

Research Misconduct

For Trainees

Why case studies?

A core function of the UK Research Integrity Office is to provide independent, expert, and confidential advice on the conduct of research, from promoting good practice to addressing allegations of misconduct.

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 to illustrate the complexities and 'grey areas' which can occur.

Case studies are not literal accounts of any particular enquiry to UKRIO. Instead, they are scenarios, based on real-life situations, which illustrate recurring or notable issues and problems which have been brought to our attention.

Case studies are suitable for any audience but may be of particular interest to managers, advisors and researchers involved in responding to allegations of research misconduct. While some case studies may mention a particular discipline, they contain themes that are relevant across all subjects.

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

Case study 2

You are a *postdoctoral researcher* at a university, employed on a fixed-term contract that is just coming up for renewal, you are hoping to be offered a permanent position. You are a member of a research team involving university staff and several PhD students. Your Department is rapidly gaining a reputation as an exceptional place to work, not least because of the research of a colleague, 'X'. Widely perceived as the protégé of the Head of the Department, X has published a series of papers in high-profile journals which have been described as ground-breaking research, attracting a great deal of interest from the research community and beyond.

The decision on your contract will be made by a panel of senior colleagues, including your Head of Department. You are hopeful that the outcome will be positive: your research has been well-received, as you have several articles published; you get on with your colleagues and managers; and you have been able to attract the interest of additional funding bodies.

Emily, a PhD student who is part of the same research team as you, brings to you three papers written by X, all published in peer-reviewed, high-profile journals. She shows you digital images in the three papers. *The images are identical*. However, X has described them as denoting the results of a different piece of work in each paper.

You have thoroughly gone over the figures and the data that support them. Perhaps X, the protégé of your Head of Department, has made a serious mistake in his work? Or has he deliberately falsified information in one or more of the articles?



Please discuss and decide:

1. What do you do?
2. What do you advise Emily to do?
3. How might the matter be resolved?



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

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