

Barriers to Investigating and Reporting Research Misconduct

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Professional training is needed and the stigma of whistleblowing must end: UKRIO releases report examining the barriers to investigating and reporting research misconduct

The effectiveness of the UK's employer-led system in addressing research misconduct has been the subject of growing attention in recent years, in recognition of the adverse impact it can have on academic knowledge, funder and public confidence in research, and the UK's international standing as a research leader.

To better understand how the UK can tackle research misconduct, in early 2023 the UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO) convened an expert working group, chaired by Tracey Brown OBE, to review the challenges faced by research employers, funders, publishers, and researchers in investigating allegations of misconduct. Members of the expert working group also included distinguished senior research leaders Professor Sir Ian Boyd; Professor Sarah Harper, CBE; Dr. Jane Alfred; Jeremy Barraud; Dr. Peter Hedges; Dr. Simon Kolstoe; Professor Inke Nätke and Professor Sir Jim Smith.

The findings are published in UKRIO's report, [Barriers to Investigating and Reporting Research Misconduct](#). The working group found that, while the parties in the system experienced the issues very differently, common themes of lack of clarity and confidence, and the need for culture change, came through strongly. It also found that, while much attention has been given in parliamentary and other discussions to a possible future regulator, there are immediate steps that can be taken to reduce the barriers to effective investigations and improve the experience for all parties.

The report makes four key proposals for the research community to respond to these challenges together:

1. The adoption of standardised requirements and procedures detailing how allegations of research misconduct are investigated and reported
2. Professional research misconduct investigation training for all sectors undertaking research
3. A flagging system that promotes transparency, destigmatises allegations of research misconduct, and normalises early raising of concerns
4. National infrastructure to collect and report on research misconduct cases annually

Tracey Brown, Chair of the working group and UKRIO Trustee, said: "In the context of pressures from an increasingly competitive and financially challenging environment, it is important that research misconduct investigations are effective and efficient. While our report is not a comprehensive review of potential solutions, it offers a valuable starting point for UKRIO and the research community to work more closely together to prevent, investigate, and report on research misconduct. My hope is that it will galvanise discussion and action to foster the clarity, confidence, and culture we need to safeguard the integrity of UK research."

The report will be available for download via the UKRIO website from 20th May 2024.

For further information, please contact:

Pippa Day, Operations Manager
UK Research Integrity Office

Sussex Innovation Croydon
Tel: +44 (0)20 3828 1325
Email: info@ukrio.org
Web: www.ukrio.org

About UKRIO

The UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO) is an independent charity which works closely with the research community to ensure UK research is produced to the highest integrity, quality and efficacy. It offers support to the public, researchers and organisations to further good practice in academic, scientific and medical research.

The charity pursues 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. UKRIO covers 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.



Promoting integrity and high ethical standards in research
Providing confidential, independent, and expert support