Research Integrity Champions, Leads and Advisers – Case study from the University of Glasgow

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Institutional context

The University of Glasgow (UofG) is a broad-based research-intensive University with over 3,400 staff in involved in research and/or teaching. The Vice Principal for Research is responsible for ensuring that standards of good research practice are maintained, and they are supported in this role by the Academic Lead for Good Research practice and a team of staff within the Research Services Directorate. The activities of the team include co-ordinating investigations into alleged research misconduct, updating and disseminating the Code of Good Practice in Research, and ensuring that appropriate training and other measures exist to support a culture of research integrity.

The Academic Lead for Good Research Practice and the central team work with a network of Good Research Practice Champions and Advisers across the university.

The role of the Champions

There are two roles within the institution: Good Research Practice Champions and Good Research Practice Advisers.

The role of the four Champions is as follows:

- Promoting good research practice within the context of the relevant disciplines.
- Ensuring that the principles and relevant standards are embedded in cross-University and local guidance, in training and procedures, and integrated into mentorship programmes.
- Ensuring that local advice is available to researchers (staff and students) who are unsure about a research conduct issue and may be considering whether to make an allegation of misconduct.
- Supporting the network of local S Good Research Practice Advisers who are delivering the activities above within schools or research units.

The role of the 25 Good Research Practice Advisers is as follows:

- To act as a local point of contact for research staff and students.

- To raise the profile of research integrity training and policies.
- To provide advice to researchers (staff and students) about good research practice, research ethics or integrity specific to their discipline.
- To provide informed support for those who may be considering whether to make an allegation of misconduct.

Since their inception in 2015, the Advisers and Champions have been involved in a range of activities, appropriate to their discipline. For example, the College of Arts Advisers and Champions meet regularly to share practice and emerging issues and developed a guide to explain what research integrity means within their disciplinary context, which can be found here: https://www.gla.ac.uk/colleges/arts/research/researchintegrity/

In other cases, these roles have been involved in writing for School or College newsletters, contributing to policy development (such as the authorship guidance within the Code of Good Practice in Research), reviewing new training resources and giving talks at staff away days or inductions. The University asks advisers to keep a log of informal questions and topics they have considered during the year, as a way of informing future policy development and training.

Development and maintenance of the network

In summer 2015, the University established a working group to review its efforts in promoting a culture of research integrity. This included consultation with staff at all levels, including early-career researchers and postgraduate researchers as well as academic staff at all career stages.

Feedback identified that students and more junior staff would welcome a local point of contact for questions and informal advice. The Office of the Vice Principal for Research and generic email address were considered somewhat intimidating and off-putting. Additionally, the working group recommended a greater focus on promoting a good culture, rather than on misconduct. Therefore, having senior Champions who could advocate for this and adviser roles who could support embedding of good practice locally and advise on subject-specific issues, were suggested to ensure visibility of this area and relevance to the broad range of disciplines represented in the University.

This review and working group resulted in a series of recommendations being put forward to the University's Senior Management Group, including: a review of policies and procedures, the appointment of local 'Advisers' and 'Champions', enhanced training opportunities, and improved communication and visibility of good research practice and integrity.

The roles are supported centrally by the Research Governance & Integrity Team within the Research Services Directorate (RSD) with practice sharing, policy updates and

specialist lectures from invited experts at an annual meeting. Where possible, the University has also provided support for Champions to attend external events (such as the annual UKRIO conference).

Research Integrity is included in the guidance for the University's annual appraisal forms as an example of academic leadership, allowing staff to gain formal recognition for their efforts in this area. The posts are not remunerated. Workload modelling has been agreed through our Senior Management Group with advisers being allocated 1-2 hours per week and Champions 2-4 hours per week. Research Integrity will also be an important feature in the environment statements for the next REF submission and therefore efforts in this area are recognised at local level as contributing to the culture of the School.

Features of the system and monitoring

Colleagues considered that formal and agreed role descriptions were particularly important and they are implemented in a variety of areas already within UofG for 'champion' roles (e.g., REF champions). Role descriptions (and appointments, if necessary) are reviewed annually. In order to move away from negative associations with some of the language used when discussing integrity and its link to misconduct, it was agreed in 2023/24 that the name of the network would change from "Research Integrity Champion and Adviser Network" to Good Research Practice Network (GRP Network) with Good Research Practice Champions (GRP Champions) and Good Research Practice Advisers (GRP Advisers).

Bespoke online training was created for Champions and Advisers, and they meet with the Central Research Governance and Integrity team on an as needed basis. Regular sector updates are disseminated to the Network for wider sharing at a local level as is opportunities to partake in Good Research Practice events.

UofG monitors the effectiveness of research integrity interventions annually, aligned to the publication of its integrity annual assurance statement. his statement is shared with the University Senior Management and Court, which is of key importance in ensuring that the agenda is fully embedded, supported and recognised across the University.

Progress with research integrity is also considered within the wider context of the UofG research culture action plan. Monitoring is informed by surveys (e.g. PGR surveys and our staff research culture survey) as well as feedback from the advisers and champions themselves, and from the University's research culture and careers group. UofG also undertook a thorough review of initiatives supporting research culture in late 2021.

Benefits

These roles have helped the University to achieve greater visibility of research integrity issues at local level and improved its policies, training and advice to staff and students. A review of research integrity in 2015 and the subsequent introduction of these roles was one of the first actions in a wider approach to updating research culture at UofG, which is now reflected in a five-pillar action plan. It is important that no single aspect of culture – integrity included – is looked at in isolation of other key parts of the system and the Champions bring different strengths, perspectives and networks to reinforce this.

Challenges

The model of appointing Advisers and Champions varies across the four academic Colleges and keeping track of advisers as roles change (e.g., someone becomes Head of School or goes on leave) can be a challenge. In two of our Colleges, the Heads of School have taken on this role, helping to raise its visibility and ensure it is taken seriously.

However, to junior staff or students, Heads of School may be perceived as too senior to be approachable and therefore the University has found that it is helpful to have a more junior Deputy in some cases. This is an area that it is likely to expand on in future as it fits well with the aim of promoting a culture where research integrity is seen as a shared responsibility, where ongoing effort is required by staff at all career stages (and a variety of staff roles, including professional services and technical) to ensure their knowledge is up to date. This also aligns well to one of the other pillars in the University's research culture action plan of recognising and valuing diverse contributions to leadership and research.

Champions and Advisers are reviewed every 3 years and monitoring of proactivity via annual logbooks allows College to assess the effectiveness of the people they have in place and make changes where necessary. Induction with new Champions and Advisers also ensures that everyone involved in the GRP Network is aware of the expectations of the role and areas that they can look to be active in within their Schools.

As with many University-wide initiatives, a key issue is communications and awareness. We are working on embedding research integrity (and input from advisers) into local committee structures as a standing agenda item.

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

Academic staff are busy and often wearing multiple 'champion' hats. It's important to find ways to support champions of this nature, with human contact and regular reminders or prompts, as well as appropriate training and a clear set of expectations.

Being able to include a work allocation formally has also been beneficial in getting more support for the Network and encouraging the Champions and Advisers to be proactive in the area. Enthusiasm for the role, and genuine interest in the subject is often more important than seniority.

Further information is available from:

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