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# Research Integrity and Openness: What Codes of Ethics Say About Open Access


## Summary

- The overwhelming majority of EU countries with codes of ethics and research integrity underline the importance of sharing outputs through publication.
- Most countries also stress that this sharing should reach the general public, not just the scientific community. Many explicitly make Open Access, Open Science and/or wider open research practices a key part of their efforts to boost integrity and ethics.
- Overall, this suggests there is no fundamental issue with government and funder efforts to advance Open Access. Instead, these efforts contribute to broader integrity and ethics goals. Nonetheless, more clarity would help simplify application and remove potential confusion.


## Introduction

With the European Research Area Act approaching finalisation, advocacy for and against an EU-level Secondary Publication Right has intensified. A particular claim put forward by those seeking to delay, dilute or simply block it is that such a right runs counter to the freedom of scientific research.[1]

Such claims tend to confuse Secondary Publication Rights (SPRs) with Open Access (OA) mandates, using worries about the latter to justify opposition to the former. Ironically, the rights of researchers are thus invoked to undermine researchers' rights.

Nonetheless, SPRs and OA mandates ultimately share a long-term goal: continued progress towards universal OA to scientific publications. In this context, it is worth exploring whether there are strong grounds for the claim that OA mandates run counter to basic principles of academic or research freedom.

In this regard, it is noteworthy that the Bonn Declaration on Freedom of Scientific Research[2] focuses only on the right to publish, and says nothing that would imply that an obligation to do so in OA venues could be problematic. However, we can also look beyond it, to codes of ethics on research integrity. These are closely related, effectively setting out what are seen as the responsibilities of researchers in order to continue to justify those freedoms.

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[1] Kaufman, R (2026), *Academic Freedom for the Win; Open Access Mandate in Germany Declared Unconstitutional*, Scholarly Kitchen 16 June 2026 (link), Stech, M (2026), *An Update on the Problems Presented by the Secondary Publication Right*, Kluwer Copyright Blog, 27 June 2026 (link), subsequently firmly rebutted by Hugenholtz, B (2026), *Misleading Claims about the Secondary Publication Right*, Kluwer Copyright Blog, 13 July 2026 (link)

[2] German Presidency of the European Union (2020), *Bonn Declaration on Freedom of Scientific Research* (link)

This Insights paper contributes to the discussion by exploring what codes of ethics and related texts say about the place of OA. In particular, it examines the extent to which OA publishing aligns with research ethics principles.

It does this by reviewing available codes from EU countries, as sourced from the European Network of Research Integrity Offices,[3] as well as UK and international texts identified through internet searches. It draws on texts from 18 EU countries, plus examples from Norway, Switzerland, the UK, and international organisations.

First, it examines examples of countries that make only narrow references to publishing in general, then moves to those that highlight the importance of availability to the wider research community, those that argue for public dissemination, and finally those that make explicit references to OA. The conclusion section highlights aspects of codes of ethics that may still raise questions around OA mandates and how to resolve them.

## Category 1: No Reference

The first set of codes, four in total, either do not refer to the place of publishing within research ethics and integrity, or only do so in very broad terms. In the first case, there are the OeAWI Guidelines for Good Scientific Practice from Austria[4] and Slovenia's Code of Research Ethics and Integrity.[5]

In the second case, the 2023 Code of Conduct for Research Integrity and Procedures for Handling Alleged Violations of Research Integrity in Finland[6] only highlights the need to communicate honestly and openly about research, regardless of publication format. Meanwhile, the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity[7] only underlines that contracts with funders should "include fair agreements about access to and the publication of data and research material." None of these codes offer much clarity around publication formats.

## Category 2: A Call to Publish to Benefit the Research Community

The second category is for codes of ethics that clearly state that publication is part of the responsibilities of researchers, to support the accessibility of new insights and ideas to others. The European Code of Conduct, prepared by ALLEA,[8] for example, highlights that research should be communicated "as transparently and openly as possible."

[3] European Network of Research Integrity Offices (n.d.) (link)
[4] OeAWI (2026), *Guidelines for Good Scientific Practice* (link)
[5] ZRC SAZU (2023), *Code of Research Ethics and Integrity* (link)
[6] Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK (2023), *Finnish Code of Conduct for Research Integrity and Procedures for Handling Alleged Violations of Research Integrity in Finland* 2023 (link)
[7] Universiteiten van Nederland (2018), *Code of Conduct for Research Integrity* (link)
[8] ALLEA (2023), *The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity, Revised Edition* (link)

Within this category, some examples explicitly link publication to achieving other goals. The Italian Guidelines for Research Integrity,[9] under the heading of 'disseminate results,' underline that "research results bring collective benefits," and on this basis call for these to be "freely available to the international scientific community." The Latvian Academy of Sciences' Code of Ethics for Scientists[10] also highlights that other researchers have a right to be informed about scientific achievements, associating this with an obligation to publish to the extent permitted by data protection and confidentiality requirements.

The Code of Ethics for Scientific Research in Belgium[11] also links publication to the possibility of enforcing accountability, noting that "publication of results is at the basis of the evaluation by peers." The link between publication and the possibility of enforcing accountability is also given as a reason in the Code of Ethics for Scientific Research in Belgium, which notes that "publication of results is at the basis of the evaluation by peers." Poland too sets out an obligation to publish in its Code of Ethics for Researchers,[12] linking this to the possibility of other researchers replicating results.

## Category 3: An Expectation to Make Research Results Available to the Public

The third category goes a step further, explicitly stating that results should be available beyond academia and to the general public. While the examples here do not explicitly state that OA models should be used, this can be inferred because the general public is typically not affiliated with an institution that might have access to paywalled materials and is unlikely to purchase them directly.

International references also support this: the International Science Council, in its interpretation of the Right to Science,[13] makes clear that the wider population has "a right to equitably access information, data, and other resources necessary to enhance scientific knowledge, teaching and research."

Nationally, the Code of Ethics for Researchers of the Czech Academy of Sciences[14] urges researchers to provide the general public with 'judicious' access to non-confidential results, with the 'judicious' aspect linked to calls for openness and transparency. The Danish Code of Conduct for Research Integrity[15] highlights that "researchers have a right and an obligation to publish and communicate their results to the research community, to professional practitioners and to society at large." The Norwegian Code of Ethics for Research in Science and Technology[16] similarly notes

[9] Italian National Research Council (2019), *Guidelines for Research Integrity* (link)
[10] Latvian Academy of Sciences (2017), *Code of Ethics for Scientists* (link)
[11] BELSPO (2009), *Code of Ethics for Scientific Research in Belgium* (link)
[12] Polish Academy of Integrity (2025), *Code of Ethics for Researchers* (link)
[13] International Science Council (n.d.), *Right to Science* (link)
[14] Czech Academy of Sciences(2024), *Code of Ethics for ScientificResearch of the Czech Academy of Sciences* (link)
[15] Danish Agency for Higher Education and Science(2026), *Danish Code of Conduct for Research Integrity* (link)
[16] Norwegian National Research Ethics Committees (2024), *Guidelines for Research Ethics in Science and Technology* (link)

that "disseminating research to a broader audience beyond the research community is a social responsibility," while the Norwegian General Guidelines for Research Ethics[17] links public accessibility to "returning some benefit to… society in general," and argues that open publication is a "function of democracy."

In France (French National Charter for Research Integrity)[18] and Germany (Guidelines for Safeguarding Good Research Practices),[19] they also reference the goal that research results, as a rule, should be publicly available. The Code of Ethics of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences,[20] meanwhile, underlines that results should contribute "to the accumulation of a common legacy of knowledge," and clarifies that "openness presupposes the availability and accessibility of data supporting results published in a research paper for all interested fellow researchers and the general public."

## Category 4: Explicit Calls for Open Access Publishing

This last category covers the group representing around half of the total sample, which have explicitly made reference to the importance of open research practices, as well as more directly to OA and Open Science.

In doing so, they echo the call of the World Conferences on Research Integrity,[21] which commits signatories to valuing the principles of Open Science, as well as the World Health Organisation's Code of Conduct for Responsible Research,[22] which presents its OA policy as part of its wider approach: "this policy supports Open Access to the published output of its activities as a fundamental part of its mission and a public benefit to be encouraged wherever possible."

Turning to the national level, the Danish Code of Conduct for Research Integrity makes clear that "the aim should be Open Access whenever possible,"[23] while the Estonian equivalent[24] urges that "if other conditions are equal, the researcher prefers Open Access journals." The Code of Ethics of the Slovak Academy of Sciences[25] makes a similar call, as does the Romanian Code of Ethics and Good Conduct in Research, Development and Innovation for RDI staff in Research Organisations.[26]

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[17] Norwegian National Research Ethics Committees (n.d.), *General Guidelines for Research Ethics* (link)
[18] Office français de l'intégrité scientifique (2015), *National Charter for Research Integrity* (link)
[19] Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (2025), *Guidelines for Safeguarding Good Research Practice. Code of Conduct* (link)
[20] Hungarian Academy of Sciences (2025), *Code of Ethics* (link)
[21] World Conferences on Research Integrity (2019), *Hong Kong Principles for Assessing Researchers* (link)
[22] World Health Organisation (2018), *Code of Conduct for Responsible Research* (link)
[23] Danish Agency for Higher Education and Science (2026), *supra*
[24] Centre for Ethics, University of Tartu (2023), *Estonian Code of Conduct for Research Integrity Agreement* (link)
[25] Slovak Academy of Sciences (2025), *The Code of Ethics of the Slovak Academy of Sciences* (link)
[26] Government of Romania (2025), *MEC Order No. 6905/16.12.2025 on the approval of the codes of ethics and good conduct in research, development and innovation of RDI personnel in research organizations, by research fields* (link)

Meanwhile, the UK Concordat to Support Research Integrity[27] sets out that appropriate open research practices are part of broader transparency and open communication obligations. The Swiss Code of Conduct for Scientific Integrity[28] also urges scientists to commit to "making their work available to a wide audience as soon as possible, in line with the Open Science principle."

The Irish National Policy Statement on Ensuring Research Integrity provides more detail.[29] The statement clarifies the principle of "as open as possible, as closed as necessary" and hints at the need for rights retention ("equitable and fair provisions for managing their use, ownership and protection under intellectual property rights"). It also underlines that "Open Access to research data should lead to greater integrity in the gathering, analysis, stewardship, curation, and presentation of data, as it may be open to scrutiny by peers globally. It should also facilitate the re-use of data for further research, contribute to public knowledge and inform policy and practice."

Spain too is strong in this regard, with the CSIC Code of Good Scientific Practices[30] making clear its support for OA publication and the accessibility of results in repositories, while the Swedish Research Council's guide on Good Research Practice[31] notes that "researchers shall strive to give other researchers and the general public as much insight as possible into the research, including through Open Access to research results and research data."

Beyond formal policy documents, Universities UK has also made it clear that OA will "create opportunities for enhancing the integrity of research,"[32] while the Finnish Responsible Research[33] website is strong in underlining how it sees Open Science practices as consistent with its wider goals.

## Conclusion

The evidence from this article is clear: in all but four of the 21 documents reviewed around research integrity, there is a connection linking integrity and ethics to the accessibility of research results. In almost half, it is made explicit that OA and wider open research methods are seen not just as consistent with, but indeed as a contributing factor to the goal of ensuring honest, transparent and ethical research. As such, measures that make OA accessible to all, particularly those unable to pay APCs or not covered by transformative agreements, logically align with this objective.

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[27] UK Committee on Research Integrity (2025), *The Concordat to Support Research Integrity* (link)
[28] Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences (2021), *Code of Conduct for Scientific Integrity* (link)
[29] Irish Research Integrity National Forum (2024), *Policy Statement on Ensuring Research Integrity in Ireland* (link)
[30] Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (2021), *Código de Buenas Prácticas Científicas del CSIC* (link)
[31] Swedish Research Council (2024), *Good Research Practice* (link)
[32] Universities UK, written evidence to the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee (RIN0057, para 29), quoted in House of Commons Committee on Science and Technology (2018), *Research Integrity: Sixth Report of Session 2017-2019*, para 69 (link)
[33] Responsible Research (n.d.) (link)

This alone should be enough to dismiss arguments that an obligation to publish OA is somehow contrary to wider scientific principles. Nonetheless, there is certainly room to clarify what is meant by the possibilities for 'opting out' of openness that some codes set out.

Germany arguably stands out here, including references to the idea of a freedom to decide where to disseminate results (Guidelines for Safeguarding Good Research Practice)[34], although it does also suggest that results should be accessible by default, as well as stating that in choosing a publication medium, visibility is a relevant factor. Given the greater reach and citation advantage of OA publications, this may still weigh in favour of openness.

Denmark[35] too suggests that there is an individual right to choose relevant publication channels, but at the same time does also include the goal of OA publishing whenever possible, a provision that would not logically include opting out due to a personal preference for one journal or another (for example, on grounds of 'prestige'). That said, a high Article Processing Charge may well be an insurmountable barrier, one more reason for introducing Secondary Publication Rights.

A useful step could be to provide additional clarity around the scenarios under which the need to respect intellectual property rights can represent a justification for restricting publication, as suggested in the French National Charter for Research Integrity.[36] It would appear logical that this refers to third-party rights in materials included in publications (for example, illustrations or similar), rather than the newly created rights of publishers, but more certainty would be desirable.

[34] Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (2025), *supra*
[35] Danish Agency for Higher Education and Science (2026), *supra*
[36] Office français de l'intégrité scientifique (2015), *supra*