

## Concordat to support research integrity - 'Commitment 5'

### RCUK annual narrative statement on research integrity

#### **Background**

RCUK is a signatory to the concordat to support research integrity<sup>1</sup>, published in July 2012

Commitment 5 of the concordat (page 21) states:

***Funders of research, employers of researchers and other organisations** recognising the concordat should work together to produce an annual narrative statement on research integrity. This statement should be based on input from the signatories to the concordat.*

*To provide assurance over efforts to strengthen research integrity, Research Councils UK will use its existing assurance mechanisms to garner feedback on activity across the sector. This information will be made available to other funders and provide an evidence base for the annual statement, thereby reducing the need for additional reporting requirements.*

#### **RCUK narrative statement on research integrity**

The reporting period for this narrative is 1 July 2012 to 30 June 2013 (the first 12 months following the Concordat), though some more recent information has been included where available.

RCUK published its "Policy and Code of Conduct on the Governance of Good Research Conduct" in July 2009. It was clear that, as just one stakeholder in the issue of research conduct in the UK, and although a powerful one given its role as a major funder, RCUK recognised that to be effective it needed to work very closely with other players in the UK and adopt common approaches. This was particularly important on the question of assessing the extent of research misconduct in the UK and having concerted approaches to ensure allegations were properly investigated and appropriate actions taken. RCUK was therefore a strong supporter of the Concordat and was represented on the Working Group that drafted it.

The Research Councils work closely together through a formal RCUK Network: 'Good Research Conduct Network' (GRECON) which meets about three times a year.

Since July 2012, RCUK has:

- i) Updated its Policy and Guidelines on the Governance of Good Research Conduct

The updated Policy and Guidelines<sup>2</sup> were published on 26 February 2013. They aim to help researchers and research organisations to manage their research to the highest standards. Specifically the document covers the promotion of good research conduct, including good conduct in peer review, the need for appropriate training and development, what constitutes unacceptable research conduct and the investigation and reporting of unacceptable research conduct. The update included:

- Inclusion of an introduction setting the broader context and relating the RCUK text to other relevant documents, particularly the UUK Concordat;
- Reordering of the contents under new headings to improve the overall logic of the document;

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/highereducation/Pages/Theconcordattosupportresearchintegrity.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> [www.rcuk.ac.uk/documents/reviews/grc/RCUKPolicyandGuidelinesonGovernanceofGoodResearchPracticeFebruary2013.pdf](http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/documents/reviews/grc/RCUKPolicyandGuidelinesonGovernanceofGoodResearchPracticeFebruary2013.pdf)

- Specifying clearly scope and expectations (Section 1, page 3): who the policy applies to and the general expectations of RCs;
  - A new paragraph on joint working (page 5) reflecting increasing trends in this direction;
  - More details on sanctions and what we expect to be reported to RCs (pages 9 and 10), based on RC experience of specific cases;
  - General updating of language.
- ii) Issued guidance to applicants for Research Council support concerning declarations of interest

New guidance is currently being prepared for applicants; there will also be a clearer process for recording them on the application form (JeS).

- iii) Participated in Science Europe (SE) activities in research integrity

RCUK has participated in meetings of the Science Europe General Assembly, including final approval (at the meeting on 21<sup>st</sup> November 2013) of the SE Roadmap<sup>3</sup> which includes a section on 'Research Integrity' (Annex 1). This is being taken forward by a Working Group on Research Integrity, on which RCUK is represented. The Group is chaired by Dr Maura Hiney (Head of Policy, Evaluation and External Relations, Health Research Board, Ireland). There will be a two-year workplan. The Working Group will, among other things:

- Take stock of the existing policies and institutional arrangements related to research integrity;
- Progress implementation of best practices and positive actions within the remit of SE MOs;
- Contribute to strengthen the emerging normative structure around research integrity;
- Interact with the SE Scientific Committees and other Working Groups to identify community or policy area specific requirements and/or contributions.

More details, including the Working Group membership, are at:

[www.scienceeurope.org/policy/working-groups/Research-Integrity](http://www.scienceeurope.org/policy/working-groups/Research-Integrity)

- iv) Participated in Global Research Council (GRC) activities in research integrity

On 27-29 May 2013, RCUK participated in the GRC summit in Berlin at which participants endorsed a Statement of Principles on Research Integrity<sup>4</sup>. (Annex 2)

- v) Modified the RCUK Assurance Programme of Research Organisations

The RCUK Assurance programme<sup>5</sup> is an internal programme that provides assurance to the Research Councils that the funding they provide to Research Organisations (RO) is used for the purposes for which it was provided. The process is applied to 40-45 institutions a year. A set of questions is sent to the RO; these are answered in writing, and then there is a visit from the RCUK assurance team. From August 2012, the remit of the Programme was extended to include assurance on research integrity. A set of questions on research integrity (Annex 3) was agreed and these started to be used from 1<sup>st</sup> November 2012 as a pilot in universities shortly to be subject to assurance.

The reasons for collecting the information are:

- i) Primarily to provide assurance to the RCs that the HEIs are complying with the RCUK Policy and Guidelines on the Governance of Good Research Conduct;
- ii) But also, to feed in to this narrative statement in meeting the requirements of the Concordat; and

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.scienceeurope.org/downloads>

<sup>4</sup> [www.globalresearchcouncil.org/statement-principles-research-integrity](http://www.globalresearchcouncil.org/statement-principles-research-integrity)

<sup>5</sup> [www.rcuk.ac.uk/about/aboutRCUK/aims/units/Pages/Assurance.aspx](http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/about/aboutRCUK/aims/units/Pages/Assurance.aspx)

- iii) To allow RCUK to compare the data it receives from HEIs as part of the assurance programme with other information about research misconduct received by other routes, either from HEIs or from elsewhere.

The Assurance team lets GRECON members know regularly of the schedule of ROs to be sent questionnaires and to be visited, and to report to GRECON routinely every six months on the assurance programme.

RCUK already has a memorandum of understanding with the Wellcome Trust to share the findings from the assurance programme, subject to receiving the consent of the research organisation.

To 31 March 2013, seven ROs had been included in the pilot. In summary, the conclusions have been:

- Based on the responses received, all seven stated that they complied with the RCUK guidelines.
- In the past year, there had been two formal investigations (at different institutions). One was for plagiarism (upheld); and the second was for a breach of duty of care (upheld).
- [In addition, at a third institution, there had been misuse of travel funds (since repaid)].

In future years (April – March), we propose to report trend data. [It should be noted that numbers will need careful interpretation as increases may be 'good' as they may reflect better reporting].

- vi) Participated in the Royal Society 'Research misconduct and irreproducibility' roundtable meeting, 22 May 2013

The objective of the meeting was to determine why research misconduct takes place, how to prevent the incidence of misconduct, and to discuss potential responses.

Extract from the Science Europe Roadmap, 21 November 2013 (pp 23 -24)

## Research Integrity

Enhanced research integrity policies will contribute to:

- **Supporting borderless science** – by fostering the harmonisation of procedures related to research integrity across disciplines, institutions and borders;
- **Facilitating science** – by increasing the efficiency of the R&D system through increased trust between scientists and in scientific results, and by reducing the likelihood that funding is misused;
- **Communicating science** – by helping to build and maintain public support for science, and by reducing the risk of misinformation based on misguided research; and
- **Improving the scientific environment** – by reducing the risk of unfair career advancements based on fraudulent results, by cultivating good research practices and embedding them in an improved research culture, and by strengthening the global normative framework around research integrity.

### What is the Issue?

Research integrity is intrinsic to research activity and excellence. It is at the core of science itself, and is a basis for scientists' trust in each other and in the scientific record, and, equally importantly, society's trust in science. Addressing research integrity requires a holistic approach, given the linkages with other aspects of the research system, such as access to publications and data, research careers, evaluation, peer review, and research collaboration.

Individual or collective research misconduct can cover a broad spectrum of acts, but its most detrimental forms are Fabrication or Falsification of data, including under-reporting of data (which can have potential effects beyond the sphere of science itself) and Plagiarism (which can distort the internal system of scientific evaluation) (FFP). Beyond FFP, other, and perhaps even more frequent, cases of research misconduct include questionable research practices, the misuse of research data, authorship-related misconduct, and inadequate personal or leadership behavior.

Whilst the ultimate responsibility for good research practice lies with the individual researcher, it will only flourish in an environment that embraces both personal responsibility and an understanding that safeguarding research integrity is a shared task. Therefore, the research community as a whole, its institutions and research funding providers share the responsibility to raise awareness of, promote and support adherence to, and deal with infringements of good research practice, as well as dealing with infringements.

The Singapore Statement on Research Integrity issued in 2010 provided, for the first time, a foundational document on a global scale.

At a European level, the development and dissemination of the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity of March 2011, issued by the European Science Foundation and ALLEA (All European Academies), was an important step in creating a normative body around the issue, addressing a wide range of actors involved in the research endeavor.

On a national scale, many institutions around Europe, including Research Performing and Research Funding Organisations, academies, universities and ministries, have put in place structures to promote research integrity and to deal with misconduct. In many European countries, legislation and policies have been developed to address issues of research integrity. However, the decisions of research integrity authorities are still not sufficiently legally robust and therefore remain vulnerable.

## Science Europe's Objectives

Science Europe Member Organisations will strive to consolidate the emerging normative structure around research integrity, to move towards a harmonised implementation in Europe, and to ease research collaboration. They will do this by:

- Promoting research integrity. This includes working with all relevant parties to articulate and promote the centrality of research integrity, most notably in the education and training of researchers.
- Increasing knowledge. Science Europe Member Organisations will seek to expand their common understanding of the types, frequency, causes and effects of research misconduct, Science Europe will facilitate the regular *exchange* of best practice and experiences, and will strive to promote research on research integrity.
- Preventing misconduct. This includes developing appropriate incentives for fostering a culture of integrity, and setting high standards for researchers and institutions. All aspects of the research process - from funding, through employment contracts, peer-review processes, and collaborative projects to handling research data and publications - should take integrity issues into account. All sanctioning measures must be underpinned and preceded by pedagogical efforts aimed at instilling a culture of integrity, and at preventing the occurrence of cases of research misconduct.
- Dealing with misconduct. This includes working towards removing potential incompatibilities in procedural frameworks for research integrity between different disciplines, organisations and countries. Within their own remit and capacities, Science Europe Member Organisations will aim to identify and promote good practices related to the protection of 'whistle blowers', the fairness of procedure (including presumption of innocence), the proportionality of decisions and sanctions, and the possibilities for appeal.

## **Statement of Principles for Research Integrity**

### **Preamble**

The Responsible Conduct of Research is at the very essence of the scientific enterprise and is intrinsic to society's trust in science. Within the framework of the Responsible Conduct of Research, the basic principles of Research Integrity - namely honesty, responsibility, fairness and accountability – are enshrined in foundational documents <sup>1</sup> that also describe the responsibilities of researchers and the scientific community. While researchers and institutions themselves remain ultimately responsible for undertaking research with integrity, research funding agencies have an obligation to ensure that the research they support is conducted in accordance with the highest standards possible. To that end, participants in the 2nd Annual Meeting of the Global Research Council recognize the following Principles to articulate the responsibilities of research funding agencies in creating an international environment in which research integrity is at the core of all activities.

### **Principles**

#### **Leadership**

Research funding agencies must lead by example in the responsible management of research programs.

#### **Promotion**

Research funding agencies should encourage institutions to develop and implement policies and systems to promote integrity in all aspects of the research enterprise.

#### **Education**

Research funding agencies should promote continual training in research integrity, and develop initiatives to educate all researchers and students on the importance of research integrity.

#### **Transparent Processes**

Research funding agencies should, within the scope of their mandate, publish policies and procedures to promote research integrity and to address allegations of research misconduct.

#### **Response to Allegations of Misconduct**

During any investigation of misconduct <sup>2</sup>, research funding agencies should support a process that values accountability, timeliness and fairness.

#### **Conditions for Research Support**

Research funding agencies should incorporate integrity in research as a condition for obtaining and maintaining funding by researchers and institutions.

#### **International Cooperation**

Research funding agencies will work cooperatively with partners to support and facilitate research integrity worldwide.

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<sup>1</sup> For example: the Singapore Statement, the InterAcademy Council IAP Policy Report, and the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity.

<sup>2</sup> Breaches of research integrity can include, but are not limited to, plagiarism, fabrication and falsification.

Research Integrity Assurance questions (August 2012)

**Research Integrity & Ethics**

*The Research Organisation is required to have procedures for governing good research practice, and for investigating and reporting unacceptable research conduct that meet the requirements set out in the Concordat to Support Research Integrity (2012) and the Research Councils' Code of Conduct and Policy on the Governance of Good Research Conduct (2009) and any subsequent amendments.*

- 1 Please confirm that you have policies and procedures in place that meet the above requirements, including processes for dealing with allegations of misconduct. How often are these reviewed and when were they last reviewed?
- 2 Please provide the weblink to these policies and the name of the senior officer responsible for dealing with cases of misconduct.
- 3 How are these policies disseminated to staff? Please indicate if any special provision is made for new employees (including post-graduate students) and also how staff awareness is maintained.
- 4 Please outline any actions and activities that have been undertaken to support and strengthen understanding and application of research integrity issues (for example, postgraduate and researcher training, or process reviews).
- 5 How many formal investigations of research misconduct have been undertaken in the past three years which relate to researchers funded by or responsible for funding from Research Councils (including supervisors of postgraduate awards)?
- 6 The Research Councils expect that the research they support will be carried out to a high ethical standard. Please explain the arrangements you have in place for reviewing that any research funded by the Research Councils is planned and conducted in accordance with such ethical standards.