



UK Research Integrity Office Annual Conference 2013

Summary Report

March 2013



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About this publication

On 6th March 2013, the **UK Research Integrity Office** (UKRIO) held our first **Annual Conference** for our subscribers, bringing together researchers, administrators, managers and others to discuss issues of research integrity. The conference was held as part of our ongoing commitment to offer our subscribers tailored support on research practice, ethics and governance.

Speakers from UKRIO and other experts in research integrity discussed how to promote and sustain good research practice and avoid common issues and pitfalls. The underlying theme of the event was to share the lessons learnt from UKRIO's unique and extensive experience. The conference generated lively and informative discussion on research integrity in the United Kingdom and the issues important to our subscribers.

This publication provides summaries of the session and concludes by examining the comments and suggestions posed by our subscribers. The conference was conducted in compliance with the Chatham House Rules and prior permission has been granted for comments which have been attributed to individuals or institutions. The views expressed in session summaries are those of the speakers and do not necessarily reflect those of UKRIO.

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Conference agenda

UK Research Integrity Office Annual Conference 2013

10.00am – 4.30pm, Wednesday 6 March 2013
CMS Cameron McKenna LLP, Mitre House,
160 Aldersgate Street, London EC1A 4DD

AGENDA

- 09:00 – 10:00 Registration and refreshments
- 10:00 – 10:05 **Introduction from CMS Cameron McKenna LLP**
- 10:05 – 10:15 **Welcome: Professor Sir Ian Kennedy, Chair, UKRIO**
- 10:15 – 11:15 **Professor Michael Farthing, Vice-Chair, UKRIO;
Vice-Chancellor, University of Sussex**
UKRIO: Where next?
- 11:15 – 11:30 Break
- 11:30 – 12:00 **Professor Anthony Segal, Director, Centre for Molecular Medicine,
University College London**
Lessons that could be learnt from a laboratory fraud at UCL
- 12:00 – 12:30 **Professor Edward Acton, Vice-Chancellor, University of East Anglia**
Climategate Revisited
- 12:30 – 13:30 Lunch and networking
- 13:30 – 14:20 **Dr Liz Wager, former Chair, Committee on Publication Ethics;
UKRIO Advisory Board member**
How easy is it to find contact details on research integrity at UK universities?
James Parry, Chief Executive, UKRIO
Implementation of the Concordat to Support Research Integrity: Lessons learnt by UKRIO

- 14:20 – 15:15 **Dr Richard Smith, former Editor-in-Chief, British Medical Journal; UKRIO Advisory Board member**
Publication ethics: Case studies for discussion
- 15:15 – 15:30 Break
- 15:30 – 16:20 **Panel Discussion**
- Professor Sir Ian Kennedy, Chair, UKRIO
 - Dr Virginia Barbour, Chief Editor, PLOS Medicine; UKRIO Advisory Board Member
 - Professor Michael Farthing, Vice-Chair UKRIO; Vice-Chancellor, University of Sussex
 - John Oates, Open University and British Psychological Society
 - James Parry, Chief Executive, UKRIO
- 16:20 – 16:30 **Round Up: Professor Michael Farthing, Vice-Chair, UKRIO; Vice-Chancellor, University of Sussex**
- 16:30 Close

Summary of conference sessions

Chair's opening remarks

Professor Sir Ian Kennedy, Chair, UKRIO

Sir Ian Kennedy welcomed the delegates to UKRIO's Inaugural Conference 2013. He stated that since its formation in 2006, UKRIO has provided assistance to researchers, research organisations and members of the public. Supporting integrity in research remains a vital priority to ensure the public's trust in research, enhance this country's international reputation, secure the best return on public funds and protect research participants.

On behalf of UKRIO, Sir Ian Kennedy thanked CMS Cameron McKenna for hosting the conference and the Association of Research Managers and Administrators for their generous support. He stated that the underlying theme of the event was sharing lessons learnt from UKRIO's unique and extensive experiences. He hoped that the conference would provide a forum for subscribers to discuss the issues which matter to them and share their own experiences.

UKRIO: Where next?

Professor Michael Farthing, Vice-Chair, UKRIO; Vice-Chancellor, University of Sussex

Professor Farthing stated that the UK has been relatively slow to develop mechanisms of responding to research misconduct. The USA and other European nations, particularly those in Scandinavia, had national bodies established by the mid 1990's.

He explained that in the UK the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) was founded in 1997 but there was resistance to establishing a national body for research integrity. This was despite the unequivocal recommendations of the 1999 Consensus Conference in Edinburgh that a body should be established to (i) develop and promote models of good practice, (ii) provide assistance with investigation of alleged misconduct and (iii) collect, collate and publish information on incidents of research misconduct.

He added that in 2006, UKRIO was set up as a 'research project' funded by a consortium of well-wishers. With these modest resources UKRIO published a Procedure for the Investigation of Misconduct in Research in 2008 and a Code of Practice for Research in 2009. It rapidly assembled a panel of experts to support an advisory service which could be accessed through a helpline; this was open to all, including research organisations, individual researchers, 'whistle blowers' and members of the public. Although the original project was targeted at research in health and biomedicine, within months UKRIO was advising on issues that crossed all disciplines including the arts and humanities, social sciences, and engineering and the physical sciences. The case load has grown in magnitude and diversity over the last six years indicating that there is a need for customised advice that goes beyond UKRIO's guidance documents. UKRIO has engaged in education and training with

the aim of promoting the responsible conduct of research and assisting research organisations to develop expertise in conducting investigations of alleged research misconduct.

In 2011 UKRIO moved from being a pilot project to a subscriber based organisation and now has almost 40 institutions that support its activities.

He posed the question of how UKRIO should continue to develop in the future. He recommended that UKRIO should aim to enhance the quality of all of its activities and be able to demonstrate value for money to its subscribers. It needs to increase its capacity to deliver education and training opportunities and work hard to do this by continuing to develop strong partnerships with subscriber organisations. It will need to continue to broaden the expertise of its register of expert advisers to ensure high quality support. UKRIO should continue to support important campaigns such as the mandatory registration of clinical trials and consider extending this approach to other areas of research. UKRIO should promote the debate about the wider implementation of research audit and support efforts to develop a UK repository of research misconduct cases. To ensure that UKRIO has the human and financial resources to undertake these challenges it will need to grow its panel of subscribers or persuade another agency to support its work as an independent non-government body.

Lessons that could be learnt from a laboratory fraud at UCL

Professor Anthony Segal, Director, Centre for Molecular Medicine, University College London

Professor Segal discussed the lessons that could be learnt from a research fraud that occurred within University College London (UCL).

He analysed his experience of research integrity investigations and his efforts to hold accountable a postdoctoral researcher who falsified research data and results. He stated that academic institutions should ensure they have robust mechanisms for dealing with research fraud. This should be combined with sanctions for institutions who fail to deal adequately with fraud and dishonesty.

He stated that the case can be made for a national office of research integrity with regulatory powers as is already present in the United States of America. He argued there is a need to compel institutions and journals to deal adequately with cases of research misconduct.

Climategate Revisited

Professor Edward Acton, Vice-Chancellor, University of East Anglia

Professor Acton considered the implications of his institution's response to the so-called 'Climategate affair.' The incident refers to the online publication of approximately 1,000 emails from the Climatic Research Unit of the University of East Anglia in November 2009.

Professor Acton addressed three key themes:

- The impact of the media on the investigation of public charges of research misconduct. He discussed the issues raised by the international news coverage, emphasising the imperative of verifying the integrity of research given the potential implications for public policy.
- Whistleblowing, both real and false. Professor Acton emphasised the need for institutions to fulfil their duty of care towards academics accused of misconduct. He argued that this duty is made all the more palpable in a case like this where independent review established that there was not a shred of evidence of research misconduct. He also stressed the need for institutions to ensure theirs is an environment in which whistleblowers feel able to speak up without fear of adverse consequences.
- Freedom of Information and research. Professor Acton stressed the importance of freedom of information in promoting the transparency of research and of nurturing a culture of openness and transparency. He also welcomed proposals to improve the protection of unpublished research.

How easy is it to find contact details on research integrity at UK universities?

Dr Liz Wager, former Chair, Committee on Publication Ethics; UKRIO Advisory Board member

Dr Wager highlighted the difficulty that journal editors and other external whistleblowers face when trying to raise questions about suspected research misconduct with institutions.

In particular, her research suggests that it is often difficult to obtain contact details for a person responsible for research integrity at UK universities.

Research institutions should therefore check their websites to make sure they provide helpful information about research misconduct and, in particular, points of contact for concerns to be raised. A full report of this research project will be presented at the 3rd World Conference on Research Integrity in Montreal in May 2013.

Implementation of the Concordat to Support Research Integrity: Lessons learnt by UKRIO

James Parry, Chief Executive, UKRIO

Mr Parry discussed the challenges faced by institutions when implementing the Concordat to Support Research Integrity. He explored the underlying themes of the Concordat, suggesting some actions to help implement it. He stressed the need for organisations to have accurate information on the effectiveness of their initiatives to support research integrity. His key points were that:

- Research integrity needs to be supported by institutions in a more sustained and visible way.

- Good lines of communication and flows of information from central services to researchers and vice versa are essential.
- UKRIO will support its subscribers to implement the Concordat.

Publication ethics: Case studies for discussion

Dr Richard Smith, former Editor-in-Chief, British Medical Journal; UKRIO Advisory Board member

Dr Smith held an interactive session, employing case studies to encourage attendees to consider how issues of research integrity are not simplistic. The exercise aimed to demonstrate that;

- It is easy for inexperienced researchers inadvertently to make potentially serious mistakes with publication ethics.
- All early career researchers should have some training in publication ethics.
- The best kind of training is probably not to try and tell early-career researchers what is right and wrong but to encourage them to think hard about the issues.

Panel Discussion

Professor Sir Ian Kennedy, Chair, UKRIO

Dr Virginia Barbour, Chief Editor, PLOS Medicine; UKRIO Advisory Board Member

Professor Michael Farthing, Vice-Chair UKRIO; Vice-Chancellor, University of Sussex

John Oates, Open University and British Psychological Society

James Parry, Chief Executive, UKRIO

The panellists opened by taking two minutes each to discuss topics of their choosing. They discussed the following issues:

- Dr Barbour opened by discussing the role and remit of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) and the lessons learnt by their case-handling procedures.
- Professor Farthing considered how to deal with anonymous whistleblowers. He stressed the need to protect individuals from the potentially negative implications of reporting allegations of research misconduct.
- John Oates introduced the three symposia supported by the Academy of Social Sciences, the British Psychological Society, the Association of Research Ethics Committees, the Economic and Social Research Council and the British Sociological Association. He stated that high

standards of integrity can be effectively promoted through consensus within and across social science disciplines, regulation and facilitative governance.

- James Parry discussed the needs of UKRIO's subscribers and how UKRIO can tailor its services to ensure the promotion of research integrity in the UK. He invited subscribers to consider what additional support they want from UKRIO.

Delegates raised the following key issues both during the discussion and in later feedback forms:

- How UKRIO and institutions could provide training in research integrity across the sector.
- The need to understand what lessons on research integrity are learnt by researchers as they begin their careers and the potential for picking up bad habits due to gaps in their training.
- Monitoring and audit of research outcomes and the role of peer review.
- How other institutions are dealing with anonymous or pseudonymous complaints, particularly when receiving a high volume over a short period of time.
- How UKRIO could facilitate the exchange of best practice in issues of research integrity, both in higher education and with other research sectors.
- The career pressures faced by all researchers – such as 'publish or perish' - and the impact that these have on research integrity.
- Global aspects of research integrity and differences in research practice in different countries.
- The challenges involved in implementing the Concordat and other guidance for the promotion of research integrity.
- How to integrate research integrity and good governance as an everyday part of research
- How to successfully support postdocs in ensuring best practice in their research.
- How research funders can incentivise high standards of integrity and ethics in research, rather than just dis-incentivise breaches of those standards.
- How UKRIO's subscribers might support the work of the organisation.

Round Up

Professor Michael Farthing, Vice-Chair, UKRIO; Vice-Chancellor, University of Sussex

During his keynote presentation at the beginning of the conference, Professor Farthing challenged the participants (UKRIO's subscriber group) to determine what should be the major initiatives for

UKRIO in the future. Throughout the day a rich spectrum of options emerged, ranging from organic growth of current activities, through to 'step change', including a possible call for new legislation directed at individuals who are found to have committed serious research fraud.

Organic Growth:

1. Further enhancement of UKRIO's education and training programme delivered through a collaborative subscriber network.
2. Implementation of the Concordat, perhaps with clarification as to how success might be measured.
3. Encourage subscribers to improve information about how research integrity officers in their institutions can be contacted.
4. Consider ways to more closely align the responsible conduct of research with research excellence, as measured in the REF.
5. It was recognised that UKRIO, as a relatively light touch advisory organisation, could not undertake these tasks alone. There was strong support from subscribers for the development of closer partnership working with other organisations and funders with similar objectives in the field of research and publication integrity. It was suggested that such a consortium might come together under an umbrella, such as 'The College of Integrity in Research and Publication', functioning as a virtual organisation.

Step Change:

1. There was discussion and some agreement that education and training alone would be insufficient to ensure that widespread adoption of the high standards of the responsible conduct of research.
2. A variety of additional measures were discussed, including the introduction of a more systematic approach to the audit of research conduct and the introduction of new legislation to make research fraud an offence, like financial fraud.
3. A sense that there must be a way to get tough with organisations that conduct research, and journals who publish research findings, who fail to comply with best practice standards in setting the record straight when research misconduct is discovered.
4. Explore ways to 'close the net' on serial offenders of research misconduct and reduce the risk that such individuals can move between institutions and countries, without the knowledge of employers.

Concluding comments

UKRIO has received extremely positive feedback on our inaugural annual conference. Delegates have told us that they found it an informative and valuable experience. They welcomed the opportunity to get advice from our staff and volunteers in person and to share their experiences with colleagues from other institutions.

We appreciated the opportunity to get views from our subscribers on how we could continue to help them and intend to follow up on these leads over the coming year. It is clear that issues such as responding to serious cases of misconduct or meeting the requirements of funding bodies and regulators remain of key interest to our subscribers but other, more nuanced themes also emerged: how to use training and leadership to counter pressures to cut corners; whether institutional systems for research practice can meet challenges posed by global research collaborations; how to respond to growing numbers of anonymous complaints of misconduct; and how to ensure that researchers and administrators see integrity as a part of professional research practice rather than simply a 'tick-box' exercise. We are already considering what more UKRIO can do to meet those needs.

We would welcome suggestions for topics and speakers for the UKRIO 2014 Annual Conference. As always, we would welcome any other feedback that our subscribers would like to give us.

James Parry, Chief Executive, UKRIO

Acknowledgements

UKRIO would like to thank CMS Cameron McKenna for hosting the conference and the Association of Research Managers and Administrators for its generous support.

We would also like to thank the speakers, UKRIO volunteers and, above all, the delegates who made the conference the success that it was.