



The
University
Of
Sheffield.

Human
Resources.

Investigating and Responding to Allegations of Research Misconduct Policy

1. Introduction

The University expects all University staff and workers engaged in research wherever it takes place (and all others working on University premises, using University facilities or otherwise undertaking research on behalf of the University), to be committed to supporting the production of excellent research founded on integrity. Working in accordance with: the University's policy on [Good Research & Innovations Practice](#) (GRIP); relevant research ethics processes; standards for professional practice and wider legal, contractual and/or regulatory requirements. All of which these individuals should take steps to acquaint themselves with, along any other discipline specific relevant guidance.

The aim of this policy is to provide transparent, robust and fair processes, applicable to all fields of research, reflecting the right to academic freedom, and in compliance with the Concordat to Support Research Integrity, to allow the effective, timely and sensitive consideration and response to allegations in relation to potential research misconduct; to reach a conclusion about suspected research misconduct and the provision of any relevant recommendations.

2. Scope

This policy relates to allegations of research misconduct made against University staff members and workers (e.g.: Emeritus, Clinical and Honorary Contract staff), and individuals permitted to work in University premises or using University facilities (e.g. visiting collaborating researchers, independent contractors or consultants), or otherwise undertaking research on behalf of the University. [Note there are separate processes for raising and responding to such allegations regarding students].

Such allegations can be brought to the University's attention by any individual or body in any capacity. Where allegations are made by an individual or body external to the University, the expectation is that they will comply with this policy's requirements.

The University is only empowered to investigate activities that have occurred within its premises, using its facilities or that have been undertaken on its behalf but if necessary, it may request that any other relevant employing organisation either cooperates in the investigation or undertakes its own investigation.

3. What is Research Misconduct?

Research misconduct occurs where an individual deliberately, dangerously or negligently deviates from accepted practices that the University expects to be followed (i.e. unacceptable practices). This specifically encompasses (but is not restricted to)

unacceptable practices as listed within Annex 2 of the [Good Research & Innovations Practice \(GRIP\)](#) policy.

Research misconduct does **not** include:

- honest errors (unless deemed negligent) and differences in for example the design, execution, interpretation or judgment in evaluating research methods or results or
- misconduct unrelated to the research

For the avoidance of doubt, research misconduct includes acts of omission as well as acts of commission. In addition, the standards by which allegations of misconduct in research should be judged should be those prevailing at the date that the behaviour under investigation took place.

4. Key Policy Principles

- Staff undertaking research are able to exercise their right to academic freedom under the University Statutes, but must also take responsibility of ensuring that the integrity of research is upheld, and of being aware of the legal requirements that regulate their work.
- To enable all stakeholders (including funders, sponsors, regulators, staff, scientific publishers, students, research participants and patients) to have confidence that high standards of research integrity are upheld by the University at all times and that allegations of research misconduct are treated seriously and investigated as confidentially as is reasonably practicable.
- All staff/workers and students are obliged (and any individuals authorised to work in the University, its facilities or otherwise undertaking research on behalf of the University have a responsibility to report) to the University any concerns about potential research misconduct, whether witnessed or where they reasonably believe that this is, has or is likely to occur.
- Those staff, workers, and students who raise such concerns in line with this policy will not be penalised or suffer detriment by the University for doing so, provided that they do so in confidence and reasonably believe that potential research misconduct is, has or is likely to occur.
- All parties involved in an investigation are bound by confidentiality (except in so far that disclosure is necessary in relation to the proceedings, for example, to witnesses, advisers and trade union representatives), any breach of which shall be considered as a serious disciplinary matter unless covered by the Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblowing) Act.
- Where appropriate, issues may be resolved through informal discussions, advice, guidance, or agreed mediation, without the requirement for a formal investigation.
- The basis for reaching a conclusion that an individual is responsible for misconduct in research relies on a judgment that there was an intention to commit the misconduct and/or negligence in the conduct of any aspect of research undertaken and that the burden of proof required is that of 'on the balance of probabilities'.
- To protect the reputation of those suspected of, or alleged to have engaged in, misconduct, when the allegations or suspicions are not confirmed.

- Depending upon the outcome of an investigation, other relevant formal procedures may be initiated including for example the University's disciplinary or capability procedures. In such cases the information/findings of an investigation may be used in whole or in part to form the investigation element of such procedures.
- The University is committed to identifying and applying any relevant learnings from an investigation in order to improve systems and processes, where possible, (while maintaining the confidentiality of all involved parties) and to prevent the same type of incident reoccurring.

5. How the University Supports this Policy

Enquiries on matters concerning good research practice (e.g. what constitutes good practice, what constitutes unacceptable practice, and information on existing support resources) can be raised with the Research Ethics and Integrity Manager in Research Services (RS).

The Vice-President for Research (VPR) (also Chair of the University's Senate Research and Innovation Committee), has overarching responsibility for the University's approach to fostering high standards of good research practice throughout the University's research community. Collectively the Committee's members are responsible for keeping under review and supporting the implementation of the University's approach within the Faculties.

A summary of the actions and activities undertaken by the University in meeting the requirements of the Concordat to Support Research Integrity are outlined in its publically available annual statements to Council.

Other procedures are available for individuals to raise and resolve issues of different concern, for example (not exhaustive), the Policy on Public Interest (Whistleblowing) Disclosure, and the Grievance procedure. Financial fraud or other misuse of research funds or research equipment may be addressed under the University's Fraud Response Plan instead of under this policy. For information on how to raise potential research misconduct concerns relating to students please see refer to Student Services.

Guidance can also be gained from the Human Resources in relation to this or any other Human Resources policy and procedure.

Date Last Reviewed: 7/22

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