

Research Integrity Champions, Leads and Advisers – Case study from King's College London

Version 2.0

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Institutional context

King's College London is an internationally renowned multi-disciplinary university dedicated to driving positive and sustainable change and realising its vision of making the world a better place.

King's was established by royal charter in 1829 and in 1836 became one of the two founding colleges of the University of London. In the late 20th century, King's grew through a series of mergers, and the university has expanded even further in the 21st century, maintaining its commitment to exceptional education, impactful and world-leading research and genuine service to society. It has approximately 22,500 undergraduate students, 20,300 postgraduate students (both taught and research) and approximately 11,000 academic, research and support staff across the institution.

The Research Integrity Office (RIO) was established in 2019 to promote good conduct and integrity in all research undertaken at King's, in order to safeguard public trust in the university's research.

The role of the Research Integrity Champions and Advisors

Background

The RIO maintains close liaison with academic and research colleagues through networks of Research Integrity Champions and Research Integrity Advisors embedded in each of King's nine academic faculties.

The Research Integrity Champion network was introduced at King's in September 2019. This model of engagement and partnership working with faculties was expanded to include a network of Research Integrity Advisors, who were appointed in September 2020. These roles hold different remits, providing senior advocates together with locally embedded individuals trained to provide advice. In the years since these roles were created, adaptations have been made to the roles for efficiency and continued relevance. Role descriptions for Champions and Advisors were first approved in February 2020, then updated in December 2021.¹

¹ These will be reviewed and refreshed (as necessary) in 2025.

Research Integrity Champions

Each of the nine academic faculties at King's has a single named Research Integrity Champion. This is a high-level advocacy role with responsibility for promoting integrity and excellence in research within their area. The senior nature of the role ensures that messages integral to research integrity reach the highest levels of each Faculty.

A Research Integrity Champion is a recognised face of good practice and is the individual responsible for their faculty's commitment to research integrity and raising its profile. Research Integrity Champions are expected to:

- promote a healthy research culture with integrity at its core, in the conduct of routine Faculty business;
- attend, or nominate an appropriate delegate to attend in their place, the RICH Forum (convened by the Research Integrity Office) at which they will take on the responsibilities as outlined in the RICH Forum Terms of Reference;
- identify appropriate discipline-specific training;
- work with the Research Integrity Office to identify Faculty colleagues to take on the role of Research Integrity Advisors (RIAds) and determine the structure of RIAds appropriate for their Faculty;
- act as a point of contact, where required, for the Research Integrity Office to seek advice.

Research Integrity Advisors

The Research Integrity Advisor (RIAd) role was created to embed research integrity within faculties, providing a visible point of contact for all those engaged with research.

A Research Integrity Advisor is an individual known to conduct or enable research in accordance with good practice. Research Integrity Advisors are expected to:

- act as a visible point of contact for researchers within their department or school;
- act as an appropriate conduit for any queries on research (mis)conduct;
- maintain confidentiality when dealing with queries about research (mis)conduct;
- liaise with the Research Integrity Office, as necessary;
- act in confidence when discussing any query with the Research Integrity Office;
- support the Research Integrity Office to deliver training, as required;

- attend initial training, and then subsequent refresher training, provided by the Research Integrity Team to enable the role to be carried out effectively.

Development and maintenance of the networks

Prior to the implementation of these networks, the Research Integrity Office consulted with colleagues across the sector to test the feasibility of such an initiative, how it might best be implemented and how to achieve institutional buy-in. The RIO held in-depth discussions with Faculty Vice Deans for Research to ensure success of this initiative through partnership working. Two parallel networks with complementary roles were conceived as part of this initiative from the start, with the intention to roll these out in a phased approach.

Research Integrity Champions

The role of Research Integrity Champion (RICH) was introduced first with the intention to build a solid foundation for high-level support for and promotion of research integrity within faculties. At the outset, each Vice Dean for Research assumed the title of RICH. This specification was later updated to accommodate the varying requirements and structures of individual faculties, by enabling another nominated senior colleague to hold this role following discussion with the Research Integrity Office. For example, the RICH in Arts and Humanities is the Pro Vice Dean for Research Culture.

The Research Integrity Champions meet collectively with the RIO at a Research Integrity Champions Forum. Since 2024, the frequency of these meetings has reduced from every two months to termly (i.e. three times a year), reflecting the reduced need for consultation as the RIO is operating at business as usual. The purpose and governance of the RICH Forum are outlined in the published [terms of reference](#), as approved in May 2021.² Engagement remains good and the Champions continue to recognise the importance of their attendance and contributions.

The Vice Dean for Research position is fixed term and so, upon stepping down from this, the incumbent hands over the role of Research Integrity Champion to the incoming Vice Dean. To support this transition, an introductory meeting is held between the new RICH and the Research Integrity Office. In faculties where the RICH is not the Vice Dean for Research, the incoming Vice Dean is given the opportunity to take this on.

At King's, formal reporting of matters arising under the research misconduct procedure is made to the Vice Dean for Research. Where the Vice Dean and RICH are not the same individual, as required or upon request, the Research Integrity Office will provide the RICH with a high-level summary of breaches of good research practice in their area, to advocate for better local support, training and guidance.

² These has been updated as of 2025.

It is anticipated that the Research Integrity Champion role demands c.4-6 hours' commitment per term.³

Research Integrity Advisors

Research Integrity Advisors (RIAs) were originally scheduled to be in place from April 2020, but the process of appointing colleagues to these roles was delayed by the RIO to account for the additional pressures on colleagues following the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. This network was established by the start of the 2020/21 academic year.

The size and structure of each academic faculty at King's varies and so the number of RIAs appointed is bespoke to each faculty, determined following discussion between the Research Integrity Office and each Research Integrity Champion. Aligned with the recommendations set out in the RIAs role description, some faculties have nominated Advisors from across the career spectrum (including early career researchers, lecturers, readers, and professors) and in some areas professional services staff act as a RIAd.

Initially, colleagues were recruited to these positions through a nominations process whereby a senior faculty member, usually the Research Integrity Champion, completed a form outlining an individual's suitability for the role and submitted this to the Research Integrity Office. In 2022, the RIO introduced a self-nomination process. In these cases, the application is first reviewed and approved by the Faculty prior to it being submitted to the Research Integrity Office. The Research Integrity Office reviews each nomination with the Director of Research Governance, Ethics and Integrity and the Dean of Research Culture. If no concerns are flagged, the nomination is confirmed with the individual.

The Research Integrity Office supports all RIAs in a number of ways to enable them to fulfil their role effectively, and to ensure they feel confident and are equipped with the appropriate knowledge and resources to advise researchers in line with their remit. Each newly appointed RIAd meets with a representative from the Research Integrity Office to discuss the role in detail. Following this, they receive a comprehensive resource pack. The Research Integrity Office holds an annual training session designed specifically for the Advisors, providing a deep dive into an area for discussion. Previous sessions have covered authorship, peer review and dispute resolution. Faculty Research Integrity Advisor meetings are held termly to establish plans for raising awareness of research integrity, plan local training in research integrity, and discuss any issues that may be relevant to the disciplines within a faculty. Following feedback, Research Integrity Champions are now invited to attend the start of these meetings to ensure better shared understanding between these networks.

³ This is subject to periodic review.

It is anticipated that the Research Integrity Advisor role demands c.6-8 hours' commitment per term, though it is recognised that this is likely to be higher in the first year of appointment to allow for induction and training.⁴

Benefits

The development and implementation of these two complementary networks has undoubtedly enhanced both institutional knowledge of research integrity and strengthened the work of the Research Integrity Office.

The Research Integrity Champions and Advisors provide crucial perspectives from their faculties on how research integrity initiatives may be implemented effectively within their areas. This is important to avoid centralised and top-down approaches to research integrity, creating instead a framework for dialogue and partnership working.

The Research Integrity Advisors are key to designing tailored training sessions and those delivered in collaboration with them have been successful, providing a space for researchers to discuss issues pertinent to their discipline. Some more established RIAs take the initiative to lead training in their local areas, and this is a positive development and a model to replicate in all areas. The network of RIAs provides important local points of contact for all those engaged in research across the university. This is particularly vital in a large institution such as King's where knowledge of central services can be limited or where macro-level bonds are weak.

The Research Integrity Office engages both networks to provide feedback on institutional policy development (e.g. on Generative AI guidance or the Code of Conduct in Research) and institutional responses to national consultation processes (e.g. the UK government Reproducibility enquiry, the UKRI EDI Strategy, or the UKRIO research misconduct review). This role played by both RICs and RIAs is invaluable, and provides a pool of engaged, knowledgeable and trusted colleagues upon whom the Research Integrity Office can rely for informed comment.

Challenges

It must be acknowledged that despite the benefits, there remains challenge with this system. With an organisation the size of King's, levels of engagement vary across areas. This is most acute with the Research Integrity Advisors network and can lead to inconsistency in the access to local sources of advice for researchers and the provision of high-quality disciplinary-specific training.

For some faculties, low engagement among the RIAs is attributable to views that research integrity is not relevant to their fields of work; for others, it stems from pressures on time and the lack of (formal) recognition. This leads to low attendance at the termly RIAd meetings, which in turn means research integrity is deprioritised

⁴ This is subject to periodic review.

within local areas. To mitigate the former, the Research Integrity Office places emphasis in training and awareness sessions that research integrity extends beyond collaborative endeavours, such as authorship or lab culture, and that it touches upon all practices within the research lifecycle.

The RIAd network is formed of a number of Early Career Researchers (ECRs) on fixed-term contracts or mid-career researchers, both sets of colleagues most likely to be transient. As a consequence, this network is often in constant ebb and flow, since these individuals leave the institution with greater frequency than those more established colleagues in the Champion roles. This means that recruitment to these Advisor roles is ongoing, placing pressure on the Research Integrity Office as new RIAds require both additional supports to understand the scope of the role and time to embed fully into the role. Where possible, the Research Integrity Office aims to integrate community building as part of the RIAd induction process, introducing colleagues to existing RIAds to enable them to embed themselves within the network quicker and with ease.

The drive towards research culture initiatives has led to some confusion, with some colleagues unclear of how research culture and research integrity integrate, and where efforts should be focused. For example, research culture funding has led to the creation of posts in some faculties but there is not always proper coordination between these individuals and the RIAds. This requires closer collaboration to ensure all initiatives succeed.

The Research Integrity Office is aware that not all local issues are being addressed in the first instance by the RIAds, which suggests that they are not being seen as local points of contact. This may be related to a lack of visibility or promotion of the role. Conversely, though, the RIO is aware from verbal updates that some enquiries are dealt with exclusively by the Advisors with no recourse to the Research Integrity Office. Local logs were initially created by the RIO to support the tracking of these instances and provide better understanding of the full range of enquiries received in any one area. However, these were not being used and instead were seen to create an additional administrative burden, particularly as overall, the number of enquiries dealt exclusively by the RIAds remains low.

The RIO has created a comms pack which can be tailored to local contexts and is provided to each RIAd to support them in promoting their role. The RIO has also begun tracking whether a research integrity enquiry came via a RIAd or if a RIAd was engaged later for advice. While the principle of being a local point of contact remains, being a subject-knowledge expert contact for the RIO is invaluable.

Reflections

The Research Integrity Champion and Advisor roles have been in place at King's for over five and four years, respectively. In that time, adjustments have been made to acknowledge the changing research landscape and to embed learnings on the

journey. The initiative has been overall successful and has helped raise the profile of research integrity across the organisation. Having faculty-based colleagues engaged in research integrity, in any capacity and to whatever extent, is hugely powerful. The following reflections offer some thoughts on the past, present and future iterations of the RICH and RIAd networks.

- The addition of a self-nomination process for the Research Integrity Advisors has led to enhanced engagement as individuals who put themselves forward are interested and motivated.
- Bringing in Research Integrity Advisors to support the Research Integrity Office with discipline-specific research enquiries has been successful.
- Drawing closer ties between the RICHs and RIAds through attendance of the Champions at the termly RIAd meetings has ensured more coordinated faculty approaches.
- Tracking RIAd support with enquiries (referral or later support to the RIO) has been useful to measure success of the network.
- Providing appropriate recognition for the Research Integrity Advisor role is crucial, e.g. making the role visible to senior leaders or including time within a Workload Allocation Model.
- Consideration of making the RIAd appointment a fixed-term one to provide more colleagues with this opportunity for professional development, to broaden awareness of research integrity, to ensure colleagues are not burdened with additional workload indefinitely, and to support with maintaining the pipeline of support.
- Professional Services (PS) staff are useful links for signposting but cannot necessarily fulfil the full advisory role of a RIAd, so should only research-active colleagues be RIAds? If so, strong connections must be retained with Faculty PS staff to maintain awareness of the RIAd network.

One piece of advice for institutions looking to implement a Champion/Advisor network

Research integrity is a complex concept, one that requires a range of interventions at different levels throughout an organisation. What is evident, however, is the need to bring your academic colleagues on board with you; the earlier you initiate these conversations, the sooner you can build effective networks to help you succeed

Further information is available from

[Research Integrity Champions and Advisors at King's College London](#)

[Terms of Reference for the KCL RICH Forum](#)

For further details, please contact the Research Integrity Office: research-integrity@kcl.ac.uk



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