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UK Research Integrity Office response to the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee's report on peer review in scientific publications

The UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO) has responded to the publication of the report by the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee of its inquiry into peer review in scientific publications.

James Parry, Acting Head of UKRIO, said: "The UK Research Integrity Office has long campaigned against complacency on issues of research integrity and welcomes the publication of this report. We agree entirely that scientific misconduct damages peer review and science as a whole. UKRIO welcomes the conclusion that all UK research institutions should have a specific member of staff leading on research integrity and the receipt of misconduct allegations, a concept we have championed for some years.

"UKRIO is the only body which has offered dedicated support to the research community and the public on issues of research integrity across all disciplines. No other organisation has comparable experience in providing such support. Use of our services has risen each year - we dealt with more than 60 cases in 2010 alone – and our published guidance is used by many organisations, including over 50 universities, and endorsed by funding bodies.

"We welcome the recommendation to revisit the conclusions of the UK Research Integrity Futures Group, which recommended a very similar model of support to that which UKRIO currently operates: an independent advisory body offering confidential and expert support to institutions, researchers and the public. The proposed programme of work was also very similar to that undertaken by UKRIO, as was the emphasis on support that is appropriate and proportionate, rather than burdensome and bureaucratic.

"We are perplexed by comments to the Committee that we do not cover all disciplines. UKRIO was in fact conceived to support the UK life sciences research community as a pilot for a wider remit. Demand from employers, researchers and the public led us to support all disciplines soon after our inception, including cross-disciplinary research, and we continue to do so. UKRIO was not created to deliver an assurance mechanism for research funders, a function which remains their responsibility, but we indirectly support them by improving research integrity in the organisations in receipt of their funds."

Professor Sir Ian Kennedy, Chair of UKRIO, said: "UKRIO meets the needs identified in the report without being a formal regulatory body, and our close contact with the research community indicates that this is a model which meets the public interest, is welcomed by the community and provides the service required significantly more cheaply than any statutorily created body.

"Whilst one might expect researchers, employers and the public to be hesitant about sharing problems with a non-regulatory body, our experience has shown there is no such reluctance - so far in 2011 we have received over 40 additional new cases. While UKRIO has always recognised that it will need to further evolve as the needs of the research community and the public change, we would not be approached if we were not needed.

"UKRIO has stepped in to fill the breach, providing support where there was none. If a statutory regime of regulation is ultimately regarded as desirable, we would be keen to use our unique expertise to inform the process of its creation and work with the body which was established to fulfil this function. Meanwhile, we are firmly of the view that we should build on UKRIO's successes and continue to supply and develop the support that we currently provide."

ENDS

Notes for Editors

1. In January 2011, the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee announced an inquiry into the operation and effectiveness of the peer review process used to examine and validate scientific results and papers prior to publication. For more information on the report of the inquiry, visit:
<http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/science-and-technology-committee/inquiries/peer-review/>
2. The UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO) is an independent, not-for-profit body which provides confidential and expert advice and guidance about the conduct of academic, scientific and medical research, whether promoting good practice or addressing misconduct. We cover all subjects and help all involved in research: members of the public, researchers and research organisations, including universities and NHS bodies. In 2010 alone we helped with more than 60 cases and use of our services continues to grow exponentially each year. Our publications have been used or adopted by many organisations, including over 50 universities. Further information about UKRIO is available from its website: www.ukrio.org .
3. In 2008, UKRIO published its *Procedure for the Investigation of Misconduct in Research*, a step-by-step manual for investigating allegations of misconduct in research, applicable to all subject areas. It has been used and adopted by research organisations – including more than 50 universities - endorsed by funding bodies such as Research Councils UK and used to investigate cases of fraud and misconduct. Use of the Procedure can help ensure that investigations are rigorous and objective, driven by strong principles and conducted according to a timely and transparent process. It specifically states that research organisations should have a specific member of staff - a 'Named Person' - to receive allegations of ethical breaches and misconduct, as the Committee's report recommends.
4. For further information contact the UK Research Integrity Office, Sussex Innovation Centre, University of Sussex, Science Park Square, Falmer BN1 9SB. Tel: +44 (0) 1273 234 697, email: info@ukrio.org, web: www.ukrio.org .