

Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics (STEM)

Allegations of Research Misconduct

For Trainees

Why case studies?

A core function of the UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO) is to provide independent, expert, and confidential advice on the conduct of research, from promoting good practice to addressing allegations of misconduct. We have been doing this since 2006.

Each request for assistance received by UKRIO increases our body of knowledge. These 'lessons learned' not only inform our response to subsequent enquiries but also underpin our other activities, especially UKRIO's education and training work.

We have found that illustrative case studies are an excellent way to raise awareness of research integrity and research culture and to illustrate the complexities and 'grey areas' that can occur.

Case studies are not literal accounts of any enquiry to UKRIO. Instead, they are scenarios, based on real-life situations, which illustrate recurring or notable issues and problems that have been brought to our attention. While some case studies may mention a particular discipline or setting, they contain themes that are relevant across subjects.

Please note that this case study is fictitious. Any similarity to actual persons, organisations or events is coincidental.

Case study 13

You are the *Named Person* in your university responsible for receiving allegations of research misconduct and any other concerns about research conducted under the auspices of the university.

A **statistician** from another university has raised some serious allegations with the institution relating to the *manipulation of statistics* following research carried out by a unit within your institution on the effectiveness of different treatments for people with Alzheimer’s disease. The statistics were included as part of a recently published report on the deployment of NHS resources for the most effective treatments.

In accordance with your university’s research misconduct procedure, a panel was established to undertake a preliminary investigation of the matter, to determine whether the allegation had sufficient substance to warrant a full, formal investigation. It found *no evidence of manipulation or falsification, although it did find several errors in the referencing of the work undertaken*, which could have led to misunderstandings.

Accordingly, the matter did not progress to a formal enquiry and was dealt with internally by the Head of the relevant Department.

The statistician has been notified of the outcome and has pursued the matter as far as he can under the research misconduct procedure. He says that he is still unhappy and is hinting at his suspicions of a ‘cover-up’ by the institution and protection of its staff. He has indicated that he may write to his MP and is also *considering reporting those involved to the General Medical Council for negligence*.

 **Please discuss and decide:**

1. How do you respond to the statistician?
2. What actions, if any, should you take?
3. What other issues does this raise?



Promoting integrity and high ethical standards in research
 Providing confidential, independent, and expert support

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