

## Research integrity champions, leads and advisers: Case study from King's College London

### Institutional context

King's College London is a multi-faculty university based in London. 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, including with the Institute of Psychiatry in 1997 and, in 1998, with the United Medical and Dental Schools of Guy's and St Thomas' Hospitals and the Florence Nightingale School of Nursing and Midwifery. It has approximately 20,000 undergraduate students and 14,000 postgraduate students and 5,000 academic and research staff, across nine faculties (information from HESA data for 2019/20).

The Research Integrity Champion system at King's was introduced in September 2019. This framework of engagement with faculties was expanded to include a network of Research Integrity Advisors, who were appointed in September 2020. Advisors are in place in all faculties.

### The role of the Research Integrity Champions

There are two roles within the institution, Research Integrity Champions and Research Integrity Advisors.

#### Research Integrity Champions:

There is a single named Research Integrity Champion in each faculty. It is a high-level advocacy role aimed at promoting integrity and excellence in research across each faculty.

- Act as a sounding board for potential changes to relevant university policies and procedures
- Provide feedback to the Research Integrity Office on proposals to promote research integrity across King's, to include reviewing new or amended documents relating to relevant university policies and procedures
- Provide updates on faculty-led research integrity initiatives
- Identify appropriate disciplines-specific training
- Identify areas of support from the Research Integrity office
- Contribute to discussions to improve research integrity

A role description for this position was approved in February 2020 and updated in December 2021.

### **Research Integrity Advisors:**

Research Integrity Advisors (RIAds) are colleagues embedded within faculties at local level and they provide a visible point of contact for every researcher, act as a conduit for any queries on research (mis)conduct, and support the Research Integrity Office with local, discipline-specific training.

RIAds have been recruited from both academic and professional services staff and are colleagues known for their pursuit of excellence in research, whether through the conduct or facilitation of good research practices.

A role description for this position was approved in February 2020 and updated in December 2021.

## **Development and maintenance of the network**

### **Research Integrity Champions:**

The Research Integrity Manager (Arts & Sciences) discussed the idea with colleagues across the sector. She then discussed the plan with the Vice Deans for Research within the faculties and introduced it subsequent to that.

The role of Champion is ordinarily held by the faculty Vice Dean for Research, but an agreed deputy may assume this position. The Champions meet with the RIO every two months at a Research Integrity Champions (RICH) Forum and terms of reference for the forum were approved in May 2021. Engagement has been good, with the Champions recognising the importance of their attendance and contribution. As Vice Deans for Research step down, the incumbent hands over the role of Research Integrity Champion to the incoming Vice Dean and customarily an introductory meeting is held with the new Champion and the appropriate Research Integrity Manager (Health or Arts & Sciences).

### **Research Integrity Advisors:**

Recruitment of the Advisors is through a nominations process. A senior faculty member, usually the Research Integrity Champion, completes a form outlining an individual's suitability for the role and submits this to the appropriate Research Integrity Manager. From 2022, the Research Integrity Office will be introducing a self-nomination process. In such cases, the application will be first reviewed and approved by the Faculty prior to it being submitted to the Research Integrity Office. The Research Integrity Manager reviews the nomination with the Director of Research Governance, Ethics and Integrity and the Dean of Research Governance, Ethics and Integrity. If no concerns are flagged, the nomination is confirmed with the individual and a short briefing meeting

is held with the relevant Research Integrity Manager. This is to ensure that the incoming RIAd is aware of the full scope of the role and allows them to ask any questions. Following this, the RIAd is provided with a resources pack to support them.

An annual training session has been designed specifically for the Advisors and this is well-attended.

Faculty Advisor meetings are held termly to establish plans for raising awareness of research integrity, plan training in research integrity, and discuss any issues that may be relevant to the disciplines within a faculty.

## Features of the system

It is not a 'one size fits all' system, as the departmental or school structure varies between each faculty. How the Advisors are recruited is determined in discussion with each Research Integrity Champion. 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.

## Benefits

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

The Research Integrity Advisors are key to designing tailored training sessions and those delivered to-date in collaboration with them have been successful, providing a space for researchers to discuss issues pertinent to their discipline. The network of RIAds provides an important visible point of contact for researchers across the university, who may not be aware of the central Research Integrity Office, to raise questions or concerns about the conduct of research.

## Challenges

Some areas of the university are more engaged than others and it is important for consistency to ensure that all researchers have access to local sources of advice on the good conduct of research.

As researchers leave the institution, there has been a need to recruit more Advisors to sustain the network, so it is a process in constant motion. We are now contemplating how to provide appropriate recognition for colleagues who take on these roles, as for some high workload is prohibitive to becoming a RIAd.

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

You must bring your academic colleagues with you on this journey, so start initiating the conversations early and find your senior allies first to make your life easier!

### Further information is available from:

#### Research Integrity Champions and Advisors at King's College London:

<https://www.kcl.ac.uk/research/support/rgei/research-integrity/research-integrity-champions-and-advisors>

Terms of Reference for the KCL RICH Forum: <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/research/assets/pdf/rich-forum-tor-july-2021.pdf>

For further details, please contact the Research Integrity Office: [research-integrity@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:research-integrity@kcl.ac.uk)

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