



AALBORG UNIVERSITET

AAU PRACTICE COMMITTEE

REPORT 2023

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INTRODUCTION

AAU PRACTICE COMMITTEE

The AAU Practice Committee was established by the rector on 1.7.2017 to deal with cases of questionable research practice and to handle preliminary processing of cases of research misconduct. The practice committee consists of a permanent member and a faculty member from each faculty. When reviewing a specific case of questionable research practice, an ad hoc member is also appointed to ensure that the practice committee represents the expertise required for the case concerned.

ABOUT THE 2023 REPORT

The report covers the period 1.1.2023-31.12.2023

The report includes nine cases received by the practice committee in 2023. Of the nine cases, the practice committee dismissed one case as manifestly unfounded. The case is partially included in the report.

In 2023, the practice committee submitted three cases to the Danish Board on Research Misconduct for review. Of these, one case was finalized by the Board and subsequently reviewed by the practice committee based on the facts presented.

STATISTICS

The following section presents several statistics based on the allegations received in 2023.

DIVERSITY OF THE PRACTICE COMMITTEE

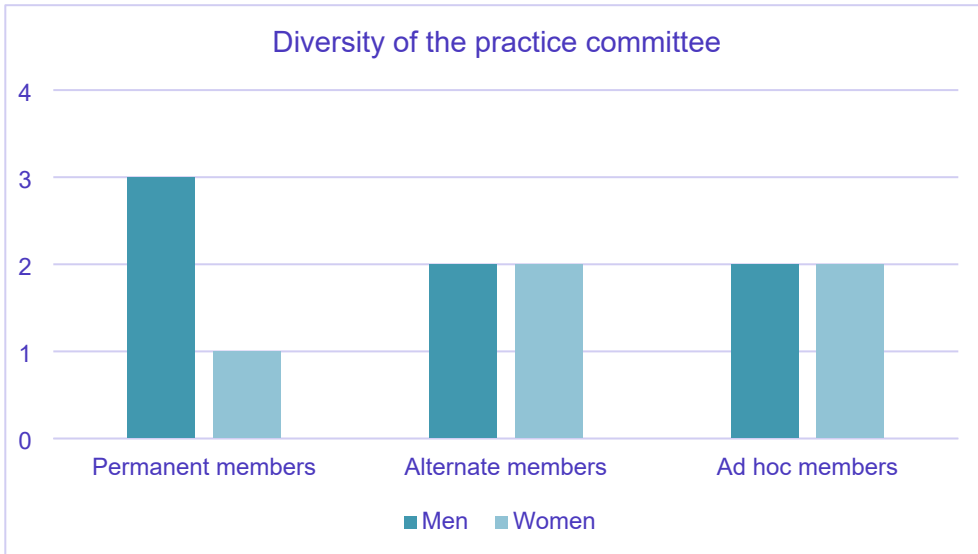


Figure 1 shows the diversity of the practice committee for permanent members, faculty members and ad hoc members, respectively.

COMPLAINANTS

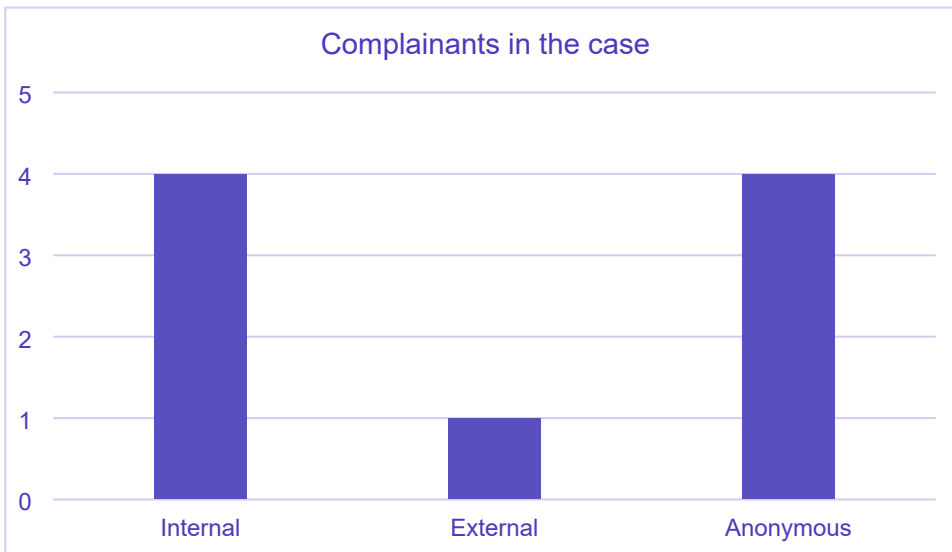


Figure 2 shows the distribution of internal allegations from AAU, and external and anonymous allegations.

EMPLOYMENT STATUS OF THE RESPONDENTS

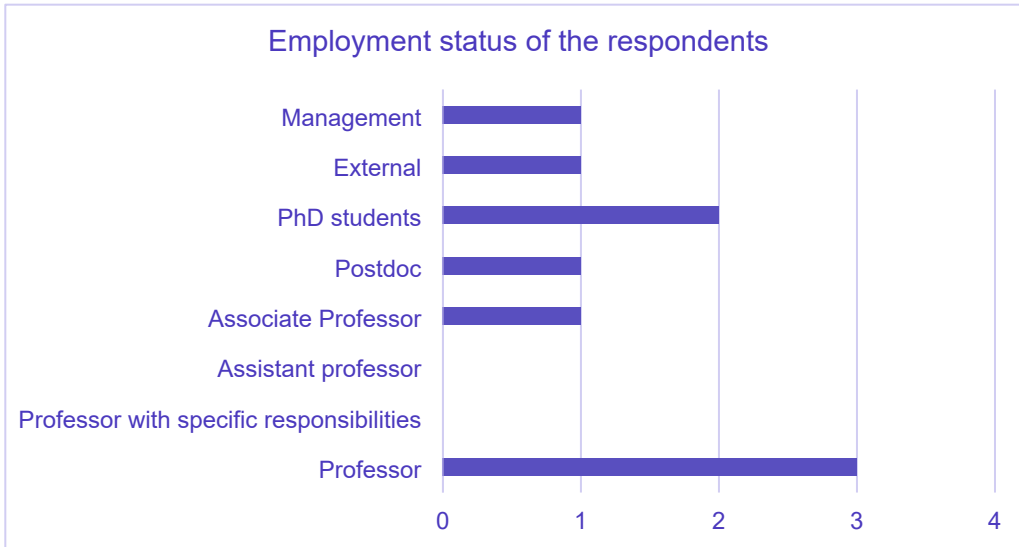


Figure 3 shows the employment status of the respondents at the time the research in question took place. The case against the respondent from the management was dismissed as the allegation was considered manifestly unfounded.

COMPLAINTS INVOLVING PHD STUDENTS

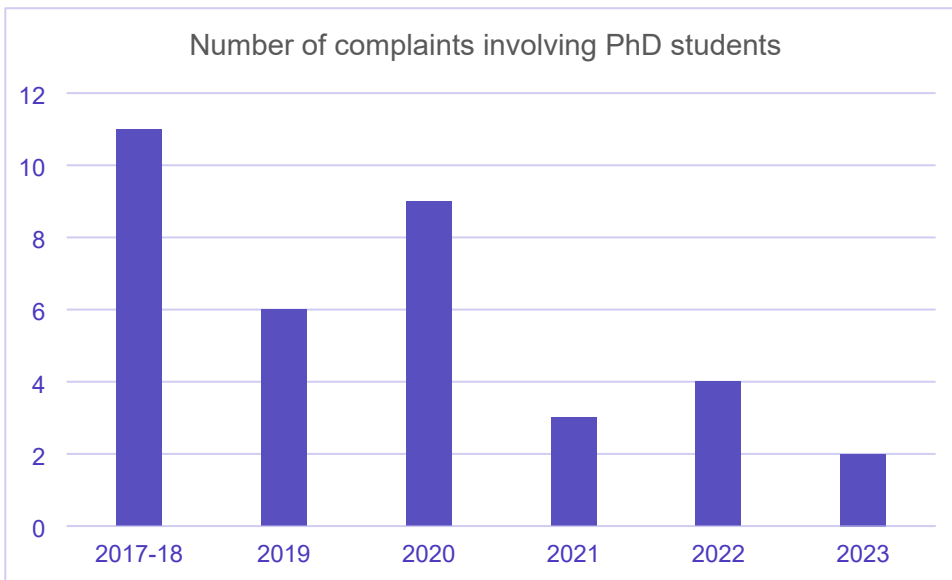


Figure 4 shows the complaints involving PhD students over the past seven years.

DIVERSITY OF THE RESPONDENTS

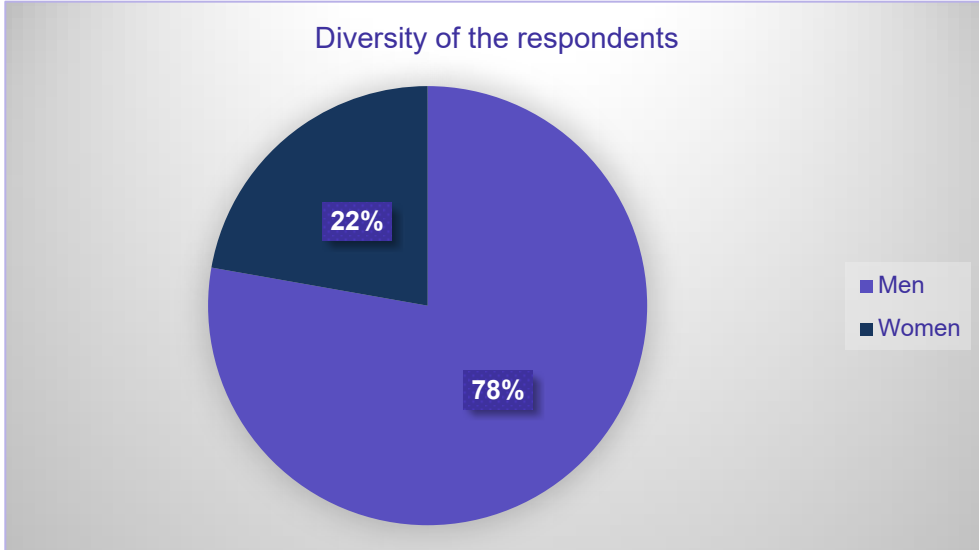


Figure 5 shows the gender distribution of the respondents.

DISTRIBUTION OF CASES BY FACULTY

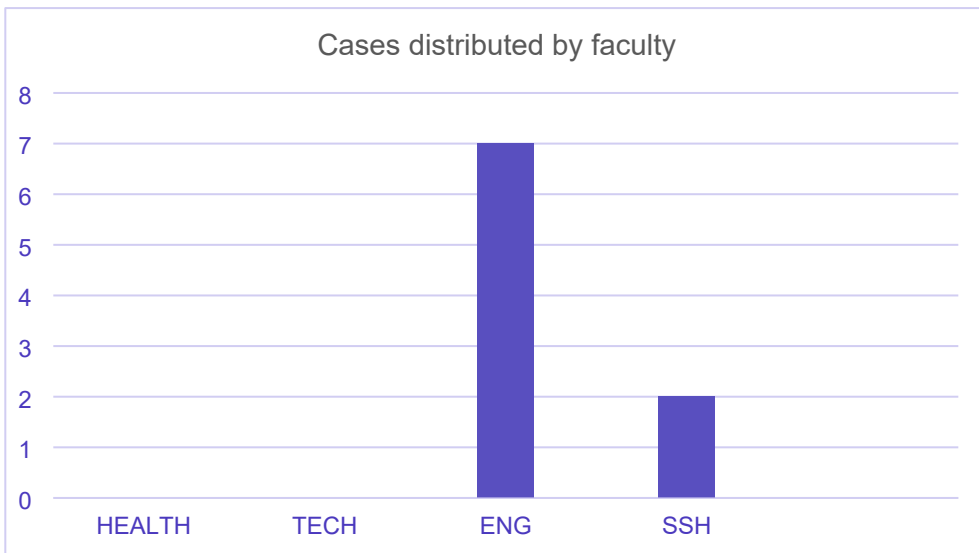


Figure 6 shows the distribution of cases at ENG and SSH, respectively. In 2023, there were no cases from TECH and HEALTH.

CASE PROCESSING VENUE

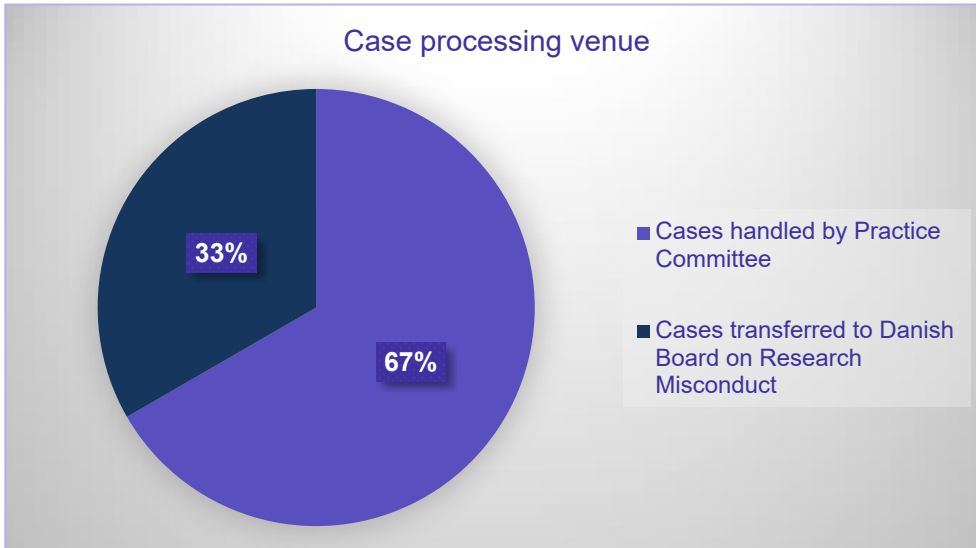


Figure 7 shows the distribution of cases reviewed by the practice committee and forwarded to the Danish Board on Research Misconduct for review. In 2023, three cases were sent to the Board for review. One of the cases sent was considered by the Board in 2023 and subsequently reviewed by the practice committee based on the facts presented.

OUTCOME OF OPINIONS



Figure 8 shows that in the six cases the practice committee reviewed in 2023 based on the facts presented, the committee decided that the cases did not constitute questionable research practice. The other cases received were forwarded to the Danish Board on Research Misconduct.

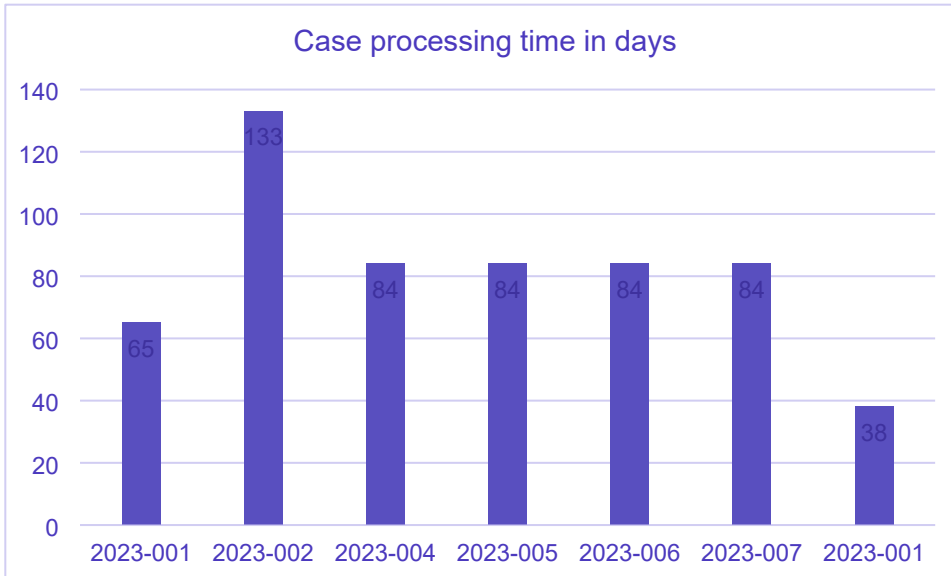
CASE PROCESSING TIME

Figure 9 shows the case processing time for the cases the practice committee reviewed in 2023. Note that case 2023-001 is counted twice, both before it was submitted to the Danish Board on Research Misconduct and after the Board's decision in the case.

SUMMARIES OF CASES REVIEWED BY THE PRACTICE COMMITTEE

In 2023, the practice committee examined six cases about breaches of good scientific practice based on the facts presented. Additionally in 2023, the practice committee submitted three cases to the Danish Board on Research Misconduct for review.

CASE 2023-002

Subject: Idea originator, authorship and buy-out for research project

A former postdoc complained about a professor regarding a research project that the former postdoc had been part of.

The case concerns whether the respondent acted in a manner contrary to good research practice regarding the origin of the idea, project development, application and authorship. The practice committee found that the respondent, as PI on the project application, had contributed to the establishment, maturation and development of the project to a not insignificant extent. Therefore, there was no breach of good research practice.

On the issue of authorship, where questions were raised including co-authorship, the practice committee found that the respondent's actions were not contrary to good research practice.

On the issue of buy-out, it appears from the case that the complainant was on maternity leave during the project and that there were changes to the buy-out of the complainant's hours. The

practice committee does not have authority in relation to prioritization and reprioritization of buy-out done under the auspices of the project. The practice committee did not find a breach of good research practice.

CASE 2023-004, 2023-005, 2023-006 & 2023-007

Subject: Allegation of suspected plagiarism

The cases concern a publication issued by Aalborg University. From the anonymous allegation, it appears that two articles were plagiarized in the publication mentioned. The publication has four authors and all four had identical cases reviewed by the practice committee. They are therefore described together here.

The practice committee found that strikingly similar methods had been used in both the publication and the articles mentioned. However, the method is generally known and used in the field, which speaks against the existence of plagiarism.

The practice committee found that the publication used methods that can also allow for regulations other than those that appear in the two articles. The practice committee did not find such a well-founded suspicion of research misconduct as to warrant referring the case to the Danish Board on Research Misconduct.

In addition, the Board did not find a breach of good research practice.

CASE 2023-001

Subject: Manipulation of data

The case was forwarded to the Danish Board on Research Misconduct in January 2023. On 10 November 2023, the Board decided that there was no research misconduct, but that the case could contain matters of questionable research practice.

The respondent is the first author on two publications where the same image was used, but the image was rotated 180 degrees. Two figures are the focus of the case. In relation to one figure, the practice committee considered that the respondent had not followed the usual practice of enlarging and reproducing images. The committee considered that the chosen approach risks that the work will not appear completely transparent, which may give rise to a suspicion of questionable research practice. Based on the limited importance of the figure for the article and its conclusion, the practice committee finds that this issue is below the threshold to constitute research misconduct.

In relation to the second figure, the practice committee considered it unproblematic that the image in the article was rotated 180 degrees.

The practice committee concluded there was no breach of good research practice.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

There is generally a marked decrease in the number of cases.

The practice committee notes that since the establishment of the practice committee in 2017, there has been a substantial representation of PhD students among the respondents. This trend has reversed and there were only two PhD students among the respondents in 2023.

The practice committee notes that the committee's case processing time increased to an average of 82 days, compared to an average processing time of 35 days in 2022. This is partly due to phasing-in staff and the generally heavy workload in the Rector's Office in 2023. In one case, the processing time was more than four months, which, in addition to the above-mentioned facts, was due to the fact that the complaint came directly to the chair of the practice committee at the beginning of the chair's summer vacation. In addition, both the respondent and the complainant made several submissions, and a meeting of the practice committee had to be cancelled as the committee lacked a quorum due to nonattendance.

In its report for 2022, the practice committee found that there is generally an overrepresentation of men among the members of the practice committee. For 2023, there is an overrepresentation of men among the permanent members, but an equal distribution of men and women among the faculty members. Among the appointed ad hoc members for 2023, there is also an equal distribution of men and women.

According to the practice committee, there is an over-representation among the respondents of researchers who earned their most recent academic degree from a non-Danish university. However, the practice committee has not had this verified by HR.

The practice committee would like to draw attention to the fact that there may be a need for an increased focus on how junior researchers can best be protected and supported at the beginning of their careers.