UK RESEARCH INTEGRITY OFFICE

Good Practice in Research:

Research Integrity Champions, Leads & Advisers

Version 1.0

https://doi.org/10.37672/UKRIO.2022.01.champions

Overview

Introduction

This document is part of a series from the UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO) giving guidance on particular aspects of academic, scientific and medical research, including activities embedding and demonstrating high standards of research integrity within research organisations.

This document aims to share best practice from academic and research organisations that have implemented a model of Research Integrity Champions, Leads and/or Advisers to help create a research environment 'underpinned by a culture of integrity' (see Commitment 3 of the 2019 *Concordat to Support Research Integrity* ('The Concordat')). It provides guidance for those responsible for research integrity who are considering ways of embedding research integrity across their organisation and is intended to complement the publicly available UKRIO *Self-Assessment Tool for the Concordat to Support Research Integrity*. We have published case studies alongside this document as examples of how this can work in practice and hope to publish more in due course: please visit https://ukrio.org/publications/research-integrity-champions-leads-advisers/ for examples of these and information on the training of research integrity champions, leads and advisers.

Footnote to the first edition

This is the first edition of the guidance, which we intend to update periodically and also to add additional case studies in due course. We welcome comments on this publication, to help ensure that it remains relevant and evolves over time. If you have any comments or would like to add a case study to those currently available, please email info@ukrio.org.

Creating the right environment to embed a culture of research integrity

The Concordat to Support Research Integrity encourages all research organisations to create the right environment to embed a culture of research integrity. Commitment 3 of the Concordat sets out the need to embed a culture of research integrity, and the importance of the research environment in creating that culture. There are several different governance elements to a good research environment including policies, training and clear processes, but one key element that can be difficult to engage with is the need for awareness amongst researchers of the standards of behaviour that are expected, and mechanisms for providing researchers with assistance when needed.

The landscape study undertaken by Vitae, UKRIO and the UK Reproducibility Network into research integrity that was published in June 2020 highlighted the importance of the department or local environment in which a researcher is based, and that of role models (see section 8.3 *Influence of the environment,* page 50: 'Throughout the study, researchers and stakeholders revealed strongly perceived views on how the people and culture within a local research environment can have strong and persistent impacts on research integrity… The strong influence of (local) leaders, managers and role models was a frequent theme, with potentially positive or negative impacts on research integrity depending on the attitudes and behaviours of these individuals.')

One way to help create an environment embodying good research practice and integrity is to use a system of local research integrity champions, advisers, leads or contacts (hereafter referred to as 'champions'). They can perform a range of roles as follows:

- To act as a point of contact if a researcher has a query relating to research integrity or research practice. Whilst on most occasions a researcher might approach their supervisor or line manager, sometimes they may wish to get a second opinion or just want to talk it over outside of the immediate environment.

- To help create a good research environment via awareness raising and engagement within the local research community. By sharing policies and information, acting as a conduit between the central research integrity lead and the department, keeping an eye on what is going on at university/ discipline /national level and potentially also holding occasional seminars etc. They are well positioned, likely to be knowledgeable in the subject area of the researchers within their department, school, or division (hereafter 'department') and foster an open research environment. This may encourage researchers to feel more comfortable raising their concerns relating to research integrity at a much earlier stage or make it easier to allow a researcher to admit they have made a mistake and consequently seek guidance and mentoring.

- To act as a first confidential point of contact if an individual has any concerns that they would like to discuss relating to their own research or that of another researcher, i.e., a liaison point relating to possible questionable research practice or research misconduct. Local research integrity

Creating the right environment to embed a culture of research integrity

champions may also occasionally act as research misconduct panel members (see further discussion on this below).

- To contribute to policy and guidance development. This means there is input from across the disciplinary spectrum within an institution, which ensures diversity of approach and potentially ensures that policies are stronger and more likely to be accepted across different disciplines.

This guidance note sets out how such a system might work and provides examples showing how it can work in practice. It also explores other options for providing support, guidance, and advice where this may not be appropriate (for example smaller institutions). It also provides examples of research integrity champions internationally, and accompanying this guidance are case studies showing how UK institutions have implemented a model of local research integrity champions.

The UK case studies contain detail on the model adopted, how it was set up, the duties of the local champions and how the model has been implemented to date. The case studies also address the challenges of such a model and what the institutions have learnt. Sharing this good practice gives insight into how local research integrity champions may be utilised at other UK research institutions.

Creating the right environment to embed a culture of research integrity

DIFFERENT ROLES WITHIN AN INSTITUTION

This text box shows the range of roles within institutions with responsibility for research integrity. *The Concordat to Support Research Integrity* requires that institutions identify individuals to fulfil three roles, although more than one role can be undertaken by the same person.

Senior member of staff identified publicly as having responsibility for research integrity within an institution.

Official **point of contact** for people wishing to raise concerns or allegations under the institutional research misconduct procedure.

Named **confidential liaison** for whistle-blowers, or people who wish to discuss a matter initially before raising a formal allegation.

The **Named Person** is defined in the UKRIO *Procedure for the Investigation of Misconduct in Research* and *The Concordat to Support Research Integrity* as responsible for receiving any allegations of misconduct in research; initiating and supervising the Procedure for investigating allegations of misconduct in research; maintaining the record of information during the investigation and subsequently reporting on the investigation to internal contacts and external organisations; they also take decisions at key stages of the Procedure. This may or may not be the same person as the official point of contact mentioned above.

Research Integrity Officer – member of professional services who takes the lead on research integrity and research misconduct matters. They will be known by different titles in different institutions and may have other roles as well! Larger institutions will have departments looking after this area including several professional services roles.

Research Ethics – there will be professional services and academic roles responsible for the oversight and management of procedures relating to ethical approval/opinion of research involving human participants and animals, or which raise other ethical concerns.

Local **research integrity champion** to act as an initial local contact point and/or advocate – an experienced researcher, local to the researchers and who can perform various roles/ deliver various types of support.

International examples

Australia: The Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research, which was first produced in 2007 and revised in 2018, includes a concept of Research Integrity Advisers (RIAs) which notes the following responsibility for all institutions:

'Identify and train Research Integrity Advisors who assist in the promotion and fostering of responsible research conduct and provide advice to those with concerns about potential breaches of the Code…. RIAs are people with research experience, analytical skills, empathy, good communication skills, knowledge of the institution's processes and the Code, and familiarity with accepted practices in research. Institutions should offer ongoing training to RIAs to maintain their skills and knowledge base.'

The aim of the role is to promote research integrity and responsible research practices. RIAs have no role in research misconduct investigations and are not permitted to contact any individual against whom an allegation is made. Some Australian research institutions have a webpage dedicated to describing the role of RIAs. The RIAs are not normally employed in this role but undertake it as part of their academic position; each discipline within an institution may have a dedicated RIA, but any of the RIAs can be approached from within or outside of the enquirers own subject area/faculty. RIAs are expected to keep a record of the number of enquires and declare any conflicts of interest to the enquirer. Two examples of research institutional webpages include the Australian National University and the University of New South Wales where they describe the role, responsibilities and give the contact details of the RIAs in each discipline.

Denmark: The Danish National Research Foundation statement on research integrity indicates that some universities have research integrity advisers, whose role may vary across institutions, but *'who will help support good scientific practice within their respective research areas. The advisors' tasks may vary depending on the institution, but examples of tasks include guidance and advice in good research practice, advice on suspected questionable research practice, and mediation in relation to possible conflicts that relate to good research practice'*.

Finland: A national network of research integrity advisers has been established by the Finnish National Board for Research Integrity. The advisers are based in universities but trained by the National Board and national guidance is available on the role.

An example of the practice of this system can be found at the University of Tampere.

League of European Research Universities: In an advice paper published in January 2020, the European League of Research Universities (LERU) recommended the appointment of confidential counsellors or advisers: *'It is important that researchers are able to seek advice from others and obtain strictly confidential advice. In many cases researchers face problems that they do not immediately want to share with their colleagues. This counts especially when these relate to a relationship in which the researcher is partly dependent for his or her career on the other, as is for example the case in the relationship between a PhD and supervisor'* (section 3).

Considerations

As highlighted in the international examples in the previous section and the UK case studies on our website, a research integrity champion can be responsible for:

- promoting good research practice at the local level;
- acting as a first point of contact for queries and concerns;
- acting as a panel member for research misconduct investigations;
- contributing to the development of policies or procedures.

These roles all support a positive research culture. Different models can be adopted to suit the ethos and requirements of your institution.

We have provided below some areas that it will be helpful for you to consider if you are planning to introduce a research integrity champions system in your institution:

Senior leadership/ buy-in

Gaining support and buy-in from those in academic leadership and senior management positions within your organisation is important. Buy-in from across the academic disciplines within your institution will also help to ensure it is fully embedded; this may take some time for this point to be reached.

You will encounter sceptics and nay-sayers as with any new initiative, but as shown by the examples provided here from across the globe, there is evidence that a strong, well thought out initiative will bring benefits over time.

Recognition and support

Consider whether the roles will fit into an academic career framework- will there be formal recognition for the roles in appraisals and promotions and, if possible, recognition in terms of workload allocation and remission from other duties? Whilst cultures vary across institutions, it is likely that the role is more likely to be perceived as valued by the organisation if the champion has time allocated (within their annual hours/local workload model) to undertake the role, rather than being seen as an 'add-on' to existing heavy workloads, to be performed when the champion 'has time'. The role should be seen as an example of academic leadership within the career framework.

You should give some consideration to whether the initiative will be resourced, for example to allow the advisers, champions or leads to attend external events to support their personal development, or to hold events locally. Many individuals will take this on in addition to already busy roles and it is important that they also see some benefits personally.

Considerations

Remit and expectations

Bearing in mind the note above about the potentially different activities that these roles can undertake, it is important to determine from the start about what these positions are intended to achieve (and what they are not).

Consider the seniority of the champions and whether more than one type of role is needed. For example, some organisations have a senior champion role for advocacy, and more hands-on or junior roles within departments. Different levels of experience will be needed for different roles. It is worth noting that new or junior staff members may be deterred from approaching very senior individuals.

The development of role descriptions is important to ensure that those taking on the role know what is expected of them. Role description may be the same across the institution or could vary depending on local need.

Recruitment and training

A key element to the success of these schemes is the recruitment of the right individuals. In addition to considering a role description, think about the key skills and attributes that it will be useful for the individuals to have. Knowledge can be gained, but getting the right people in terms of interest, motivation and skills is very important. It may sound obvious, but an interest in research integrity and good research conduct is crucial – reluctant recruits who have been strongly encouraged into the role rather than volunteering are less likely to be successful.

Consider how you will provide initial training or induction for the advisers, and how you will ensure that you keep the champions up to date on relevant changes to policies, procedures and law. UKRIO has produced a document on the types of training that could be needed, please see our website for details.

Support and management

Consider how the process will be managed, supported and maintained. It is relatively easy to set up a new initiative but less easy to maintain it and keep it going over time. Staff come and go, research staff may be on relatively short-term contracts and the field of research integrity is constantly developing, so it will be important to ensure that the initiative remains relevant and useful.

Establish a support structure and communication strategy with the research office for the champions to aid their role. It will also be important to consider how you will keep them engaged and motivated, and to encourage them to share best practice. This may include a regular shared forum, either online

Considerations

or in person. The roles can be quite isolated, and people may find sharing experiences helpful. Support for the champions is key to ensure they do not feel isolated and that they feel knowledgeable.

It is important to review and monitor the effectiveness of the initiative you have put in place, by means of reviews, feedback, regular checking in with the individuals locally, and the wider community. When building timescales for review, bear in mind that initiatives like these can take time, as they involved changing and improving research culture and practice.

Local initiatives/ variation

It is worth remembering that different issues and initiatives could work better in different academic areas and being open to variation. Encourage the champions to promote the importance of research integrity to the local research community through awareness raising events/training within their department. Examples include: rewarding good practice (awards for best supervisor/mentor, poster or infographic competitions), group training using dilemmas and cases studies and opening discussions on how to overcome challenges.

Communications

Good communication with staff and students in the relevant areas is key, so that they know about the roles - all individuals should be made aware of the roles and what it means to them, and be reminded periodically of their existence. This can be done for example by means of newsletters, away days, inductions, departmental meetings etc.

Research misconduct

If the role is to include acting as the first point of contact for potential concerns about research misconduct, it is very important to be clear on how this will work in terms of confidentiality and reporting lines, and ensure they are trained and supported in how to respond to difficult disclosures. Individuals taking on this role may also need training or peer support for listening, compassionate empathy, non-judgmental mentorship skills.

Consider how record keeping will be managed in terms of maintaining a record of the numbers and nature of the enquiries made. This can be used to generate a proactive feedback mechanism to implement change based on the enquiries made. For example, they may indicate more training in needed in one department on authorship or that they need to develop a particular skill, such as mediation. Additionally, it may highlight changes that need to be made to policy. This activity can be reported on within the institution's annual research integrity statement which is required under *The Concordat to Support Research Integrity*.

Considerations

Consider whether the champions might take on the role as a panel member of a misconduct investigation, although there are pros and cons associated with this approach. They could be considered less approachable if it is known that they have this position. Equally, the role may been seen as less of a local, freestanding source of peer/ expert advice and more as an oversight role associated with institutional management structures. However, it would generate a pool of potential misconduct panel members from a variety disciplines within an institution.

Terminology

Consider the terminology that would work best in your institution. It isn't necessary to use the terms 'Champions', 'Leads' or 'Advisers'; they could be discipline-specific mentors, or other terminology appropriate to your institution.

Alternative/ related systems

For some institutions, the type of system described above might not be appropriate, or possible within the resources available. There are other options that could perform some of the functions described above, and as indicated earlier, it might be best to start from a position of what you would like to achieve, then think about how you might go about it. Other examples include:

- **Open office hours and hot desking** for research integrity officers, so that they are more accessible and available to colleagues. This could include hot desking in faculties/ departments/ schools, allowing representatives of the institution's central research integrity team to be more visible locally. For an example, see the UKRIO/ Royal Society tool kit *Integrity in Practice*.
- **Providing opportunities for staff to ask questions and seek advice anonymously**
- **Peer support network** – these can be physical or virtual, please see the 'ReproducibiliTea network. Another example was provided in one of UKRIO's webinars.
- **A single or small number of champions** within an institution, separate from the Named Person, who is available to provide confidential advice and support and who will promote research integrity. This could work well in small and single-faculty institutions where a local system provided above might not be necessary. Another option might be to nominate leads for specific areas such as research ethics, publication ethics, data management, open research etc., or to nominate leads separate to the line management or supervision for specific groups such as early career researchers, postdoctoral staff or research students.
- **Mentor or buddy schemes** where a new or more junior member of staff is paired with a more senior person who is separate from their line manager and who can provide advice, support and guidance, particularly related to career development. If the mentors were sufficiently well-versed and trained in research integrity matters, they could also advise on concerns that their mentee may have relating to research integrity and research misconduct.
- **Postgraduate Research Students** – the governance and management processes in place for postgraduate research students will vary across institutions, but many will include a network of support for the students beyond the supervisory team. Some universities appoint personal tutors for research students in addition to their supervisory team. Other alternatives include a departmental postgraduate research co-ordinator for a group of students or Head of Graduate Studies. These roles can include pastoral care and support for the students and can act as a source of advice for students, and in practice, they may advise on issues the student is experiencing such as with publishing for the first time or with other integrity-related areas. With appropriate training and support, these roles could act as a first point of call for advice on research integrity matters and could run sessions at induction or at appropriate points within the student life cycle on integrity, ethics or research misconduct.

Summary

Safeguarding and improving research integrity – 'good research practice' – is a complex and multifaceted endeavour. It is also an essential one. Studies such as the landscape study undertaken by Vitae, UKRIO and UKRN highlight how the quality and ethical standards of research, and the effectiveness and wellbeing of researchers, can be negatively impacted by the culture and systems of their research environment and by the incentives and pressures which researchers face.

There is no single solution to these challenges but establishing a system of local research integrity champions (or whatever the institution's preferred name is) can play a key part. Creating informal channels to discuss openly issues of good research practice and the challenges faced by researchers, helps to establish a dialogue around research integrity and culture. It can foster community ownership of problems and help develop solutions, as well as creating an environment which enhances collegiality and mutual support.

A system of research integrity champions can also help create a faster flow of information, allowing institutions to share expectations and sources of help more effectively, as well as enabling researchers to more easily give feedback about their research environment and raise concerns about unacceptable practices in research.

Embedding research integrity into institutional culture benefits research quality, ethical standards, researchers and the institution as a whole. UKRIO feels that systems of local research integrity champions can help greatly with this and we hope that you find this document helpful when establishing them.

The considerations and alternatives described in this guidance are not exhaustive, but hopefully will be useful for institutions considering this route. As we have noted above, enthusiasm and commitment on the part of those involved is key to the success of this endeavour.

UKRIO is happy to give further advice on the implementation, support and development of systems of local research integrity champions. Please contact us via https://ukrio.org/get-advice-from-ukrio/ . We also very much welcome comments on this guidance note, to help ensure that it remains current and evolves over time.

References and further reading

Affiliations shown are all at the time of the activity

Authors

The idea for the guidance note originated with James Parry of UKRIO and it was initially drafted by Dr Elizabeth Adams and Emma Cullen with advice and input from the UKRIO Advisory Council, James Parry and Dr Josephine Woodhams. Nicola Sainsbury of UKRIO subsequently edited and refocussed the document. At this point, it was modified to a shorter guidance note with a series of separate case studies from individual institutions.

Conceptualisation

James Parry – UKRIO staff

Dr Elizabeth Adams – Workstream lead, Research Culture, University of Glasgow

Emma Gore (nee Cullen), Research Integrity and Governance Officer, Cardiff University

Dr Josephine Woodhams – UKRIO staff

Writing – original draft preparation

Dr Elizabeth Adams, Emma Cullen, Dr Josephine Woodhams, James Parry, UKRIO Advisory Council

Writing – redraft in 2021

Nicola Sainsbury – UKRIO staff

Writing – reviewing and editing

Nicola Sainsbury Dr Josephine Woodhams and James Parry

Project administration

Nicola Sainsbury

Supervision

Dr Josephine Woodhams and James Parry

Reviewers

- Dr Elizabeth Adams – Workstream lead, Research Culture, University of Glasgow
- Dr Natasha Awais-Dean - Research Integrity Manager (Arts & Sciences), King's College London.

References and further reading

- Elizabeth Chuck, Research Integrity Officer, King's College London
- Emma Gore (nee Cullen) - Research Integrity and Governance Officer, Cardiff University
- Dr Serena Mitchell, Research Integrity Manager (Health), King's College London
- Dr Tracy Nevatte - Director of Research Strategy Delivery, Keele University
- Dr Catherine Winchester - Senior Research Adviser, Grants and Research Integrity, Cancer Research UK Beatson Institute

Acknowledgements

UKRIO would like to thank all our colleagues listed above, who gave their time freely to contribute to and comment on drafts of this document, and for their time in preparing the individual case studies. We would also like to thank Dr IIna Kohonen and Dr Anni Sairio of the Finnish Research Integrity Board for meeting with us and sharing their experience, which proved invaluable in the preparation of this guidance note.

References and further reading

Case studies providing further information on how the champions system works within different UK universities can be found alongside this guidance, as well as suggestions for the training of research integrity champions, leads and advisers. Please see https://ukrio.org/publications/research-integrity-champions-leads-advisers/ for details.

UKRIO wishes to acknowledge the use of the following documents in the development of this publication:

- National Health and Medical Research Council, the Australian Research Council and Universities Australia: *Australian Code of Conduct for research integrity (updated 2018),* available at*:* https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/publications/australian-code-responsible-conduct-research-2018
- The Concordat to Support Research Integrity, second edition 2019, available at: https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2019/the-concordat-to-support-research-integrity.pdf
- Danish National Research Foundation: *Statement on research integrity,* available at https://dg.dk/en/research-integrity/
- Finnish National Board for Research Integrity: *Research Integrity Advisers*, available from: https://tenk.fi/en/research-misconduct/research-integrity-advisers and https://www.tenk.fi/sites/tenk.fi/files/TENK_Research_Integrity_Advisers_2018.pdf
- League of European Research Universities: *Advice Paper,* available from: https://www.leru.org/files/Towards-a-Research-Integrity-Culture-at-Universities-full-paper.pdf
- Royal Society and UK Research Integrity Office *Integrity in Practice Toolkit*: https://ukrio.org/publications/integrity-in-practice-toolkit/
- UK Research Integrity Office *Code of Practice for Research*: https://ukrio.org/wp-content/uploads/UKRIO-Code-of-Practice-for-Research.pdf
- UK Research Integrity Office *Recommended Checklist for Research Communities during the COVID-19 Pandemic*: https://doi.org/10.37672/UKRIO.2020.01.COVID-19
- UK Research Integrity Office *Self-Assessment Tool for the Concordat to Support Research Integrity*: https://doi.org/10.37672/UKRIO.2021.02.self-assessment
- Vitae, UK Research Integrity Office and UK Reproducibility Network, 2020. *Research integrity: a landscape study*, available from: https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/UKRI-020920-ResearchIntegrityLandscapeStudy.pdf

UK RESEARCH INTEGRITY OFFICE

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.

UKRIO welcomes enquiries on any issues relating to the conduct of research, whether promoting good research practice, seeking help with a particular research project, responding to allegations of fraud and misconduct, or improving research culture and systems.

UK Research Integrity Office

Sussex Innovation Croydon, No. 1 Croydon, 12-16 Addiscombe Road, Croydon CR0 0XT

Tel.: +44 (0)20 3828 1325 Email: info@ukrio.org Web: www.ukrio.org Twitter: @UKRIO

Registered Charity No: 1147061 **Registered Company No:** 7444269

For the full list of UKRIO publications, visit www.ukrio.org

https://doi.org/10.37672/UKRIO.2022.01.champions