which they are doing well in terms of “managing contestation” and “responsibilisation” of research. Moreover, the paper looks into factors that promote and inhibit their work.

The case study is based on document analysis (see Annex) and nine interviews with chairpersons or senior employees of ethics bodies. The interviews were conducted between April and June 2014; eight of them face to face at people's workplaces and one via telephone. The interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, were fully transcribed, paraphrased and analysed by thematic analysis.

The sample includes six comprehensive and one technical university; one university specialized in veterinary medicine and one university specialized in agriculture and life sciences. It comprises different institutional responses to address the question of ethics in research and innovation. In five cases these universities established ethics commissions, other institutions are called “ethics platform”, “agency for scientific integrity”, “university commission for scientific

integrity and ethics” and “advisory board for ethical questions in scientific research”. With the exception of one organization, which is a joint establishment of several member organizations comprising university and non-university research organizations, all other bodies are located within the university.

This study concerns basic and applied research by Austrian publicly funded universities. However, it also touches upon issues of contract research from industry and the public sector which is carried out at public universities.

## **Governance arrangements of research ethics in Austria**

In the Austrian R&D context several categories of ethics committee exist. These are

1. Policy oriented ethics bodies which advise government in policy making on a national level<sup>1</sup>
2. Mandatory Research Ethics Committees at hospitals and Medical Universities (27 in number)<sup>2</sup>
3. Non-Compulsory Ethics Committees at other full universities and research institutions<sup>3</sup>
4. Ethics bodies of research funding institutions

For a comprehensive overview of these different bodies see Wolfslehner/Griessler 2015.

In contrast to medical universities, where the establishment of ethic committees is mandatory and provided for by law, no central piece of legislation stipulates that ethics committees have to be established at the other Austrian universities (Wolfslehner/Griessler 2015). It is at the universities’ discretion whether they establish an ethics committee or not.<sup>4</sup>

## **Non-mandatory ethics bodies**

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<sup>1</sup> Austrian Bioethics Commission, Advisory Board on Biotechnology and Genetic Engineering, National Committee for the Protection of Animals used for Scientific Purposes.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ethikkommissionen.at/> (01.05.2015)

<sup>3</sup> In total in Austria there are 13 non-medical universities which offer a full programme including PhD courses. Universities of applied sciences (Fachhochschulen), offering a limited programme and the different universities of arts are not included into the analysis.

<sup>4</sup> For a detailed description of ethics commissions in various Austrian contexts see Wolfslehner/Griessler 2015.

## **Why are non-mandatory ethics bodies established?**

All in all, the non-mandatory ethics bodies analysed for this case study are rather new institutions. The first was established in 2005. Other units were founded in the years 2006, 2008, 2009 and 2010 respectively. In 2011, three new organizations were set up. One ethics body of this sample was only installed in 2012.

Interviewees mentioned several reasons for this trend of establishing non-mandatory ethics bodies at Austrian universities. One explanation provided by many interviewees is pressure from national and international funding bodies and/or journals, which increasingly require ethical clearance for funding and publication. This obligation is particularly strong in research that involves human subjects and animals, although this is covered by national legislation anyway.

Several respondents also mentioned public scandals that had endangered the image and credibility of their research institutions. These scandals had triggered the establishment of an ethics body. Instances for such scandals referred to in the interviews included the use of animals for research that was considered unnecessary and cruel, the improper use of human corpses for car crash tests, the removal of bone chippings from corpses without prior informed consent by relatives, cases of plagiarism as well as research that was considered mumbo jumbo.

Another driving force for creating ethics bodies was the major reorganisation of Austrian universities in the 2002. In the context of this reorganisation medical schools became independent from comprehensive universities and took the already existing research ethics committees with them. Universities which by that had lost their ethics committees had to establish new ones.

## **Tasks and set up**

The interviews showed that bodies that deal with ethics have very different tasks.

Most bodies limit themselves to the review of research proposal and provide the ethical clearance applicants need for funding and publication. A few of these commissions in principle also have broader tasks such as to advise the university management on ethical issues or to initiate, if they consider it necessary, courses, events or research projects on ethics. However, according to interviewees, ethics bodies are rarely active in these areas and their everyday work is confined to the review of research projects.

There are a few exceptions to this general rule:

At one university ethics review is carried out at faculty level. The university's ethics advisory board is only dealing with ethics review in problematic cases and is mainly concerned with advising the university management on ethical questions.

At two universities the ethics body does not have the role of a research ethics commission. One of these universities took a different line to set up an ethics body. It chose a comprehensive approach and installed an ethics platform which is not concerned with the evaluation of individual research projects but more generally with looking into ethical aspects of university teaching and research. The main tool this university developed in the first years of the ethics platform was an ethics charter, which was adopted recently. The platform explicitly decided not to install an ethics commission for the time being.

Two ethics bodies studied in this report do not review research projects but investigate supposed scientific misconduct. One of them is fully independent, while the other one is located as an independent unit within the university.

All ethics bodies are interdisciplinary and consist of members from several faculties. In two cases the bodies also include nominees from the workers council of the scientific personnel and student representatives. One ethics board also has members from outside the university - a judge and the responsible patient ombudsperson. Two ethics bodies include only external members to guarantee their full independence.

The ethics bodies have between five and twelve delegates. An exception is the aforementioned ethics platform which comprises 26 members.

## **Size of activity**

The number of cases ethics bodies deal with every year differs according to the scope of activity (see above). Ethics committees have far more submissions to deal with than bodies that are concerned with scientific misconduct. The numbers of submissions for ethical clearance naturally vary according to the university's size. The ethics body at the largest Austrian university reviews less than 100 proposals a year; smaller ones have to deal with 60, 20 to 30 and 30 annually. Many interviewees reported that the numbers of submissions are growing because ethics committees are better known and the pressure for clearance is constantly increasing. Interviewees from organizations that deal with research integrity and scientific misconduct reported fewer cases - 3 to 10 a year.

## Activities and Procedures

In almost all cases, the initiative to submit a research project lies with the researcher.<sup>5</sup> The explanations provided by interviewees why applicants have to approach the ethics body are requirements by journals and funding organisations, university rules (code of conduct) and, in one case, researchers' growing awareness of ethical issues.

In most organisations the submission of a research project is based on the applicant's voluntary decision. Applicants are rarely obliged to submit a proposal. In the minority of universities such an obligation is laid down in the respective code of conduct. Most universities do not foresee any sanction if a researcher fails to provide a proposal for review. One university, however, requires researchers to submit all projects to the ethics commission in order to get an overview of all research done at the university. In addition, this measure should safeguard that only research projects, which have been quality checked, are submitted to the responsible Ministry for notification or approval of animal testing. If a research proposal was not provided despite the fact that this would have been mandatory, the researcher is admonished. If this happens once, it is excused. If failure happens more often, it is reported to the ombudsperson for good scientific practice.

In general, it is up to the individual researcher to decide whether he/she submits a proposal to the ethics body or not. Most ethics committees thus only can become active after a researcher took the initiative. Only a few committees can take the initiative on their own.

Applications for ethical clearance originate mainly from disciplines that conduct research on humans and animals. Interviewees most often mentioned the following disciplines: medicine, sport science, life science, psychology and experimental economy. There were little or almost no applications from the humanities and social sciences.

The procedures of ethics bodies differ considerably.

Some bodies have installed an e-mail procedure and meet little in sessions. At one university the chairperson appoints a competent rapporteur who writes an opinion. The draft is forwarded to the other members and gets accepted if none of them objects within a certain period of time. The commission only meets in sessions if the rapporteurs' opinion is opposed.

Another body carries out a formal check of all research done at the university. For review of simple cases an e-mail procedure exists. More complicated projects are discussed within meetings.

In one case, review of research proposals is carried out at faculty level; the advisory body gets only involved if difficulties arise that cannot be settled.

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<sup>5</sup> Whether bachelor, master and Ph.D. thesis are reviewed or not, and whether student or supervisor have to apply, varies between ethics bodies.

Other commissions do not pre-evaluate proposals and decide entirely during meetings.

Most ethics commissions use evaluation criteria that can be summarized under the term of research integrity. This includes the criteria of informed consent, data protection and safety, voluntariness of participation in research, issues of risk management and insurance, possible infringement of physical or psychological integrity, issues of animal research, vulnerability and the right to leave a research at any time without consequences for the test person. Scientific or societal relevance of research are almost never addressed. On the contrary, several interviewees particularly stressed the importance of freedom of research and their intention not to obstruct or censure research. Rather, some of them mentioned that their primary aim is to create awareness for the topic of ethics. They want to support researchers in their research and provide advice. In order to be supportive, they want to act rapidly and without too much red tape.

With one exception, respondents reported that their ethics body has never rejected any research project altogether. One chairperson informed that so far all submissions directly received a positive response.

In several cases, however, interview partners mentioned that the research ethics commission asks for clarifications and amendments. When these requirements are met, almost all projects pass. Several chair persons declared that such temporary rejections and revisions happen quite frequently. In some instances, they were the rule.

In all but one case the decisions of ethics bodies are only recommendations which are non-binding. They do not carry legal weight but an intrinsic pressure to comply. It is within the university's management power to interdict research. In one case projects are submitted, as foreseen by law, to the responsible Ministry for approval of animal tests by the university administration. One precondition for this submission is the positive review by the research ethics committee. Without this approval the proposal is not passed on.

No ethics body in the sample had an ex post evaluation of submitted research proposals in place. However, one of them has just set up such a procedure.

Summarizing, as an outcome of this analysis, it is possible to construct the following typology of non-mandatory ethics bodies in the Austrian university landscape:

- **Service bodies based on voluntariness** (5). Submission is voluntary. The main aim is to provide ethical clearance in order to enable researchers to receive grants and to publish. The body tries to guarantee a fast and predictable procedure. Criteria applied focus on research ethics.
- **Control bodies** (1). Researchers are obliged to submit all research. Non-compliance is sanctioned. Criteria are research integrity, methodology (in particular statistics in animal testing) and compliance with legal requirements.

- **Bodies promoting ethical reflection (1).** This body focuses on the promotion of ethical reflection (Brom et al. 2015) and the creation of a mission statement as well as on deep institutional change. The criteria of ethical reflection are broader than research ethics.
- **Bodies investigating scientific misconduct (2).** These bodies are not concerned with ethical review but with investigation of scientific misconduct.

## Actors

Important actors in the establishment and running of ethical bodies are university management, departments, researchers, commission members and the public.

University management plays an important – sometimes furthering, sometimes hindering – role in the decision whether to establish an ethics body. The cases illustrate the critical role of the rector of the university in this process. In one case, the rector refused to install an ethics commission because he was anxious that such a body might decree verdicts on research projects. In another case, the rector rejected the idea to establish an ethics commission altogether. He argued that funding organisations already had many control mechanisms in place to look at ethics in research. When a new rector took office, he supported establishing an ethics commission. In yet another case, it was the rector himself who initiated the ethics advisory board. A lesson to be learned from these examples is that the management of the university must support the idea of an ethics committee.

Rectors have a very important role in the appointment of commission members. In almost all universities studied, the right of appointment is with the rector. Only in two cases this prerogative lies with the Senate and the Board, respectively. Other major actors in the appointment process are deans and faculties, who in several instances nominate members. In a few cases, the workers' council of scientific personnel and the students' organisations delegate additional members.

An important issue in the establishment and operation of ethics bodies is individual researchers' and the departments' readiness to accept the new institutions. This is connected with the question whether existing working and funding conditions favour ethical reflections at all. One interviewee described individual researchers being under heavy pressure from contract research and the realities of contemporary academic life, which implies getting the necessary ECTS points, the necessity of writing the Ph.D. thesis, to habilitate, to publish, to accrue as many impact points as possible. In his view, acquiring contract research, as important source of funding, is a major element of occupational stress within the university system. Researchers have to get contracts in order to secure their position. However, contract research is often rather tightly calculated in terms of time, personnel and money. This in turn puts pressure on researchers, inhibits communication and impedes quality. The respondent mentioned that some researchers are sceptical towards ethical considerations in research because they fear

that they might lose important contracts. In his perspective, the stress of contract research leaves little time for ethical reflection and open debate. This view was shared by another interviewee who indicated the difficult situation and stress of researchers.

Researchers can also play an active role in promoting or inhibiting ethics bodies. In one case, it was researchers from the psychology department who recognized the importance of ethics committees for publication and ethical reflection, and tried to initiate an ethics commission. However, this was met with resistance by the rector. In another case, an interviewee mentioned that departments, particularly in ethically sensitive areas, tried to protect their autonomy and scientific freedom. The process of setting up an ethics body was fraught with difficulties, particularly, because researchers from highly sensitive research areas, like biotechnology, which have a very strong position at the university, were very sceptical and afraid that they had to question and scrutinize everything from now on. In summary, it is important to try to take researchers on board when setting up an ethics committee and to recognize the restrictions of current modes of knowledge production at contemporary universities.

In order to be able to run an ethics commission it is necessary to have dedicated and experienced members. In one case, commission members took along the experience they had from the former medical research ethics committee and learned to work with one another. The necessity to start a collaborative culture within the ethics body is mentioned in several interviews. Also interviewees bring up that it is not easy to meet the quorum and to get enough people to all meetings. Being involved in ethics bodies as a member means additional, voluntary and unpaid work on top of research, teaching and other gremial work.

The public, or, to be more precise, the university members' perception of the public, plays an important role in the establishment of ethics committees. In several cases, public scandals triggered the establishment of ethics bodies. In another case, the public outcry caused by media reports about animal tests with living pigs to study their survival of avalanches forced physicians to stop their research.

## **What works and what problems exist?**

### **What works?**

Responses concerning what ethical bodies accomplished varied. The elements of achievement mentioned most often were to succeed in setting up an ethics body, to start work, to collaborate as a body and to set up a clear and feasible process. In one case, the respondents considered it a success that the university now has an overview of all the research carried out within its institution.



Another element of success mentioned several times was that researchers got to know and accepted the ethics body. This also meant, as one respondent pointed out, to overcome a negative attitude towards the commission. The ethics commission, in this case, was able to deal with these resentments by creating a slim procedure that also helped the researchers to improve their proposals. Another interviewee mentioned that researchers appreciate the fact that a formalized process exists if they need ethics clearance.

A third factor of success mentioned, however, by fewer interviewees was that the work of the ethics body raised the awareness of researchers for ethical issues and good scientific practice. This also, as one respondent mentioned, improved the quality of research proposals.

Potential positive impacts of ethics commissions can be summarized as:

- Researchers' increased awareness of research ethics and good scientific practice;
- "Better" proposals in terms of taking into account research ethics and methodological issues (e.g. statistics in animal testing);
- Increase of publications in "better" journals because researchers are able to submit their papers to journals which require ethical clearance.

However, evaluating to what extent these elements of impact were actually realized – and whether different types of ethics bodies vary in the achievement of these impact – is beyond the scope of this paper. To address this question further research would be needed.

## Problems

Respondents also mentioned that ethics bodies are facing a number of difficulties. A basic problem pointed out in several interviews is mistrust and resistance by some researchers. In one case, the rector initially opposed the ethics commission because he considered it unnecessary; and was of the opinion that funding bodies would already cover ethical issues anyway in their funding decisions.

According to another interviewee, there are different groups of researchers, with different opinions about ethics commissions. Young researchers would perceive them as a support that potentially helps to improve proposals. Researchers, on the other hand, who do not sufficiently consider research ethics in their proposals, perceive such institutions as impediments. Several ethics bodies at first had to overcome negative attitudes held by some researchers.

The notion of opposition to ethics committees has several elements and relates to questions such as: What is ethics? Who is qualified to evaluate ethics? Is ethics in research even a valid question for open and critical debate?

One respondent explained that some researchers would consider themselves as already acting ethically anyway. Just by pursuing the research objectives they have set for themselves, they

would argue, they are already acting ethically. Some researchers would think that they do not need any ethics committee because *they* know best what's ethical. Ethics, in this interpretation, is seen as rather individualistic.

Another interviewee pointed at a general lack of a culture of debate, in which the discussion of ethical aspects or research and research design in principle are considered beneficial. This deficient discussion culture would inhibit the development of ethical debate at university.

Another problematic issue mentioned in an interview is the danger that ethics commissions might deteriorate into bodies of white washing and routinized box ticking. Ethics commissions, in this perspective, should not turn into control mechanisms or into institutions that simply vote on ethics in a bureaucratic fashion. Instead they should contribute to ethical reflection and discussion. An ethics commission, in this viewpoint, should be a place of reflection of and inquiry into basic questions of research. It should be a space that creates and promotes awareness and watchfulness for ethical issues. An ethics commission's opinion could enable researchers to reflect on their research projects. The danger that ethics commissions might turn into bureaucratic routine to provide the clearance necessary for funding and publication was also pointed out by another respondent. The ethics commission, this person remarked, quite often literally has to search a proposal very carefully to find any relevant aspect of ethics of any kind.

Lack of resources is another serious problem of ethics commissions, mentioned by respondents. As already said, commission members contribute voluntarily and on top of their ordinary workload of research, teaching and gremial work to these bodies. Membership to an ethics body means unpaid, extra and time-consuming work. This problem becomes manifest when it is hard to reach the necessary quorum for decision making because too few members are present in a meeting.

In addition, ethics commissions are not considered top priority among the many pressing issues universities nowadays are confronted with. In times of budgetary scarcity, staffing of ethics committees in terms of administrative support often is insufficient.

Another problem of ethics committees is posed by the fact that some of them are still not well known. However, being known is a double-edged sword as well, because a renowned commission might receive more applications than it can handle (see: lack of resources).

More generally, the establishment and operation of an ethics commission has to be perceived in the overall context of an organisation, its set-up, funding, incentives and culture.

First, ethical reflection requires space for open and unfearful exchange, which at times also means dissent within and between researchers. Too strong an emphasis on hierarchy impedes open and factual communication. Some university departments, as one interviewee observed, - despite some advances since the 1970s - are still characterized by a hierarchical culture – particularly between junior and senior staff members - and lack open debate.

Second, a high degree of inter- and intradepartmental fragmentation can become problematic. Well-defended independence in research and teaching can result in lack of awareness of what other researchers are doing. This absence of a check of balance – not only in research, but also teaching - again might be a prerequisite for scientific misconduct.

In addition, the high importance of contract research bears an influence on the idea of ethics in research in two ways. Firstly, as an interviewee mentioned, some researchers, are anxious that actors inside and outside the university might interfere with their research and with the financial interests that at times are involved. Thus, researchers might feel threatened by ethical inquiry carried out by colleagues and people outside the university. As a consequence, they try to protect their (financial) autonomy. This notion is particularly strong in research areas that imply large amounts of money. This anxiety, which is only understandable given researchers heavy dependence on contract research, seriously inhibits an open atmosphere of discussion and debate.

Moreover, the financial as well as time pressure, which highly competitive and short term contract research creates, does not offer a favourable environment that nourishes ethical reflection. The impulse to fence off third party's critique might be particularly strong in sensitive research areas like biotechnology, and research that relies on animal testing. Some researchers, as one interviewee observed, do not want to enter into ethical discussions because they are afraid of what they consider as public objection or outcry against their research areas.

Also the dominant incentive system of scientific careers is little conducive to ethical reflection. Particularly young researchers experience high pressure in their scientific careers. This implies short term contracts, which do not provide safety and cannot be repeatedly extended; incentive and evaluation systems that only count publications and impact factor; reliance on contract research. This creates an environment that is unfavourable to systematic ethical reflection of research.

Finally, disciplines play a role. As this case study showed, most submissions to ethics commissions originate from medicine<sup>6</sup>, sport science and natural sciences. There is little awareness of research ethics in the social sciences.

## **How can/are governance arrangements of Responsible Research and Innovation be initiated?**

Several factors turned out to be critical for the establishment of non-mandatory ethics bodies at Austrian universities.

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<sup>6 6</sup> This covers research which is not required by other legal obligations to be submitted to research and/or hospital ethics committees or animal protection commissions.

First, outside pressure was important to trigger the creation of ethics bodies. This included the requirement of ethical clearance by international journals and funding organizations. Outside pressure also meant a number of public scandals about scientific misconduct at several Austrian universities.

Second, the establishment of ethics bodies requires people who take initiative – because they care for the question of ethics of research or perceive the necessity to install such a body in order to be able to publish. However, also the active support by the university management is critical.

Third, setting up ethics bodies means to initiate and develop a social and organizational innovation. Such a development is time-consuming, at times frustrating and needs time to develop within the organisation. It is necessary to reach out to and convince researchers as well as university management.

Moreover, to create an ethics body– or more generally – to establish an opportunity to raise ethical issues at a research facility, is strongly connected with the way it is organized. Whether such an initiative is successful or not also depends on university structures and organizational cultures, funding and incentive regimes and the way how university members – e.g., senior and junior staff - relate to each other. It involves questions of inter- and intradepartmental checks and balances as well as organizational fragmentation and hierarchy. It also relates to the question what an organisation values and rewards. Incentive schemes and evaluation criteria that only reward fast publications in high-ranking journals, and thus put a lot of pressure on researchers, might diminish researchers' inclinations to invest time in important general reflection about research ethics, research objectives and the societal impact of their research. Lack of resources and unfavourable employment contracts might have the same impact. In summary, the idea of ethics in research is firmly embedded in the questions of how a university is organized and organisational change.

In addition, it is difficult and laborious to get a common understanding of ethics in research across disciplines (natural sciences, engineering, humanities, and social sciences).

It is also important, as several respondents stated, to promote awareness of ethics within the research community and not to rely too heavily on external control mechanisms. Most respondents refused the idea of binding federal regulations concerning ethics commission that are non-mandatory today, and opted for autonomous self-governance.

Ethics committees require a delicate balance between the principles of freedom of research (perceived as autonomy of individual researchers or departments) and ethical standards (which are often disputed). Ethics bodies thus are in a delicate position in relation to their colleagues: They must evaluate research with regards to ethics but also respect freedom of research.

If a university succeeds in setting up an ethics body, there are still a number of risks to be considered: If ethics committees are not accepted in the organizations, they might be circumvent-

ed, undermined and turned into a formal procedure. Moreover, there is a certain danger that getting a certificate from the ethics committee becomes an administrative routine and not an opportunity to reflect on one's research.

## Summary, conclusions and outlook

The establishment of non-mandatory ethics bodies in Austria is a recent development which was triggered by pressure from inside the research system (requirement for ethical clearance; growing awareness of ethics in research in parts of the research community; reorganisation of the university system) and outside universities (various public scandals because of suspected or actual scientific misconduct). Analysis of existing non-mandatory ethics bodies in Austria shows the following typology:

- Service bodies based on voluntariness;
- Control bodies;
- Bodies promoting ethical reflection;
- Bodies investigating scientific misconduct.

In the sample, service bodies were most frequent (5 cases), followed by bodies investigating scientific misconduct (2), control bodies and bodies promoting ethical reflection (1 each).

In most cases, the initiative for application to service bodies is with the researcher and no sanction exists if he/she fails to submit. Applications mainly originate from medicine, sport science, life science, psychology and experimental economy. Almost all service bodies confine their evaluation criteria to issues of research ethics. The question of the significance of a project is hardly touched upon, even less the question of its societal impact and contribution to grand societal challenges.

Voluntary ethics bodies hardly issue negative opinions. However, some bodies quite frequently demand applicants to provide amendments, clarifications and additional information. Several chair persons emphasized that they perceive ethics bodies as service organizations for researchers and want to be helpful in order to improve research. They expressed their eagerness not to hinder but to promote research. They emphasized the importance of swift and efficient processes which involve little red tape and are not laborious for applicants. The opinions of service bodies are non-binding recommendations.

Important actors in setting-up and running ethics bodies are university management, departments, researchers, commission members and the public.

Ethics committees perceive themselves as doing well in several ways. They accomplished to establish committees and processes that work; they were able to overcome some of the resistance of researchers that they had encountered in the beginning, and achieved some ac-

ceptance; they raised awareness for ethics and where able to establish criteria of research ethics at their university.

Beside these accomplishments existing service bodies have a number of limitations. Submission is voluntary; their practice therefore does not cover all research activities. Evaluation is often limited to research on humans and animals<sup>7</sup>, the criteria applied only cover issues of research ethics. Social sciences and humanities are therefore often not covered by ethics commissions. In addition, there is a lack of awareness for ethics review within these disciplines. Moreover, because of their focus on research ethics, service bodies do not look into the societal benefits or the significance of research questions. Finally, they clearly work as bodies of ethical governance and not of ethical reflection (Brom et al. 2015). Service bodies seem to be little accompanied by a culture of and discussion debate of ethics as well as deep institutional change.

Difficulties of ethics bodies are caused on the one hand by some researchers' scepticism. On the other hand there is a mismatch of ethics as topic that needs time, open debate and reflection with the stress caused by the existing incentive systems at universities (model careers, measuring success by impact factors only), organizational culture (e.g., hierarchy, fragmentation) and funding regimes (importance of short-term contract research). Moreover, there is a danger that ethics evaluation turns into box ticking which does not initiate and promote ethical reflection. In addition, there is a serious lack of resources.

Ethics bodies in Austria today are clearly "responsibilisation in the making". Despite the achievements reported by their chairpersons, it is currently unclear whether they work well in terms of "managing contestation" and "responsibilisation". In order to address these questions, research into the impact of ethics bodies is necessary. Elements of potential impact include: (1) increased awareness of researchers for ethical issues; (2) increased quality of proposals in terms of recognizing and addressing research ethics; (3) increased number of publications in journals that require ethical clearance; (4) ability to acquire contract money. A number of interesting further questions should be asked, such as: Does a focus on supporting rather than penalising help to institutionalize responsibilisation? Are there differences in effectiveness and efficiency between various types of ethics bodies in terms of impact- in particular between service bodies, control bodies and bodies promoting ethical reflection? Does the composition of the ethics body- e.g. involvement of employees - have an impact on researchers' commitment to responsibility (i.e., responsibilisation)? Is it possible and desirable to broaden ethics review and include questions of social impact?

## Literature

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<sup>7</sup> This covers research which is not required by other legal obligations to be submitted to research and/or hospital ethics committees or animal protection commissions.

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# Towards Anticipatory Governance of Responsible Research and Innovation



The objective of the Res-AGorA project is to develop a comprehensive governance framework for responsible research and innovation (RRI). This will be a contribution to the EU ambition of becoming a genuine Innovation Union by 2020 striving for excellent science, a competitive industry and a better society without compromising on sustainability goals as well as ethically acceptable and socially desirable conditions.

The goal of the Res-AGorA project will be achieved through extensive case study research about existing RRI governance across different scientific technological areas, continuous monitoring of RRI trends in 16 European countries, and constructive negotiations and deliberation between key stakeholders. This comprehensive empirical work will be the building blocks of the creation of a governance framework for RRI.

The case study summarised in this document is output of Res-AGorA's extensive empirical programme (Work Package 3).

More information at [www.res-agera.eu](http://www.res-agera.eu)

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