

## **Addressing research misconduct working group -**

### **Terms of reference**

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#### **1. Background**

- 1.1. The working group convened to take forward the work stream on addressing poor research practice and research misconduct had a robust and insightful discussion when it first met in May 2023. It became clear that the Terms of Reference required clarity and focus in order to lead to deliverable actions, and crucially inform the evidence base as to the current landscape surrounding research misconduct.
- 1.2. In its reports, the House of Commons Science and Technology Select Committee (2018 and 2023) had a recurring theme around assurance and response to research misconduct allegations within Higher Education Institutions. Working group members highlighted both the select committee's concerns and sector concerns about how the current system of self-regulation works. Amongst those concerns were reflections about rigour and reproducibility of research, and experience with system pressures driving poor research practice. Considering how wide the topic of poor research practice and misconduct could be, the working group determined that the scope would need to be narrowed sufficiently to lead to deliverable actions, as noted above. The working group determined it important to undertake its work with a focus on HEIs for this first phase, however, it would seek to ascertain what deliverables can be translated across to other sectors within the research eco-system.
- 1.3. The working group recognised and acknowledged the review being undertaken by the UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO) that is focusing on the barriers to dealing with misconduct. This work, that is adopting a solutions-based approach, will identify gaps, challenges and tension that exist within the current system, which includes funders, publishers, and journals. There is agreement between UKRIO and the UK Committee on Research Integrity working groups to approach initiatives collaboratively, sharing data where possible to strengthen the evidence base which in turn will underpin decision making.
- 1.4. The draft Terms of Reference have been updated to reflect the working group's discussion.

#### **2. Terms of Reference**

- 2.1. To understand, through the collation of evidence, the scale of staff-based research misconduct across the HEI sector in the UK, and its implications on

other parts of the research system including through commissioned research and collaboration.

- 2.2. To examine the management of research misconduct from non-HEI sectors and organisations, to strengthen the evidence base as to the effectiveness of various approaches. Consideration will focus on different approaches from regulatory to advisory systems.
- 2.3. To learn from existing international models and seek understanding as to success and challenges experienced when establishing national frameworks and bodies to oversee research misconduct. In particular to evidence the variety of assurance models (e.g., ombudsman, integrity office, regulatory etc) in place and determine the effectiveness of such approaches within the UK.
- 2.4. To test the hypothesis as to whether self-regulation amongst HEIs is effective, fair, and robust. In doing so this will ascertain:
  - if the systems and processes used to investigate allegations of research misconduct are transparent, timely and robust
  - the levels of consistency across HEIs' approaches, policies, and processes
  - what skills, support and training are in place for those undertaking an investigation
  - what systems and processes are in place to support those undergoing an investigation
  - what structures and processes have been implemented, if any, to support an appeals process
  - what approaches and actions are taken to correct the research record
- 2.5. Drawing upon 2.1. to 2.4. to produce actions to improve current systems, structures, and processes.
- 2.6. Drawing upon 2.1. to 2.4. to advise what system or framework of assurance the UK HEI sector should have in the future, including governance and scope.
- 2.7. To report to the UK Committee on Research Integrity on proposed actions for the higher education sector.

### **3. Scope**

- 3.1. Work shall focus on the higher education sector in the first instance. Opportunities to translate key findings to other sectors within the research ecosystem will be sought.

- 3.2. Whilst culture, in particular research culture, directly impacts on research behaviours and as such cannot be deemed to be outside of the scope of this group, this work will not focus on research culture.

#### **4. Membership and responsibilities**

- 4.1. This working group draws together representation from across the research sector to shape and commission the work required. The group will deliver a report that will provide an evidence base for any recommendations identified through the workstream.
- 4.2. The UK Committee on Research Integrity has collaboration at the core of its work. This working group has been convened to draw on the experience of existing bodies within the research eco system to enable a fresh insight into the current landscape. In doing so, this will provide a shared understanding of strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities to identify actions that will support improvement in this area.
- 4.3. The working group shall be co-chaired by two members of the UK Committee on Research Integrity.
- 4.4. The membership includes representation from key stakeholders including:
- UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO)
  - Signatories Group for the Concordat to Support Research Integrity (2x representatives)
  - An international body responsible for promoting good research conduct
  - An industry body
  - Royal Society/Publisher
  - An independent research organisation
  - Government
  - National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement
  - Early Career Researcher(s)
  - A university Vice Chancellor
- 4.5. To draw together representation from key stakeholders yet keep the working group a manageable size, it is planned that those representing organisations shall actively engage with their members/staff/relevant interest parties, in particular, where additional information may be required. Where possible, members may also represent more than one sector through careful articulation of their views and input.
- 4.6. All meetings will be held under Chatham House Rule to encourage open discussion and debate. However, members of the working group have agreed to their names and affiliations being available on the committee's website.

- 4.7. Members serve the interests of the organisation they represent and are responsible for ensuring an honest and objective dialogue between the working group and their organisations.

## **5. Meetings and attendance**

- 5.1. The working group shall meet no more than once per month.
- 5.2. Members are expected to attend all meetings and will not be permitted to send a delegate.
- 5.3. Observers and guests can be invited to attend meetings, or for specific agenda items, at the discretion of the co-chairs.
- 5.4. At least 50% of members must be in attendance in order for the meeting to be considered quorate.
- 5.5. Conflicts of interest should be declared to the secretariat and co-chairs of the meeting. All conflicts should be clearly reflected in the meeting record when they arise.

## **6. Reporting**

- 6.1. The working group reports directly to the UK Committee on Research Integrity. This means that approval to publish reports and recommendations must be sought from the committee and the committee may request progress updates from the group.

## **7. Secretariat**

- 7.1. The secretariat for the UK Committee on Research Integrity will be responsible for arranging meetings and ensuring accurate meeting minutes are taken. In their absence a member of the UK Committee on Research Integrity will take a record of the meeting.
- 7.2. Meeting minutes will not be published but will be accessible to working group members through a dedicated Teams site.
- 7.3. The committee secretariat will manage commissions, provide project management, and budget support to this work.
- 7.4. As UKRI is accountable for the secretariat and budget, all public sector rules and expectations apply, including conforming to government rules regarding expenditure and accessibility of information through Freedom of Information requests.

## **8. Outputs and deliverables**

- 8.1. The working group shall deliver a report to the UK Committee on Research Integrity that will provide suggested actions for the sector to take forward in which to strengthen confidence in the way research misconduct is handled in the UK HEI sector.
  
- 8.2. All commissioned research relating to this project will be made publicly available.