Freedom of Information request: 2018/0241

Thank you for your Freedom of Information request received on 5th December 2018 in which you requested the following:

Your Request:

I am writing under the Freedom of Information Act to ask for information compiled by your organisation on cases of research misconduct.

1. Please supply figures on any cases that have been investigated at UK Research and Innovation, including a monthly breakdown and the amount of funding each case relates to.
2. How many of these cases – if any – have led to research funding being withdrawn or suspended?
3. Please send copies of emails/letters relating to these cases

Our response:

I can confirm UK Research and Innovation holds information relevant to your request.

To clarify, UK Research and Innovation does not generally undertake investigations of allegations of research misconduct relating to the research we fund. Our Policy and Guidelines on Governance of Good Research Conduct¹ states that it is the responsibility of the Research Organisation holding an award to investigate research misconduct allegations;

p.5 Section 1: “Responsibility for promoting good research conduct. As ultimate responsibility for promoting and safeguarding good research conduct lies with the employing institution, it is incumbent upon all institutions covered by the RCUK policy and guidelines on governance and good research conduct to have in place policies and procedures for promoting good research conduct, as well as procedures for whistle-blowers, and for dealing with allegations of research misconduct…”; Section 4 details further.

This is in line with the UUK Concordat to Support Research Integrity (p.18) – to which the research councils and Research England are signatories.

¹ available at: https://www.ukri.org/about-us/policies-and-standards/research-integrity/
However, we do require the Research Organisations we fund to inform us of investigations that are relevant to the research we fund and therefore do hold information relevant to your request relating to investigations and proven cases of research misconduct.

Please note that as an exception to the approach described above, UK Research and Innovation would have a role in investigating allegations relating to research undertaken in our own research institutes (within the Medical Research Council, Natural Environment Research Council and the Science and Technology Facilities Council). In such cases UK Research and Innovation may investigate in line with our policies that apply as an employer\(^2\) or may participate in an investigation led by another body.

We have responded to each of your questions below:

1. Please supply figures on any cases that have been investigated at UK Research and Innovation, including a monthly breakdown and the amount of funding each case relates to.

From April 2018 to January 2019 UK Research and Innovation was informed of 13 formal investigations of allegations of research misconduct. A monthly breakdown is provided in Table 1 below and unless otherwise stated the allegations were not upheld.

Table 1: Formal Investigations of research misconduct reported to UK Research and Innovation councils (April 2018-January 2019)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month UKRI informed</th>
<th>BBSRC</th>
<th>EPSRC</th>
<th>MRC</th>
<th>NERC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apr-18</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May-18</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jun-18</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jul-18</td>
<td>1 (allegation upheld)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2 (1 allegation upheld)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug-18</td>
<td>1 (allegation upheld)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sept-18</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct-18</td>
<td>1*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov-18</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dec-18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan-19</td>
<td>-</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* determined not to be research misconduct

AHRC, ESRC, STFC, Innovate UK, and Research England have not received any reports of formal investigations of allegations of research misconduct since April 2018.

Information relating to the amount of funding for each case has not been provided, as to do so may result in individual award holders being identified. We are not obliged, under section 40(2) of the FOIA, to provide information that is the personal data of another person if releasing would contravene any of the provisions of the General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018. In this instance we believe that the release of information would contravene the first data protection principle and therefore section 40(2) is engaged. The individuals concerned would not have an expectation that this information would be made publicly available.

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\(^2\) For example the MRC Policy and Procedure for Investigating Allegations of Research Misconduct available at https://mrc.ukri.org/documents/pdf/mrc-policy-on-research-misconduct/
However, in the interests of transparency, we can disclose that the total amount of funding relating to all of the cases outlined above is £922k, which represents a very small proportion of UKRI’s total research funding (circa £7 billion).

In addition to investigations directly relating to research council grants Research Organisations are also expected to report formal investigations relating to any individual funded by, or engaged with, the research councils, even where the work to which the allegation relates is not directly connected to a research council funded project. This means that not all research misconduct investigations reported are directly connected to UKRI funding.

2. How many of these cases – if any – have led to research funding being withdrawn or suspended?
3. Please send copies of emails/letters relating to these cases

None of the cases identified above, where an allegation was upheld, resulted in the withdrawal or suspension of funding. Therefore, no emails or letters relating to the withdrawal or suspension of funding are held.

If you have any queries about this response please contact me, or if you are unhappy with the service you have received in relation to your request and wish to request a review of our decision, please write to:

Complaints Officer
UK Research and Innovation
Polaris House
North Star Avenue
Swindon
SN2 1FL
Email: foi@ukri.org

Please quote the reference number above in any future communications.

If you are still not content with the outcome of the review, you may apply to refer the matter to the Information Commissioner for a decision. Generally, the ICO cannot make a decision unless you have exhausted the review procedure provided by UKRI. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

Information Commissioner
Wycliffe House,
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF

Enquiry/Information Line: Between 9am and 5pm Monday to Friday 0303 123 1113 or 01625 545745
Further information about the Office of the Information Commissioner can be found at http://www.ico.gov.uk/

Yours sincerely,

[Redacted]
UK Research and Innovation, Information Governance Team
Email: foi@ukri.org