

Embedding Integrity: A Woven Approach

Dr Sara Shinton

www.shintonconsulting.com

Abstract: Researchers in UK universities now have access to hundreds of hours of training each year. This session will explore the opportunities and effective approaches for introducing research integrity under the umbrella of many different topics with the aim of weaving integrity into every day research practice. Looking at the “life cycle” of a researcher, we will identify the natural points at which training in integrity can be introduced and adapted to tie in with the changing roles and responsibilities of researchers as they develop independence and leadership. We will also look at the potential for integrity to be undermined under pressure and how to instil in researchers the awareness of these tensions and give them strategies to manage these.

Context

Who I am

My background is in physical sciences (physical chemistry); I've postdoc'd, worked as a careers adviser, in academic development and since 2000 run a researcher development consultancy.

Where I work

I work principally with Russell Group Universities because they tend to have the critical mass of researchers which justifies the use of external consultants, but also work with HEIs outside the UK, with professional bodies and researcher networks.

What I try to achieve

I try to help researchers develop a sense of control over their careers, whether that's in terms of career choice, managing challenging situations, finding funding, working effectively in collaborations or demonstrating leadership and independence.

Academia is increasingly complex – I try to help people get a stronger sense of the context in which they work and to appreciate how to be more successful in it.

But I'm not..

...an expert in research integrity!

How to make it fit

My approach is to focus on the transition points in the researcher career lifecycle

At these points people are often receptive to input and support

I'm going to describe some of the course which I use to embed the principles of research integrity

Highway code –vs- Learning to drive

The Highway Code doesn't teach us how to drive but it gives us the rules that we need to adhere to.

We learn by practicing and being guided by mentors, experts and making mistakes in a protected environment (mostly)

Most of our understanding and practice in research integrity comes from doing it

Awareness of the tensions that can undermine integrity

When I'm developing training materials and ideas I keep in mind the tensions that will affect the researchers I'll be working with

In my slides I used an image of crocodiles to represent these. These tensions are amongst the threats to maintaining integrity as a researcher. I mentioned REF and internal systems for recognising and rewarding researchers.

Identifying opportunities to offer support

This means that I try to develop a supportive environment in workshops where people can talk about these issues. I use case studies and examples to help people relate them to their own practice.

We stress that most cases of poor research integrity are about misjudgment, often under pressure rather than fraud or dishonesty. The aim is to encourage honesty and discussion about the issues.

How?

Getting started

New PhDs....

project management
and risk

Discussions about risk are a great
vehicle to introduce integrity

defining research

Definitions of research lead to
expanded discussions about the
challenges of developing original
and unique ideas

supervisor
relationship

The supervisor is someone to be
honest with, not someone to hide
mistakes from...

How?

Established PhDs

public engagement

increasing ownership

project design

reality of research

Often begin to consider public engagement. The training can include discussions and ideas about how to describe research to the public and how to help them understand uncertainty, what this means and how it is managed

The reality of research (the second year blues or PhD happy chart) helps avoid imposter syndrome and again, reinforces how critically important it is to be HONEST

How?

Thesis writing

Viva preparation

Conferences and dissemination

Marketing and describing their practice

Transition from the PhD to whatever comes next

Thesis and viva preparation tend to cover this naturally. Instead I spoke about the potential “integrity” moments at conferences and when work begins to reach the wider research community. Other speakers referred to the many resources including those from journals to promote this.

One trick that I think we are missing is the wider employability agenda. If PhDs have great experiences to relate to employers about how they have developed their personal and research integrity, these are great distinguishers for potential employers.

We should also be keen to put our researchers into the wider labour market with their strong sense of integrity

How?

Authorship and
publishing

Informal supervision

Marketing and
describing their
leadership

Postdoc

Clearly publishing comes sooner than this in the current PhD model many researchers experience. However, it is at this stage that people start to develop their publication strategy and take more ownership of it. Whatever they have experienced whilst being supervised, they now need take responsibility for what they publish

Researchers are also increasingly responsible for day to day supervision of students so they need to understand how to develop this mindset in others

Again, on the employability agenda, these are high value skills

How?

New Principal Investigator

As the first grant is awarded the pressures really kick in. This is a period in a researcher's career where there is huge pressure to deliver, increasing responsibility for others and a need to delegate, meaning your reputation sits in someone else's hands.

There are also opportunities to become a gatekeeper of standards through reviewing

There are likely to be collaborations, bringing new challenges as your definition of RI may be very different from other disciplines, groups, institutions and countries.

Independence

Collaboration

Reviewing

Building a reputation

How?

Group Culture

Group leader, professor

Influence in field

As research groups grow, clarity of leadership and expectation from the top becomes critical. You won't have time to see the research happening – you need to trust your researchers to do things correctly, but it's your responsibility to embed “correctness”

Editorial

Influence and editorial responsibilities also come – these bring with them potentially “inconvenient truths” as we have to address the behaviours of others

How?

Policy

Upper echelons...

Recognition and
Reward

This is clearly difficult – universities are incredibly complex organisations, full of people who act like independent mini-organisations. But it's also something that seems to put disproportionate pressure on junior staff.

Design of Influencing
factors (REF)

Can we expect the sector to reward behaviour which potentially highlights its own disrepute? Hopefully yes -

Opportunities to deliver:

- Throughout the “seven ages of a researcher” there are many opportunities to introduce, embed and remind people of these themes
- Value of case studies is great – we all relate to a human experience and with support can relate this to our own practice. Integrity is messy and subjective but case studies foster debate
- Facilitating behaviours and drivers need to be identified and rewarded

How to make it fit

Talk in the language of the researcher

Use examples they can relate to personally or are in their spheres of influence

Think Babel Fish:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/cult/hitchhikers/guide/babelfish.shtml>

Read this:

<http://www.douglasadams.com/creations/0345391802.html>

Tensions that undermine

- Academic challenge
 - how our delicate flowers of ideas are crushed
- Avoiding temptation to over promise and create pressure to deliver
- Being honest about the challenge so people talk about it

Tensions that undermine

- External drivers
 - Culture of benchmarking and the impact this has on drive to publish, succeed, do things that can be counted
 - Reward and recognise a richer range of researcher success factors

Tensions that undermine

- Cultural differences
- The cartoon I used was by Beatrice the Biologist:
- <http://www.beatricebiologist.com/2011/10/how-the-brain-works/>
- We can't assume "our research integrity" is anyone else's
- Don't make assumptions – talk about the details
- (Great stuff here: <https://ombudsman.nih.gov/tools.html>)

Spheres of Influence

Training – above the iceberg, everything else forms the environment in which integrity is actually developed

Peers and Supervisors

Research communities

Professional bodies and organisations

Universities

Society

Tie to need

Think about the tension points and use integrity as a tool and support mechanism rather than additional burden

Foster honesty

At all levels get people to see the value of this

More stories

The more stories we can chose from as trainers and developers, the more chance we have of resonating with an individual.

I'd be interested in developing more stories with people!

Make reality of research more visible



Johannes Haushofer
@jhaushofer

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http://www.princeton.edu/haushofer/Johannes_Haushofer_CV_of_Failures.pdf

Inspired by Melanie Stefan's original article:

<http://www.nature.com/naturejobs/science/articles/10.1038/nj7322-467a>

In core conversations

We should always talk about this until it becomes our habit

Final thoughts

Integrity should be seen in positive terms, as something which helps us to make better decisions and be more successful rather than a burden.....

Thank you!