

Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics (STEM):

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 4

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

You are approached by the Chair of the Postgraduate Research Committee for the Department of Chemistry about a *research student* based in one of the laboratories, and whose studentship was funded by a large charitable organisation.

The student recently submitted their thesis, and before the oral examination, one of the nominated examiners noticed some discrepancies in the results of an experiment that was undertaken and written up in the thesis. She raised it with the supervisor, who undertook some quiet investigative work and ascertained that it was 'very likely' that the results had been altered. The supervisor raised the concerns with the student at a one-to-one meeting and reported that the student broke down in tears and *admitted that they had changed the results*.

However, when an additional meeting was held to discuss this further, the student denied all wrongdoing, and indicated that they had been *coerced into admitting it*, had received inadequate supervision throughout their degree and that the supervisor was now *'covering his back'*.

The oral examination is due to take place within two weeks. The student already has a job working in the Research and Development section of a borough council.



Please discuss and decide:

1. How do you proceed in these circumstances:
 - a. If your research misconduct procedure excludes research students?
 - b. If your research misconduct procedure includes research students?
2. What other issues does this raise?



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

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