

# Freedom and responsibility of science

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Yesterday, the German Research Foundation (DFG) and the Leopoldina National Academy of Sciences presented their recommendations for "The Freedom and Responsibility of Science" in Berlin. Both research organizations appeal to science to develop ethical principles and mechanisms for the responsible handling of the freedom and risks of research. To ensure the freedom of research and act responsibly, KIT adopted its ethical guidelines in May 2012 already.

"In these guidelines, the KIT commits to applying ethical principles in all areas of research, teaching, innovation, and services," says Dr. Elke Luise Barnstedt, KIT Vice President for Human Resources and Law. These ethical guidelines were developed together with various groups of KIT members, including students.

The "Guidelines for Ethical Principles of Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT)" comply with the freedom of arts, sciences, research, and teaching as outlined in Article 5, par. 3 of the German Constitution. They point out that all employees and other members of KIT are responsible for their acting. According to the ethical principles, research, teaching, and innovation at KIT shall serve the gaining of knowledge, the sustainable benefit of mankind, and the protection of the environment and shall pursue peaceful purposes exclusively.

"To comply with the freedom of science, however, our guidelines contain neither a set of instructions nor concrete prohibitions and orders," Barnstedt continues, "but principles that are supposed to guide our acting. In agreement with the recommendations presented by the

research organizations, our ethical principles guarantee the [freedom](#) of science and the society's responsibility."

Among others, the ethical principles of KIT refer to the problem of "dual use" i.e. diverse and partly unforeseeable use of research results. Employees and members of KIT are requested to always weigh potential applications of [research results](#) with the required sensitivity and to make a technology assessment, if applicable. The latter is well-established at KIT's Institute for Technology Assessment (ITAS). The KIT staff is to ultimately abstain from research activities that are associated with risks that cannot be restricted.

According to Barnstedt, societal responsibility of research, teaching, and innovation also includes public accessibility of the findings. The principles oblige the KIT members to make the results and findings obtained accessible for the scientific community and the society in compliance with the legislation and contractual regulations and to exclusively support by activities and the supply of resources research that meets these requirements. In addition, the ethical principles refer to the cooperation of the KIT members in partnership and trust as a basis of the KIT culture and the participation of students and employees in decision-making and organization processes at KIT.

If questions of ethical nature arise during [research](#) projects, KIT members may consult an ethics commission. Two ombudspersons have been appointed to give advice to the scientists.

**More information:** Guidelines for Ethical Principles of KIT:  
[www.kit.edu/downloads/KIT\\_Ethische\\_Leitlinien.pdf](http://www.kit.edu/downloads/KIT_Ethische_Leitlinien.pdf)

Provided by Karlsruhe Institute of Technology

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