

UKRI Guidance for Research Organisations on the Investigation of Research Misconduct

This guidance should be read alongside the UKRI Policy on the Governance of Good Research Practice¹ (hereafter ‘GRP policy’).

The GRP policy requires all organisations receiving UKRI funding to investigate any allegations of research misconduct against any member of staff or student in an impartial, fair and timely manner.

Research misconduct investigation procedures should be developed and reviewed in light of, and be consistent with, the Concordat to Support Research Integrity² and the UK Research Integrity Office’s recommended procedure for investigation³.

UKRI accepts that each organisation’s procedures for ensuring reporting on an investigation into allegations of unacceptable research conduct must be aligned to its own internal requirements including, for example, alignment with other human resources policies and disciplinary/conduct procedures.

UKRI also notes the published guidance by the UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO) (August 2008) on *Procedure for the Investigation of Misconduct in Research*. While requirements set out in this document are not as detailed as the model procedure set out by UKRIO, there is no inconsistency between the two approaches and UKRI recommends consideration and application of the detailed procedures set out by UKRIO where these are appropriate. The UKRI guidance sets out the minimum expectations for best practice for all research officers in receipt of UKRI funding. In addition, where international collaborative research is involved, the guidance provided by the OECD Global Science Forum on *Investigating Research Misconduct Allegations in International Collaborative Projects A Practical Guide* (April 2009) should be followed.

Procedures should cover the main requirements set out below.

Definitions

Preliminary Investigations: Also known as the “screening stage”. This stage refers to the process of reviewing the nature of an allegation of research misconduct and establishes whether the allegation made indicates that misconduct in research may have occurred. It does not determine who is responsible or the specific nature of the type(s) of misconduct that took place.

Formal investigations: Also referred to as Full Investigation Stage in UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO) guidance. Formal investigations should be preceded by a preliminary investigation. The formal stage reviews the evidence to determine the nature of the research misconduct and who is responsible and will make recommendations for the organisation’s response. Formal investigations may determine whether misconduct was due to poor practice as opposed to a deliberate act and can make recommendations such as remedial action including training. UKRI recommends that individuals with upheld allegations are asked to inform new employers if individuals are dismissed from their roles.

Note: UKRI must be notified within one month of a deciding to undertake a formal investigation to be conducted as per paragraph 4.2 of the UKRI Governance of Good Research Practice Policy. Contact details for who to report to can be found on the Good Research Resource Hub⁴. For organisations in receipt of any Research England funding please refer to RE policy on reporting investigations of research misconduct⁵. For those outside of receipt of Research England funding there must be an evidenced link

¹ <https://www.ukri.org/publications/ukri-policy-on-the-governance-of-good-research-practice/>

² <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/sites/default/files/field/downloads/2021-08/Updated%20FINAL-the-concordat-to-support-research-integrity.pdf>

³ <http://ukrio.org/publications/misconduct-investigation-procedure/>

⁴ <https://www.ukri.org/about-us/policies-standards-and-data/good-research-resource-hub/research-integrity/>

⁵ [RE policy on reporting ihttps://www.ukri.org/publications/re-policy-on-reporting-investigations-of-research-misconduct/nvestigations_of_research_misconduct_-_UKRI](https://www.ukri.org/publications/re-policy-on-reporting-investigations-of-research-misconduct/nvestigations_of_research_misconduct_-_UKRI)

to UKRI funding or activities including holding grants under consideration or roles on peer review panels and advisory boards to UKRI.

Preliminary Investigations

Allegations of unacceptable research conduct should initially be considered through an organisation's procedures for preliminary investigation. These should not be onerous and should be set within the normal organisational/institutional procedures. They should:

- Be the responsibility of a senior member of the organisation, advised where necessary by one or more other colleagues who can be seen as clearly independent of the respondent complaint
- Where necessary undertake discreet investigations to determine if there is sufficient evidence to be taken forward to a full formal investigation.
- Be completed within a specified timeframe to ensure that a relatively quick decision can be reached on whether to proceed to a formal investigation.
- Where evidence from the preliminary investigation indicates that unacceptable conduct may have occurred, procedures should then provide for a more detailed formal investigation.

Formal Investigations

When the preliminary investigation determines that a formal investigation should be initiated, UKRI should be informed⁴ and an investigation panel should immediately be set up.

When running the investigation, it is important that:

- All individuals facing allegations of research misconduct are properly informed
- The person against whom allegations are made is given details of the allegations in writing, including the nature of the evidence against them; individuals must be given reasonable time and opportunity to respond
- In serious cases the question of suspension is addressed; this should only arise where the presence of an individual is likely to hinder an investigation or where it would be difficult for an individual to perform their duties while this stage of an investigation is being conducted
- If a person is suspended the funding bodies which sponsor any research or postgraduate training with which the individual is involved must be advised
- The formal investigation is completed as quickly as possible, and within a specified time
- The formal investigation panel should consist of at least three members
- One or more of the members should be selected from outside the organisation
- If the individual facing allegations of research misconduct is an international researcher that is in the UK via the [Global Talent Visa \(GTV\) endorsed funder route](#), the Global Mobility team (globaltalentvisa@ukri.org) should be informed so that the relevant GTV policies can be followed.

[The UK Research Integrity Office](#) (UKRIO) is an independent charity, offering support to the public, researchers and organisations to further good practice in research and provides independent, expert and confidential support. Further information, or to access expert help and support can be found [here](#).

If, following any investigations, the individual is found not to have committed an act of research misconduct, or the allegation is withdrawn, the institution must protect the interests of the individual, and make the outcome clear to all who have been involved. If the allegation was made publicly, the institution must make public the outcome of the investigation.

Investigators should also make clear whether or not they believe the allegation was made in good faith. If it was, the interests of the respondent must also be protected, in keeping with the Public Interest

⁴ See Section 4 of the UKRI Policy on the Governance of Good Research Practice <https://www.ukri.org/publications/ukri-policy-on-the-governance-of-good-research-practice/>

Disclosure Act 1998. If the investigators suspect that the allegation was malicious this would constitute misconduct and should be dealt with according to the relevant procedures. If the allegations are upheld in whole or in part, then formal disciplinary charges may be brought.

The UKRI Policy on the Governance of Good Research Practice contains expectations of organisations with respect to actions in response to upheld allegations.

Anonymous and Pseudonymous allegations

There are several valid reasons why anonymous or pseudonymous allegations may be made and UKRI understands that maintaining that anonymity is important. The expectations set in the Governance of Good Research Practice policy are inclusive of anonymous allegations. Processes for anonymous allegations should be provisioned for in the policies of the research organisation. For example, where there are concerns of malicious intent the preliminary investigation stage can be used to rule out further investigation.