
Research Integrity Champions, Leads and Advisers – Case study from CRUK Scotland Institute

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Institutional context

The CRUK Scotland Institute is a cancer research institute situated in Glasgow with approximately 250 researchers split across 30 research groups consisting of Principal Investigators (PIs), postdoctoral scientists, data analysts, PhD students, scientific officers and technology specialists. It is one of Europe's leading cancer research centres, supporting cutting-edge work into the molecular mechanisms of cancer development. As well as core funding from Cancer Research UK, the Institute also receives an additional third of its total income from external grants and industry collaborations. It has an excellent reputation for fundamental and translational cancer research, including world-class *in vivo* modelling to address tumour growth and metastasis. Its research ethos is about excellence, honesty, openness, accountability and integrity.

The CRUK Scotland Institute has a Research Integrity Service led by Dr Catherine Winchester, who supports and facilitates research integrity across the Institute. In 2019, it also introduced a network of Research Integrity Champions to help foster research integrity at the grass roots level within individual research groups, core facilities and advanced technology teams. These Research Integrity Champions represent a broad spectrum of research staff at the Institute, from technicians to group leaders.

The role of the Research Integrity Champions is to:

- communicate on matters relating to research integrity to their group and back to the Head of Research Integrity;
- act as a conduit from the Head of Research Integrity to their group to aid the implementation of new and refreshed policies relating to good conduct in research;
- undertake a first point of contact/gatekeeper role within their group;
- support and foster good research practices within their group;
- participate in good research practice projects led by the Head of Research Integrity.

The Research Integrity Champions undertake a wide variety of activities within their groups. As it is a voluntary role, they are encouraged to engage in activities in which they have a particular interest. These encompass helping with experimental design, sharing good record keeping, hosting focussed lab meetings on aspects of research integrity, advising on scientific writing and proof-reading manuscripts. As the Institute's research is not primarily clinical, the Research Integrity Champions do not have a great deal to do with research integrity relating to human research ethics, although in other settings this could be an element of their role.

The Research Integrity Champions do not play a role in addressing breaches of research integrity or research misconduct. Their role is rather to champion good research conduct.

Development and maintenance of the network

Each PI was asked to nominate a Research Integrity Champion and there was very good engagement with the concept from across the Institute, boosted by buy-in from the senior management team. Those taking on the role are a mix of senior and more junior staff and include some of the more experienced technicians and laboratory managers. Two of the smaller research groups have PhD students as their Research Integrity Champion.

The role was devised by the Head of Research Integrity and discussed with the Research Integrity Champions at their inaugural meeting. The role is described on the Institute's website and is a feature of the Research Integrity Toolbox on the internal intranet.

The Research Integrity Champions meet with the Head of Research Integrity annually to discuss their experiences, share knowledge, raise any issues and feedback, and hear about the latest research integrity developments. There is also optional research integrity training for the Research Integrity Champions, covering current discipline-specific research integrity matters and research-group level activities.

Features of the system

The Research Integrity Champion system is relatively informal, focused on support and development, and possibly for this reason, there has been a good level of engagement across the Institute. Staff have been willing to participate, ask questions and raise matters at an early stage, which probably helps prevent them developing into more serious issues.

Benefits

The Institute has found that having Research Integrity Champions facilitates research integrity being more openly discussed, enhances communication about

issues and developments, and helps engage more researchers. Having Research Integrity Champions embedded within each research group, core facility and advanced technology team enables group-specific issues to be raised and discussed.

Challenges

A challenge of taking on the role of Research Integrity Champion is that researchers need to make time to actively engage in the role. Depending on their role within the Institute, staff turnover also means new champions need to be found.

One piece of advice for institutions looking to implement a Research Integrity Champion/Adviser network

Identify approachable, engaged champions with specific knowledge of research and potential issues but don't make the role too onerous.

Further information available from

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Promoting integrity and high ethical standards in research
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