



African Astronomical Society

Statement of Ethics

The Statement of Ethics outlines the philosophy of AfAS with respect to professional conduct and is the prescriptive document outlining processes and expectations under the AfAS Code of Conduct.

1. Conduct Toward Others

All people have a right to be treated with respect at all times. Detailed expectations of conduct for AfAS members are specified in the African Astronomical Society Code of Conduct document.

- a. Members of the Society are expected to promote equality of opportunity and treatment for all their colleagues, regardless of gender, cultural or linguistic background, religion, age, marital status, sexual orientation, disabilities, or any other reason not related to scientific merit.
- b. More senior members of the society, especially research supervisors, have a special responsibility to facilitate the research, educational, and professional development of students and staff. This includes providing safe, supportive working environments, appropriate opportunities, fair compensation and appropriate acknowledgment of their contribution to any research results. In addition, supervisors should encourage the timely advancement of graduate students and young professionals in their career aspirations.
- c. It is a key responsibility of senior members of AfAS to inform more junior members of these ethical expectations and of institutional and government guidelines, policies, and procedures related to the oversight and maintenance of ethical standards for research and its conduct.

2. Research – Academic Integrity

It is an ethical responsibility to record and maintain research results in a form that allows review, analysis, and reproduction by others.

- A. It is a responsibility of researchers involved in publicly supported studies to make results available in a timely manner.
- B. Fabrication of data or selective reporting of data with the intent to mislead or deceive is unethical and unacceptable, as is the appropriation of data or research results from others without permission and attribution.
- C. Human error is part of scientific enterprise. It is not unethical to make an error, provided that errors are promptly acknowledged and corrected when they are detected.

3. Publication and Authorship Practices

Anyone who has made significant contributions to a work intended for publication should be offered the opportunity to be listed as an author. This includes anyone who has contributed intellectually to the inception, design, execution, or interpretation of the research.

- A. Anyone who has contributed in any significant way to a study should be appropriately acknowledged.
- B. The sources of financial or significant in-kind support for any project should be acknowledged/disclosed.
- C. Proper acknowledgement of the work of others must always be given and complete referencing is an essential part of any astronomical research publication. Authors have an

obligation to their colleagues and the scientific community to include a set of references that communicates the precedents, sources, and context of the reported work. Deliberate omission of a pertinent author or reference is **unacceptable**. Data provided by others must be cited appropriately, even if obtained from a public database.

D. Plagiarism is the presentation of **other people's words**, ideas or scientific results as if they were one's own. It is unethical behaviour and is never acceptable. Equally unacceptable is the practice of self-plagiarism whereby a person publishes virtually identical papers in more than one refereed journal. All collaborators share responsibility for any paper they co- author and every co-author should have the opportunity to review a manuscript before its submission. All authors are therefore responsible for providing prompt corrections or retractions if errors are found in published works.

4. Peer Review Peer review is an essential component of many aspects of the scientific process such as evaluating research proposals, publishing research results and evaluating colleagues for career advancement.

A. Peer review can serve its intended function only if the members of the scientific community are prepared to provide thorough, fair and objective evaluations based on requisite expertise. Although peer review can be difficult and time-consuming, scientists have an obligation to participate in the process. Research managers have a duty to allow their staff time to participate in the referee process and to recognize such activity in performance assessment.

B. Reviewers should disclose conflicts of interest resulting from direct competitive, collaborative, or other relationships with those they are reviewing and excuse themselves from cases where such conflicts preclude an objective evaluation. It is unethical to seek to gain an advantage by means of reviewing the work of others.

5. Conflicts of Interest Many activities of scientists and educators have the potential for a conflict of interest. This is discussed in the AfAS general guidelines on Conflict of Interest. Any professional relationship or action that may either be or be perceived as a conflict of interest should be fully disclosed. If a conflict of interest cannot be properly managed, the activity should be avoided or discontinued.

Individuals engaging in behaviour which is contrary to this Code as well as those making allegations in bad faith will be subject to disciplinary action as outlined in the document Handling of Potential Breaches of the AfAS Statement of Ethics and Code of Conduct, up to and including termination of membership.

Anyone who wishes to report a violation of this policy *is asked to speak confidentially* to the meeting organiser, AfAS President, or AfAS Ethics and Conduct Committee Chair. Formal complaints to the Society can be made via the Complaints Form for confidential consideration by the AfAS Ethics and Conduct Committee.

2. Code of Conduct

The AfAS Code of Conduct outlines the Society's expectations for behaviour and conduct. The Code applies to all participants at AfAS-endorsed meetings or activities, and to AfAS members at all astronomical meetings or activities.

It is the policy of the African Astronomical Society (AfAS) that all participants in its activities are able to enjoy an environment that is free from discrimination and harassment, and that its members

conduct themselves appropriately during all professional activities. The AfAS standard of appropriate professional conduct is defined by the African Astronomical Society Statement of Ethics. AfAS is committed to making AfAS-organised, -sponsored or -supported meetings, events and publications inclusive, productive and enjoyable for everyone, regardless of age, caring responsibilities, cultural diversity, disability, gender, indigeneity, sexual orientation, gender identity, physical appearance, or religion. *The AfAS will not tolerate harassment in any form from its members, from attendees of AfAS activities, or as part of AfAS publications.*

All participants are expected to abide by these guidelines:

1. Behave professionally **at all times**. Harassment and sexist, racist, ableist or otherwise exclusionary comments or jokes are not appropriate. Harassment includes, but is not limited to, sustained disruption of talks or other events, inappropriate physical contact, sexual attention or innuendo, deliberate intimidation, stalking, and photography or recording of an individual without consent. It also includes offensive written or verbal comments related to issues including age, caring responsibilities, cultural diversity, disability, gender, indigeneity, sexual orientation, gender identity, physical appearance, or religion.
2. All verbal and written communication should be inclusive and appropriate for a diverse professional audience.
3. Be considerate and respectful to others. Do not insult or denigrate other attendees. Critique ideas rather than individuals.

Individuals engaging in behaviour prohibited by the Code of Conduct as well as those making allegations of harassment in bad faith will be subject to disciplinary action as outlined in the document Handling of Potential Breaches of the AfAS Statement of Ethics and Code of Conduct, up to and including termination of membership.

Anyone who wishes to report a violation of this policy *is asked to speak confidently* to the meeting organiser, AfAS President, or AfAS Ethics and Conduct Committee Chair. Formal complaints to the Society can be made via the [**Complaints Form**](#) for confidential consideration by the AfAS Ethics and Conduct Committee.

3. Guidelines on Conflict of Interest

This statement provides general guidelines to AfAS members on Conflicts of Interest. It is intended to be read in conjunction with the African Astronomical Society Statement of Ethics.

A **conflict of interest** is a situation in which someone in a position of trust has competing professional or personal interests. Such competing interests could make it difficult for an individual to fulfil his or her duties impartially and potentially could improperly influence the performance of their official duties and responsibilities.

An **apparent** (or perceived) conflict of interest exists where it appears that individual private interests could improperly influence the performance of their duties and responsibilities whether or not this is, in fact, the case. Individuals must be conscious that perceptions of conflict of interest may be as important as an actual conflict.

A **potential** conflict of interest arises where an individual has a private interest which is such that an actual conflict of interest would arise if the member were to become involved in relevant (that is

conflicting) official duties and responsibilities in the future.

A conflict of interest may also exist where a person's spouse, partner, immediate family member, mentor or mentee has any of the interests or involvements listed above.

Individuals must consider the potential for conflict in all possible interests including:

- professional positions
- membership of committees of other organisations
- consultancies
- boards of directors
- advisory groups
- family and personal relationships, or
- financial interests, including receiving recompense in the form of cash, services or equipment from outside bodies to support research activities.

If a conflict of interest arises in any of these situations, then it needs to be immediately declared and managed in a way that is appropriate for that situation. Most bodies and committees generally have formal procedures in place to deal with conflicts of interests.

4. Procedures for investigating:

- **Potential Breaches of the AfAS Statement of Ethics or Code of Conduct;**
- **Disputes between Members; or**
- **Disputes between Members and the Society**

The AfAS Statement of Ethics and Code of Conduct covers attendees of AfAS-organised, sponsored or supported meetings, events, and contributors or users of AfAS publications. The Statement of Ethics and Code of Conduct also cover the appropriate conduct of AfAS Members at all professional activities.

The AfAS Ethics and Conduct Committee (ECC) is established by the AfAS Executive Committee to oversee the investigation of any complaints of unethical behaviour, misconduct or grievances that may be potential breaches of the AfAS Statement of Ethics or Code of Conduct (hereafter "Breaches"). The ECC will also oversee disputes between AfAS members relevant to Society operations and disputes between Members and the Society (hereafter "Disputes"). For Disputes between Members and the Society, the ECC may form a related committee called the Internal Disputes Committee (IDC). In what follows, the term ECC also applies to the IDC.

The following sections give details on policies and procedures for handling complaints related to Breaches and Disputes. The word "Member/s" in this document refers to any individual member/s of the African Astronomical Society of any level of membership.

1. **Informal resolution** As far as possible, individuals having a complaint should seek to resolve apparent Breaches or Disputes informally by one or more of the following means (Note: This

clause does not apply to complaints concerning alleged criminal conduct, including sexual assault, which must be governed by the legal requirements for mandatory reporting in the country in which the alleged conduct occurred).

- a. Directly approaching the Respondent (person they believe is responsible for the apparent Breach), either on their own or with another person as a support person and:
 - i. telling them which behaviour they consider unreasonable and unacceptable;
 - ii. asking them to stop or to behave differently; and
 - iii. keeping a written record of this action.
- b. Where a Complainant (person who raises the complaint) does not feel comfortable raising the matter directly with the person they believe is responsible, they may raise the matter with the following people (in order of preference): meeting organisers, the ECC Chair or the AfAS President, any AfAS ECC or Executive Committee member.
- c. Any Member who has concerns about particular behaviour and is unsure whether it may constitute an apparent Breach or is a dispute between Members relevant to Society operations should contact the ECC Chair, or the AfAS President.
- d. Meeting organisers, the ECC Chair or the AfAS President who have concerns about, or become aware of, behaviour that may constitute bullying, harassment or discrimination, have an obligation to actively intervene to prevent such conduct continuing and may seek to resolve any concerns directly with the parties under this clause, if appropriate.

2. Filing of Complaint Complaints may be made via the [Complaints Form](#).

- a. Complaints can be lodged in the following circumstances:
 - i. any attendee of an AfAS-organised, sponsored or supported meeting or event who experiences or witnesses another attendee potentially violating AfAS ethical or conduct standards may file a complaint;
 - ii. any attendee of any astronomical event who witnesses an AfAS Member potentially violating AfAS ethical or conduct standards may file a complaint;
 - iii. contributors or users of AfAS publications who identify behaviour potentially violating AfAS ethical or conduct standards may file a complaint;
 - iv. the ECC may also initiate a complaint on its own behalf; and
 - v. where two or more Members are in an unresolved dispute related to the Society or its business which does not involve a Breach.
- b. Initial contact with the AfAS President or ECC Chair is encouraged to clarify whether concerns about a possible ethical or conduct breach are covered by the Statement of Ethics or Code of Conduct, or that a dispute between Members falls within Society operations before making a formal complaint.
- c. A complaint may be made in writing and must include:
 - i. the name and professional address of the Complainant;
 - ii. the name and (where known) professional address of the Member or attendee accused of the Breach;
 - iii. the provisions of the Statement of Ethics or Code of Conduct alleged to have been breached or the relevance of the dispute between Members to Society operations;
 - iv. a full statement of conduct alleged to have breached the Statement of Ethics or Code of Conduct or the full details of the dispute between Members and its relationship to Society operations, including the sources of all information on which the allegations are based; and
 - v. copies of any documents or other information supporting the allegations.

(The [Complaints Form](#) is to be used by the complainant)

- d. Anonymous formal complaints will not be accepted. However, the reporting channel is anonymous, with knowledge of the complaint having been submitted being restricted to members of the ECC. Further action by the ECC may require disclosure of the submitter to the Complainant and/or Respondent, if this is deemed necessary, but this decision will only be taken with the agreement of the submitter.
- e. AfAS Executive Committee and ECC members involved will keep confidential the information in the completed, formal complaint form, together with the identities of the Complainant and Respondent. This also applies to any subsequent information requested by, or provided to, the ECC.
- f. Individuals who make false, vindictive or vexatious allegations of Breaches in bad faith will be subject to disciplinary action by the AfAS Executive Committee on advice from the ECC.

3. Investigation of a Complaint Investigation of any complaints filed is undertaken by the ECC.

- a. The ECC Chair, in consultation with the AfAS President (or their alternate(s), in the case of a conflict) shall screen each complaint to determine whether the alleged conduct is covered by the AfAS Statement of Ethics or Code of Conduct, and evaluate whether the complaint, if proved, might constitute a Breach. In the case of a dispute between Members, the dispute will be screened to determine if it is relevant to Society operations rather than another environment such as the workplaces of the parties. The ECC Chair may request additional information from the Complainant, who will be given 30 days to provide additional information. No record will be kept of incomplete complaints.
- b. If the alleged behaviour is judged by the ECC Chair and the AfAS president not to be a Breach, the complaint will not be investigated. If a dispute between Members is found to fall outside Society operations the dispute will not be investigated. The ECC Chair will notify the Complainant of the reason(s) why action will not be taken. A record of the complaint and report on the reasons for not investigating will be kept by the AfAS Secretary.
- c. If the alleged behaviour is found to be potentially a Breach, the ECC Chair will provide a copy of the complaint form and relevant supporting materials (or summaries if required to protect the privacy of individuals named in the complaint) to the Respondent. The Respondent will be asked to provide a written response to the ECC in response to the complaint within a period of 30 days.
- d. The ECC will oversee and investigate the case. They may communicate with the Complainant, the Respondent, any witnesses, and/or other sources of information necessary to carry out their investigation and make a determination on whether the complaint is a Breach, and the severity if appropriate.
- e. The ECC may suggest mediation.
- f. In cases where mediation is not appropriate, or is declined or unsuccessful, the ECC Chair, in consultation with the AfAS President, will assign an Examiner from within the ECC to investigate the complaint or dispute between Members (unless the AfAS President or ECC Chair is a Respondent or Complainant). It is expected that the Examiner would normally be the ECC Chair.
- g. The Examiner, in consultation with the ECC, may communicate with the Complainant, the Respondent, any witnesses, and/or other sources of information necessary to carry out their investigation.
- h. The Examiner will submit a written report of the findings to the ECC within 30 days unless a longer period is necessary in the opinion of the ECC members.
- i. The ECC will submit a report to the AfAS Executive Committee, within 30 days of receiving the Examiner's report, which includes whether to endorse the Examiner's recommendations and suggested sanctions if any.

- j. Any member of the AfAS Executive Committee or ECC who is a complainant, respondent, witness or who has a conflict of interest must recuse themselves from the investigation.
- k. A copy of the ECC's report will be kept, in confidence, by the AfAS Secretary.
- l. The AfAS President will receive both the ECC report and the Examiner's report. The President may, confidentially and at their discretion, consult with some or all members of the AfAS Executive Committee. The AfAS President will accept, modify, or reject the ECC recommendation within 30 days of receiving the reports. Where any sanctions are recommended, the AfAS President will require the approval of the AfAS Executive Committee and, in the case of membership termination, must comply with the AfAS Constitution.
- m. The AfAS President will notify the Complainant and the Respondent or disputing Members of the findings, determination, and any sanctions in writing within 30 days of receiving the ECC reports.
- n. The Complainant and the Respondent or disputing Members may submit a response to the AfAS President in writing within 30 days. Responses will be kept by the AfAS Secretary.
- o. In the event that a complaint or dispute between Members alleges conduct that is known to be the subject of other legal or institutional proceedings, the ECC, in consultation with the AfAS President, may defer further proceedings with respect to the complaint until the conclusion of the other legal or institutional investigation.
- p. The ECC or its Chair may also use the findings of those other legal or institutional proceedings as a basis for considering AfAS actions.

4. Sanctions In any case where the outcome of an investigation determines that a Breach has occurred, no sanction, or one or more of the following sanctions, may be imposed as appropriate.

- a. In cases where there has been a Breach which is not deemed by the ECC to have caused serious personal and/or professional harm to any person, an educative letter and/or counselling concerning the Breach will be sent to the Respondent.
- b. In cases where there has been a Breach which is deemed to have caused serious personal and/or professional harm to any person:
 - i. a letter of censure will be made public in an appropriate manner;
 - ii. the Respondent may be denied access to AfAS organised, sponsored or supported meetings, events and publications for a finite or indefinite period;
 - iii. the Respondent may have their membership terminated for a finite or indefinite period to be determined by the AfAS Executive Committee in accordance with the Society's Constitution; and
 - iv. the home institution of the Respondent may be notified of a sanction resulting from a complaint to the AfAS.
- c. In the case of a dispute between Members where an investigation determines that no Breach has occurred, a recommendation on resolution between the parties will be made and presented to both parties.

5. Appeal of Determination A Respondent or Complainant may appeal this determination by filing a notice of appeal and statement of reasons for appeal with the AfAS Secretary within 30 days.

- . If an appeal is filed, the AfAS President will appoint an independent three-member Appeal Panel to review all information considered by the ECC and make a decision to uphold, alter or reverse the determination within 30 days.
 - a. The Appeal Panel will recommend a course of action to the AfAS Executive Committee who will then accept or reject the finding.
 - b. Both the Respondent and the Complainant will be notified of the final appeal determination. A complete record of the appeal will be kept, in confidence, by the

AfAS Secretaries.

6. Internal Disputes Disputes *between* AfAS Members can be handled by the ECC, as described above. Disputes between AfAS Member(s) and the AfAS itself will be dealt with, as outlined below.

- . An Internal Dispute Committee (IDC) will be formed, which consists of the (three or four) ECC members who are not on the AfAS Executive Committee (unless any individual has a conflict, in which case they must recuse themselves and seek a replacement from the pool listed below).
 - a. The IDC members will mutually agree on who will be the Chair of the IDC.
 - b. The IDC will add to the committee one or two more non-members of the AfAS who agree to the task, for a total of five, choosing from the following possibilities (at their discretion):
 - i. a staff member from an appropriate university department or observatory (AAL);
 - ii. a staff member from the government department dealing with astronomy in the relevant country;
 - iii. a Head or Manager of Department (or equivalently senior person, or nominee) from an African Physics or Astronomy (or related) Department or Observatory;
 - iv. a Director or nominee from a Physics or Astronomy Centre, or a related entity.
 - c. A list of non-members of the AfAS who have agreed to be available for the IDC will be maintained by the ECC Chair.

7. Roles and responsibilities of the ECC Chair and Committee

Responsibilities of the ECC Chair are:

- a. Recommend to the AfAS Executive Committee any changes to the procedures and policies arising from implementation of the Code;
- b. Take responsibility for publicising the Code amongst AfAS Members;
- c. Ensure that appropriate records of all complaints are lodged with the secretary in a timely manner; and
- d. Provide advice either formally or informally to any member of the AfAS requesting support.

Responsibilities of the ECC are:

- a. Respond to complaints within the time requirements, in particular responding to the Chair in a timely manner; and
- b. Ensure that any conflicts of interest are openly declared.

5. Terms of Reference: AfAS Ethics and Conduct Committee

The AfAS Ethics and Conduct Committee (ECC) has been established by the AfAS Executive Committee to oversee the investigation of any complaints of unethical behaviour or misconduct by AfAS members, attendees of AfAS organised, sponsored or supported meetings, events, or contributors or users of AfAS publications.

Committee makeup

- The ECC will be Chaired by the AfAS Vice President (unless involved in the complaint)
- The AfAS President will be an ex-officio member of the ECC (unless involved in the complaint)
- The AfAS Executive Committee will appoint an HR or legal representative familiar with processes in the country in which the alleged breach occurred
- The AfAS Executive Committee will appoint up to 3 additional, independent members of the ECC from the AfAS membership
- Any member of the ECC must recuse themselves if they are a Complainant, a Respondent, a witness, or have another conflict of interest.

Committee activity

- The ECC will conduct and oversee complaints and investigations as outlined in the Handling of Potential Breaches of the AfAS Statement of Ethics and Code of Conduct documents
- The ECC will advise the AfAS Executive Committee regarding the contents of the AfAS Code of Conduct document
- The ECC will advise the AfAS Executive Committee regarding the contents of the AfAS Statement of Ethics document
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