



UK RESEARCH INTEGRITY OFFICE

## CODE OF CONDUCT FOR ADVISERS

### Introduction

The UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO) is an independent charity, offering support to the public, researchers and organisations to further good practice in academic, scientific and medical research. We pursue these aims through a multi-faceted approach:

- Education via our guidance publications on research practice, training activities and comprehensive events programme.
- Sharing best practice within the community by facilitating discussions about key issues, informing national and international initiatives, and working to improve research culture.
- Giving confidential expert guidance in response to requests for assistance.

Established in 2006, UKRIO is the UK's most experienced research integrity organisation and provides independent, expert and confidential support across all disciplines of research, from the arts and humanities to the life sciences. We cover all research sectors: higher education, the NHS, private sector organisations and charities. No other organisation in the UK has comparable expertise in providing such support in the field of research integrity.

### Advisory service

UKRIO has provided a comprehensive programme in support of research integrity since 2006. Use of our services has continued to grow year on year. Many leading research organisations, including over 110 universities, use our published guidance, which is endorsed by funding and professional bodies. It has become clear that employers and individuals value our confidential, independent and expert service and are

## **UK Research Integrity Office: Code of Conduct for Advisers who are members of the Advisory Community**

willing to come forward and seek guidance from UKRIO. Our aim is to be the organisation of choice for all organisations and people across the UK to come to for these purposes.

A key element of our work programme is **UKRIO's Advisory Service**. This provides independent, expert and confidential advice on the conduct of research, whether promoting good practice or addressing alleged poor practice and misconduct. It covers all subject areas and any issues relating to research practice. No other organisation in the UK has comparable expertise in providing such support, support which draws on the expertise of **UKRIO's Advisory Community**.

Our Advisory Service is open to all, including members of the public, research participants, patients, individual researchers, research students and research organisations. UKRIO welcomes enquiries on general or hypothetical topics, as well as those on specific research projects, issues and cases.

UKRIO advises on issues of good practice in research. We also advise whistle-blowers and help those responsible to deal effectively with problems of poor practice and allegations of misconduct. Promoting and sustaining good research practice is a worthwhile object in its own right. It also reduces the risk of misconduct occurring.

## **Protocol for responding to requests for assistance**

Requests for assistance are addressed according to a standard protocol. You can find the protocol [here](#).

## **Role of UKRIO's Advisers**

UKRIO is a small charity, where the many successes of our organization could not have been achieved without the generous and expert support of our volunteers. Some volunteers sit on our Board of Trustees or our Advisory Council, the bodies that oversee UKRIO's strategy and work programme, while others become **UKRIO Advisers**.

UKRIO draws upon its Advisory Community when responding to questions and concerns about the conduct of research. Our volunteer Advisers play a vital and varied role in supporting UKRIO's Advisory Service, helping to ensure that we can offer expert guidance on the best ways to support good research practice and address poor practice and misconduct.

## **WORKLOAD**

UKRIO currently receives 100-120 formal requests for help per year. We ensure that Advisers are not overburdened by allocating enquiries carefully and proportionately. UKRIO recognises the invaluable contribution made by the people who volunteer. Advisers are always free to decline assignments without

losing goodwill of the organisation.

The main role that our Advisers play is to support the work of UKRIO's Advisory Service, the operation of which is described above. Nearly all the work of Advisers is conducted remotely, by phone or email.

Enquiries come into the office and after an initial assessment are routed to several experienced Advisers for their views. In the vast majority of cases, enquiries are anonymised before being shared with our Advisers. Straightforward enquiries are dealt with by the office directly, drawing upon relevant best practice guidance from UKRIO and others, and from our extensive experiences in resolving issues of research integrity.

When enquiries are complex, contentious or multi-faceted, opinions are sought from Advisers with relevant experience. Advisers may be approached for advice because of their expertise in a particular discipline, their knowledge of particular aspects of the research process, such as research ethics or publication practices, or their involvement in resolving similar issues in the past. Advisers must not disclose details of enquiries to anyone else, including another Adviser, unless approved by the Chair or UKRIO staff.

Advisers can choose to take a more active role, joining institutional investigations of alleged research misconduct. When approached by research organisations investigating alleged misconduct in research, UKRIO can provide members of the Register to participate as external members of screening or investigation panels. Advisers bring an external, skilled and experienced perspective to investigations and can help reassure all involved that the process will be thorough and fair. We recognise that not all Advisers will be willing or available to undertake such a role; accordingly, involvement in an institutional investigation is strictly by choice.

Recognising the wealth of experience embodied in the Advisory Community, its members may be periodically consulted regarding other elements of UKRIO's work programme. For example, Advisers may be asked: if they wish to contribute to the development of our education and training, dissemination activities, or new publications; or how UKRIO might respond to consultations or new initiatives on issues of research practice or integrity. This wider involvement in the work of UKRIO occurs much less frequently than involvement with the Advisory Service and, again, is by agreement only. Care is taken throughout not to overburden our Advisers.

## RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING

Advisers are recruited based on their expertise and experience in addressing issues of research integrity. They come from a variety of backgrounds. Advisers may be researchers, from any academic discipline, or be active in related occupations, such as: senior managers of research institutions; research administrators/managers; editors of academic journals; statisticians; representatives of regulatory, funding or professional bodies; human resources; research ethics; research governance officers and other specialists in research integrity. UKRIO also recruits lay persons and legal professionals to act as Advisers.

Persons with relevant experience are encouraged through a variety of means to apply to UKRIO. We also approach suitable candidates and invite them to join the Advisory Community. The induction process is relatively informal: new Advisers are familiarised with UKRIO, its remit, work programme and way of working, in particular the practices and standards set out in this document. They are also asked to sign the agreement at the end of this document.

UKRIO may arrange periodic training for its Advisory Community in the form of an away day or small discussion sessions.

## REMUNERATION, EXPENSES AND INSURANCE

Advisers give their time to UKRIO *pro bono* and are not employees of the organisation. We pay reasonable expenses incurred by Advisers in the course of supporting UKRIO. Appropriate insurances and indemnities have been obtained to cover volunteers, including Advisers, when acting on behalf of UKRIO.

## Code of Conduct for UKRIO staff and volunteers

All who act on behalf of UKRIO, including our Advisers, must adhere to the highest standards of integrity, objectivity, honesty and professionalism.

### UKRIO staff and volunteers must abide by the following rules:

- Act with integrity, objectivity and honesty, and in accordance with the law and the public good.
- Only take on assignments consistent with their skills and available time.
- Follow the procedures established by UKRIO and co-operate with fellow staff and volunteers.
- Remember that those who contact UKRIO for assistance:
  - Have approached us seeking confidential, expert and objective advice and guidance;
  - May feel extremely nervous about approaching our organisation and/or raising their concerns;
  - May raise issues of a serious, sensitive or contentious nature, for example allegations that persons involved in research have suffered harm, injury or death;
  - May be a research participant or patient, or have some other personal interest in the subject of their enquiry.
- Reassure enquirers and treat their concerns objectively and seriously, always acting with due sensitivity.
- Manage enquirers' expectations by communicating clearly the role and remit of UKRIO.
- Immediately report any potential or actual conflicts of interest to the UKRIO Chief Executive or Chair.
- Inform the UKRIO Chief Executive or Chair if they feel unable to address an enquiry.
- Keep appropriate and confidential records of any dealings with enquirers and submit these to UKRIO.
- Report to the UKRIO Chief Executive or Chair any concerns about: criminal activity; risk or harm to research participants, patients or other persons; improper treatment of animal subjects of research; improper use or storage of human tissue, materials or personal data; and/or negative environmental consequences.
- Pass on without delay anything that might be a subject access request to the [Data Protection Officer](#).
- Maintain [confidentiality](#) and do not share confidential information about UKRIO's work with any third parties, unless authorised to make a relevant disclosure by the UKRIO Chief Executive or Chair.

## Confidentiality statement for staff and volunteers

When working for UKRIO, you will often need to have access to confidential information which may include, for example:

- Personal information about individuals who are users of UKRIO's services, members of UKRIO subscriber institutions or otherwise involved in the activities organised by UKRIO (**note that** this type of information is not normally shared with volunteer Advisers);
- Information about the internal business of UKRIO;
- Personal information about colleagues working or volunteering for UKRIO.

UKRIO is committed to keeping this information confidential, in order to protect people and UKRIO itself.

'Confidential' means that all access to information must be on a need to know and properly authorised basis. You must use only the information you have been authorised to use, and for purposes that have been authorised. You should also be aware that under the Data Protection Act and the General Data Protection Regulation, unauthorised access to data about individuals is a criminal offence.

You must assume that information is confidential unless you know that it is intended by UKRIO to be made public. Passing information between the UKRIO office and volunteers (**note that** volunteer Advisers are not normally provided with *unonymised* information about requests for UKRIO's help) or vice versa does not count as making it public, but passing information to another organisation does count.

You must also be particularly careful not to disclose confidential information to unauthorised people or cause a breach of security. In particular you must:

- not compromise or seek to evade security measures (including computer passwords);
- be particularly careful when sending information between the UK office and volunteers;
- not gossip about confidential information, either with colleagues or people outside UKRIO; and
- not disclose information — especially over the telephone — unless you are sure that you know who you are disclosing it to and that they are authorised to have it.

If you are in doubt about whether to disclose information or not, do not guess. Withhold the information while you check with an appropriate person whether the disclosure is appropriate.

Your confidentiality obligations continue to apply indefinitely after you have stopped working for UKRIO.

## UKRIO Adviser's Agreement

**Name:**

**Title:**

**Institution / affiliation (if any):**

**Contact details:**

**Areas of experience or expertise:**

**I have read, understood and agree to abide by the Code of Conduct for UKRIO staff and volunteers.**

**Signed:** .....

**Date:** .....

**Please return the completed form to UKRIO:**

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