

IN CONFIDENCE

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Concordat to support research integrity – report from RCUK and STFC, November 2017

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Action

The report at Annex 1 provides an update on the implementation of the Concordat to support research integrity. Council is invited to note progress on the issues set out in the report.

Issues

Under the terms of the Concordat, to which RCUK is a signatory, employers of researchers are required to report annually to their governing body on the management of research integrity; and the Research Councils, collectively, are required to provide a narrative statement on the actions they have taken to promote research integrity.

Summary

This is the fifth annual statement covering the period 1 July 2016 – 30 June 2017. It firstly covers (1) above where STFC, as an employer of research staff, must report separately; followed by (2) where the RCs have a joint position.

1. Annual statement from STFC Executive

The introduction of the *Investigating Allegations of Misconduct in Research* policy was announced to staff in General Notice 12/2013. As a result, there is now a self-contained procedure for handling any

allegations of research misconduct involving STFC employees. There were, however, no such cases during 2016/17.

Following a recommendation in an internal audit of Research Councils' management of research integrity, action has been taken to include research integrity in STFC's induction process. This requires relevant staff to confirm, by the end of their first month of employment, that they have read and understood the *RCUK Policy & Guidelines on Governance of Good Research Conduct* and the associated policy on *Investigating Allegations of Research Misconduct*. In addition, STFC has an ethics policy which covers ethical issues related to research and other activities and is complementary to the *Good Research Conduct* policy. Its operation is overseen by an Ethics Committee which reports annually to Executive Board.

2. RCUK narrative statement on research integrity

Since July 2016, the Councils collectively have:

- Included questions about research integrity within the RCUK assurance programme of research organisations. Of the returns from universities assessed in 2016/17 there were reports of five allegations of research misconduct being upheld: two involving a breach of duty of care and one each of misrepresentation, plagiarism and fabrication. None were related to STFC funding.
- Participated in Science Europe activities in research integrity.
- Submitted written evidence to the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee inquiry into research integrity.
- Initiated a central log of allegations of research misconduct involving researchers funded by or engaged with RCUK.
- Revised the RCUK policy and guidelines on governance of good research conduct to reach consistency with the Wellcome Trust policy, respond to some of the recommendations in a report by Science Europe, improve clarity and to update nomenclature and links.
- Participated in the Universities UK working group on research integrity and in other UK meetings involving research integrity.

Annexes

1. Full report from STFC and RCUK on implementation of the Concordat to support research integrity
2. List of research organisations from which funding assurance questionnaires were received in 2016/17

Concordat to support research integrity – report from RCUK and STFC, November 2017

Background

RCUK is a signatory to the Concordat to support research integrity¹, published in July 2012.

The Concordat includes two requirements to report on research integrity:

(1) Annual statement from research employers to governing body

The Concordat (p 20) recommends that:

Employers of researchers should present a short annual statement to their own governing body that:

- *provides a summary of 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)*
- *provides assurances that the processes they have in place for dealing with allegations of misconduct are transparent, robust and fair, and that they continue to be appropriate to the needs of the organisation*
- *provides a high-level statement on any formal investigations of research misconduct that have been undertaken.*

(2) Annual narrative statement on research integrity

Commitment 5 of the concordat (page 21) states:

¹ www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/highereducation/Pages/Theconcordattosupportresearchintegrity.aspx

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.

This is the fifth annual statement. It firstly covers (1) above where STFC, as an employer of research staff, must report separately; followed by (2) where the RCs have a joint position.

The reporting period for this narrative is 1 July 2016 to 30 June 2017 though some more recent information has been included where available.

1. Annual statement from STFC Executive

The introduction of the *Investigating Allegations of Misconduct in Research* policy was announced to staff in General Notice 12/2013. As a result, there is now a self-contained procedure for handling any allegations of research misconduct involving STFC employees. There were, however, no such cases during 2016/17.

Following a recommendation in an internal audit of Research Councils' management of research integrity, action has been taken to include research integrity in STFC's induction process. This requires relevant staff to confirm, by the end of their first month of employment, that they have read and understood the *RCUK Policy & Guidelines on Governance of Good Research Conduct* and the associated policy on *Investigating Allegations of Research Misconduct*. In addition, STFC has an ethics policy which covers ethical issues related to research and other activities and is complementary to the *Good Research Conduct* policy. Its operation is overseen by an Ethics Committee which reports annually to Executive Board.

2. RCUK narrative statement on research integrity

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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 2016, RCUK has:

- i) Included questions asked about Research Integrity within the RCUK Assurance Programme of Research Organisations

Research Organisations (ROs) that receive funding from RCUK are subject to an Assurance Programme managed by RCUK staff.

During the financial year 2016/17, there were 42 assurance assignments (comprising 16 visits and 26 desk-based reviews). The ROs involved are listed in the annex. (In addition, there were 29 self-certification assignments undertaken for AHRC and ESRC). None of the assignments had been given its rating because of a lack of assurance around research integrity. The assurance ratings take account of the fieldwork review of policies for Research Integrity, Ethics and Misconduct. During the fieldwork, policies are reviewed and meetings take place with Departmental staff to evidence the way Research Integrity, Ethics and Misconduct are managed and promoted within the Research Organisation. For each assignment report there is a section recording the findings for Research Integrity, Ethics and Misconduct.

With respect to research integrity, ROs are asked to report on how many formal investigations of research misconduct have been undertaken in the previous years which relate to researchers funded by or responsible for funding from the Research Councils.

Of the returns assessed in 2016/17, there were reports of five allegations being upheld.

The outcomes over the four-year reporting cycle to date are shown below. (The reporting years are shown when the ROs have completed their Questionnaire):

Reporting year of Self-Assessment Questionnaire	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17

Fabrication	0	0	0	1
Falsification	2	0	0	0
Plagiarism	1	1	0	1
Misrepresentation	1	1	0	1
Breach of duty of care	0	0	1	2
Improper dealing with allegations of misconduct	0	0	0	0
Other	0	0	0	0
Details of any allegations upheld in part	0	0	0	0

ii) Participated in Science Europe (SE) activities in research integrity

RCUK is represented on the Science Europe Working Group on Research Integrity² (see previous annual statements for more background). The Group is chaired by Dr Maura Hiney (Head of Policy, Evaluation and External Relations, Health Research Board, Ireland). The Working Group had further meetings on 15th November 2016 and on 21st February 2017, both in Brussels.

Progress/activities during the year included:

- A workshop “Advancing Research Integrity Practices and Policies: From Recommendation to Implementation”, held in Brussels on 22nd February 2017³
- Input to the consultation led by the All European Academies (ALLEA) on its review of the ESF/ALLEA European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity - published 24th March 2017⁴

² www.scienceeurope.org/policy/working-groups/Research-Integrity

³ http://www.scienceeurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/WS_Report_Integrity_Practices_Policies.pdf

⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/other/hi/h2020-ethics_code-of-conduct_en.pdf

- A presentation, given by Tony Peatfield, at the 5th World Conference on Research Integrity, Amsterdam 28th – 31st May 2017⁵
- iii) Submitted written evidence to the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee on Research Integrity

RCUK submitted written evidence⁶ to the Inquiry on 22 March 2017. Following the announcement of the general election, the Inquiry was put into abeyance.

- iv) RCUK log of allegations of research misconduct

From 1 April, RCUK started to maintain a spreadsheet of allegations of research misconduct notified to the research councils (NB RCUK is in a position only to require notification of allegations where the allegation is about someone funded by, or engaged with, RCUK (including acting as a supervisor for an RCUK postgraduate student or engaged with peer review activities), even if it is about work not connected with a grant from one of the research councils).

The aim of the spreadsheet is to provide a basis for members to learn from each other and to identify possible duplicate notifications. It also provides the basis for responding to external requests consistently. [Within each council and within RCUK, information may be shared, as necessary and confidentially. The data are held securely and handled sensitively, with restricted access. Information may be shared in confidence with other funders to ensure consistency of approach and avoidance of duplication].

- v) Update to the RCUK 'Policy and Guidelines on Governance of Good Research Conduct'

With effect from 1 April 2017, RCUK introduced some changes to the 'RCUK Policy and Guidelines on Governance of Good Research Conduct'⁷.

The changes were for four reasons:

⁵ <http://www.wcri2017.org/program>

⁶ <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/science-and-technology-committee/research-integrity/written/48579.pdf>

⁷

<http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/documents/reviews/grc/rcukpolicyguidelinesgovernancegoodresearchconduct-pdf/>

- In response to some suggestions made to us by the Wellcome Trust, with a view to reaching consistency between the Wellcome policy⁸ and the RCUK one;
- In response to (some of) the recommendations in the recent Science Europe Report⁹;
- To add clarity;
- To update some of the nomenclature (and weblinks).

The major change was to specify that henceforth the relevant research council should be notified of an allegation of research misconduct at the stage that it is decided to undertake an informal inquiry; not, as previously, at the (later) stage of deciding to undertake a formal investigation.

vi) UUK Working Group on Research Integrity

Following publication of the Progress Report on the UUK Concordat to support research integrity¹⁰, in November 2016, RCUK has participated in the UUK Working Group and supports the proposal to set up a Research Integrity Forum.

vii) Other meetings on research integrity

During the year, RCUK participated in several other meetings on research integrity, including:

- Royal Society roundtable discussion on research integrity, 28th March
- Westminster Briefing on “Delivering and Maintaining the Highest Standards of Research Integrity in HE”, 26 April
- UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO) Annual Conference, 11 May.

November 2017

⁸ <https://wellcome.ac.uk/funding/managing-grant/research-misconduct>

⁹ http://www.scienceeurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Science-Europe_Integrity_Survey_Report_July_2016_FINAL.pdf

¹⁰ <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Pages/concordat-research-integrity-progress-report.aspx>

Funding Assurance Questionnaires were received from the following 42 organisations for 2016/17

Cardiff University	Brunel University London
Imperial College London	Cranfield University
Loughborough University	De Montfort University
Queen Mary, University of London	Earlham Institute
University of Aberdeen	Glasgow Caledonian University
University of Bath	Heriot-Watt University
University of Birmingham	John Innes Centre
University of Bristol	Leonard Cheshire Disability
University of Dundee	Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine
University of Glasgow	National Centre for Social Research
University of Leicester	National Institute for Biological Standards and Control
University of Manchester	Royal College of Art
University of Nottingham	Royal Holloway, University of London
University of Sheffield	Royal Veterinary College
University of Sussex	Scotland's Rural College
University of Warwick	St George's University, London
Armagh Observatory	The British Museum
Bath Spa University	University of Cape Town
Birkbeck College	University of Central Lancashire
Birmingham City University	University of Wales
Bournemouth University	Wellcome Trust Sanger Centre