



Research Integrity Champions

CRUK Scotland Institute

Research Integrity Champions: how the Cancer Research UK Scotland Institute promotes accountability and open communication

The Cancer Research UK Scotland Institute in Glasgow wanted to ensure that good research integrity practices are not seen as separate from their day-to-day operations, or satisfied merely by reference to large-scale policies or guideline documents on their website. While such documents are important frameworks, the Institute has worked on practical methods to sustainably promote and implement the principles they seek to encourage “on the ground”.

“Our research ethos is about excellence, honesty, openness, accountability and integrity. Robust data are a priority in pre-clinical cancer research as they directly affect cancer patients’ diagnoses and treatments. It is essential that the data underpinning translational and clinical research are right, to both protect cancer patients and to ensure the research is useable and effective.”

- Catherine Winchester, Head of the Research Integrity Service.

Accountability

The CRUK Scotland Institute recognised that generating behavioural change and driving a research integrity mindset across its researchers requires more than open discussions and the communication of guidelines. That is why the institute has adopted a ‘lead by example’ approach to research integrity, introducing dedicated research integrity roles.

Although the Scotland Institute already has a Head of Research Integrity, who supports research integrity at an organisation level, it recognised that developing responsibility and accountability with a ‘bottom-up’ grassroots approach is essential to facilitating the link between research integrity in principle and research integrity in practice. To address this, the Institute has introduced a network of voluntary Research Integrity Champions to help foster research integrity within individual research groups and advanced technology facilities.

What are Research Integrity Champions?

The Champions are volunteers, nominated by each research group or team leader within the Institute. Given the nature of the role and the time required to actively engage in it, each champion is selected for their interest and knowledge of research integrity and willingness and availability to undertake the responsibilities.

Nominations are open to both senior and more junior staff, across different roles, to ensure fair representation and to prevent the creation of an ‘echo-chamber’ when discussing matters relating to research integrity.



The current 40+ Champions work from the ground upward to support good practices within their research group by:

Acting as a conduit to aid the implementation of new and existing policies relating to good conduct in research.

Communicating on matters relating to research integrity in both directions.

Helping foster a collaborative research culture and environment.

Undertaking a first point of contact/gatekeeper role within their research group.

Supporting and enabling research integrity.

The Champions meet with the Head of the Research Integrity Service annually to discuss their experiences, share knowledge, raise any issues and feedback, and hear about the latest research integrity developments. The Champions have the option to undertake research integrity training, covering current discipline-specific research integrity matters and research group-level activities.

The Benefits of the Champions Network

The Institute has found that having Research Integrity Champions facilitates a more open discussion of research integrity, enhances communication about issues and developments, ensures accountability and helps engage more researchers. Having Champions embedded within each research group enables group-specific issues to be raised and discussed.

The Champions not only encourage good practices but additionally become a source of inspiration to others; championing researchers who demonstrate exemplary behaviour empowers and enables others within their group to follow the same good practice.

Testimonials from Research Integrity Champions within the CRUK Scotland Institute

"I think having Research Integrity Champions positioned within each lab, here at the institute, is an excellent initiative and has stimulated conversations to encourage honesty and integrity. As part of my role, I have been able to disseminate the latest guidance and expectations from research journals with my group as well as discussing strategies to improve the lab's data storage methods. As a team, we have identified individuals demonstrating exemplary practices and I am currently exploring approaches that I hope to roll out across the entire lab."



Testimonials from Research Integrity Champions within the CRUK Scotland Institute (cont.)

"A clear advantage of having research integrity champions immersed in each lab is that institute policies such as data management, record keeping, data analysis and presentation are regularly discussed in the context of new and ongoing projects, helping to embed good research practice in our everyday work."

"Being a Research Integrity Champion was a great experience, I have never been involved in a role like this and I have learned so much. It also encouraged me to improve the research culture we have in our lab by writing a lab handbook that reflects the values of the group, including protocols and more technical stuff. My participation in the UKRN was also a great experience where I acquired tools that I can use in my lab later on."

In summary I truly believe that it is very important for every lab to evaluate their research culture and to think about integrity in all aspects. My brief experience also showed me that this is even better and more efficient when the labs are just starting. I feel it is easy with a new group to build the rules and values than with more established ones. In laboratories that were working in a certain way for so long I have the feeling that it is hard to change habits and modify behaviours. However, I highly recommend even in these types of groups the incorporation of a research integrity champion."

"Research integrity discussions can be fun: in our group, students and staff of all levels have enjoyed participating in the 'Dilemma' game, where ethical and research integrity dilemmas are discussed in a relaxed and inclusive manner."