

**UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN**  
**POLICY AND GUIDELINES ON GOOD RESEARCH CONDUCT**  
**AND**  
**STATEMENT ON THE HANDLING OF ALLEGATIONS OF UNACCEPTABLE RESEARCH**  
**CONDUCT**

*This document should be read in conjunction with the University Statement on the Handling of Allegations of Unacceptable Research Conduct.*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The University of Aberdeen expects that all its research activities will be conducted to the highest standards of integrity. This includes the publication of materials, preparation of conference papers and the conduct of peer review, whether internally or externally. This document indicates the standards of good research conduct which are required to be adopted throughout the University and which are intended to satisfy the requirements of all funding authorities.

The Policy and Guidelines apply to all individuals involved in research, including visiting researchers, research support staff, students and research managers and administrators. Researchers should also adhere to the highest level of research ethics, in line with requirements set out by national and international regulatory bodies, professional and regulatory research guidance, and research ethics frameworks issued in appropriate areas.

The onus lies with researchers to establish that they have met the highest standard that could reasonably be expected of them. Good research conduct will be promoted and promulgated throughout the University by senior managers including Vice-Principals, Heads of Colleges, Directors of Research and Heads of Schools/Departments and Supervisors. The Policy and Guidelines, and their compliance in Colleges, will be reviewed annually by the University Advisory Group on Research Ethics and Governance. The aim is to promote integrity and rigour in research conduct, and to create a culture in which the following will be understood and observed:

- Integrity in research;
- Openness in research;
- Role of professional bodies;
- Leadership and supervision in research;
- Management and ownership of research including appropriate record-keeping;
- Ethical practice in research;
- Risk of research misuse;
- Publication practice.

## **2. INTEGRITY IN RESEARCH**

Researchers must be honest and open in respect to their own actions in research and in their responses to the actions of other researchers. This applies to the whole range of research work, including experimental design, generating and analysing data, applying for funding, publishing results and acknowledging the direct and indirect contributions of colleagues, collaborators and others. Plagiarism, including self-plagiarism<sup>1</sup>, deception or the fabrication

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<sup>1</sup> *Self plagiarism occurs when the creator of a work uses that work, or parts of it, in subsequent research papers or other output, without appropriate acknowledgement that the material has previously been published.*

or falsification of results will be regarded as unacceptable research conduct and will be treated as gross misconduct under the terms of the University's disciplinary procedures. Researchers are encouraged to report cases of suspected unacceptable conduct to their supervisors, Head of School/Department or Head of College and to do so in a responsible and appropriate manner. (See also *Code of Practice on Whistleblowing* <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/hr/uploads/files/whistleblowing.pdf>)

Researchers are required to declare any real or potential conflicts of interest in their research work, and to seek assistance, if required, from their direct supervisor in the most effective way of managing any such conflict.

### **3. OPENNESS IN RESEARCH**

While recognising the need for researchers to protect their own research interests, the University encourages all researchers to be as open as possible in discussing their work with others and with the public. Once results have been published, the researchers are expected to make available relevant data and materials to other researchers on request, provided that this is consistent with any ethical approvals and consents which cover the data and materials and any intellectual property rights. The University will normally grant access to its own collections, taking account of all ethical and other relevant issues. In return it would hope that research results would be deposited with the appropriate collection.

The University recognises that publication of the results of research may need to be delayed for a reasonable period pending protection of intellectual property arising from the research. However, any such period of delay in publication should be kept to a minimum.

### **4. ROLE OF PROFESSIONAL BODIES**

The University expects researchers to observe the standards of research practice set out in codes and guidelines of publishers, scientific and learned societies, and other professional bodies. All researchers should take the necessary steps to adhere to the legal and other requirements that regulate their work. They should also adhere to the highest level of research ethics, in line with national and international regulatory bodies, professional and regulatory research guidance, and research ethics frameworks issued in appropriate areas.

### **5. LEADERSHIP AND SUPERVISION IN RESEARCH**

The University expects senior researchers to ensure that a climate of mutual co-operation is created in which all members of a research team or an individual are encouraged to develop their skills, and in which the open exchange of ideas, and appropriate acknowledgement of the direct and indirect contributions of others is fostered. The University will ensure that appropriate direction of research and supervision of researchers through heads of school/department is provided. Training in supervisory skills will be provided where appropriate. The University's Research Staff Development Programme for research staff provides a basis for such supervision.

Supervisors are required to supervise all stages of a research process, including outlining or drawing up a hypothesis, preparing applications for funding, protocol design, data recording and data analysis. It is the responsibility of the research supervisor to explain best research practice and ethical considerations as early as possible. All researchers should undertake appropriate training, for example, in research design, regulatory use, ethics, confidentiality, record keeping and data protection and management. To assist in these matters all new researchers will receive the University of Aberdeen Policy and Guidelines on Good Research Practice within the first month. In addition, all research staff will have a contractual right to at least 3 days of training per year.

Postgraduate students undertaking research should receive training in the University's Policy and Guidelines on Good Research Conduct at their induction and throughout their programme of study. It will be a condition of their transition beyond their first year that they have been trained in good research practice and satisfactorily understood the University's

Policy and Guidelines (see also the *University Code of Practice for Research Students, Supervisors, Heads of School, Heads of Graduate School and College Postgraduate Officers* and the *Code of Practice for Postgraduate Taught Students, Programme Co-ordinators, Heads of School, Heads of Graduate School and College Postgraduate Officers*).

## **6. MANAGEMENT AND OWNERSHIP OF RESEARCH**

At the outset of any research, researchers should be clear on management and ownership of:

- Data and samples used or created in the course of the research; and
- The results of the research.

Researchers are required to seek guidance from their immediate supervisor if clarity is needed on any aspect of such management or ownership

All researchers must keep clear and accurate records of the procedures followed and approvals granted during the research process, including records of the interim results obtained as well as of the final research outcomes. This is necessary not only as a means of demonstrating proper research practices, but also in case questions are subsequently asked about either the conduct of the research or the results obtained. The maintenance of accurate records is also important for potential subsequent commercialisation of research. Researchers must adhere to the *University Guidelines on Keeping of Research records* (<http://www.abdn.ac.uk/ppg/index.php?id=69&top=68>).

Data generated in the course of research must be kept securely in paper (e.g. lab book or equivalent) or electronic format, as appropriate and in accordance with good practice in the storage of primary data, record-keeping and ethical issues. Back-up records should always be kept for data stored on a computer. Guidance on retention periods can be found in the University's Retention Schedules (<http://www.abdn.ac.uk/central/records-management/retention-schedules.pdf>) and taking account of guidelines published by scientific and learned societies, and other professional bodies.

## **7. ETHICAL PRACTICE IN RESEARCH**

All researchers must adhere to the University Research Ethics Framework (<http://www.abdn.ac.uk/ppg/index.php?id=69&top=68>)

### **i. Research involving human participants**

Approval from the appropriate research ethics committee is required for all research involving human participants or biological samples. Approval from other regulatory bodies such as the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority or the Gene Therapy Advisory Committee in the UK should also be sought where necessary.

Researchers should ensure the confidentiality of personal information relating to the participants in research, and that the research fulfils any legal requirements such as those of the Data Protection Act 1998.

### **ii. Research involving animals**

All research involving the use of animals must have the appropriate approval through the University Biological Services Ethical Review Committee. Such research may require Home Office licences for the investigator and the project. Researchers must consider, at an early stage in the design of any research involving animals, the opportunities for reduction, replacement and refinement of animal involvement (the three Rs).

### **iii. Research involving oral data collection**

Research involving the collection, preservation and use of sound and video oral material must conform to relevant ethical and technical practice.

## **8. RISKS OF RESEARCH MISUSE**

In progressing their investigations, researchers must actively consider any risk that their research could potentially generate outcomes which could be misused for harmful purposes. Research which involves potentially harmful agents, or which generates knowledge which might be misused should be identified as a risk. As examples, this might be research which demonstrates how to render a vaccine ineffective, or research which enables weaponization of a biological agent or toxin. Where such risks exist, they should seek advice as to the steps to be taken to minimise such risks from the relevant College Director of Research.

## **9. PUBLICATION AND AUTHORSHIP PRACTICE**

Results of research should be published in an appropriate form consistent with the academic discipline. It is the responsibility of the lead author to ensure familiarity with the appropriate form. No paper, abstract, report or other output should be submitted without the permission of every individual named on the output, and no person should be named as a contributor without their consent. Anyone who consents to being listed as an author on a paper should accept responsibility for ensuring that they are familiar with the contents of the paper and can identify their contribution to it.

The University of Aberdeen must be correctly named in the address for a publication

The practice of honorary authorship is unacceptable.

The contribution of formal collaborators and all others who directly assist or indirectly support the research must be properly acknowledged.

*Revised and approved by the Advisory Group on Research Ethics and Governance in March and June 2010 to conform to RCUK Policy & Code of Conduct on the Governance of Good Research Conduct*

## STATEMENT ON THE HANDLING OF ALLEGATIONS OF UNACCEPTABLE RESEARCH CONDUCT

This statement should be read in conjunction with the University's Policy and Guidelines on Good Research Conduct. Where international collaborative research is involved, the guidance provided by the OECD Global Science Forum on Investigating Research Misconduct Allegations in International Projects (A Practical Guide April 2009) will also be considered.)

### 1 DEFINITION OF UNACCEPTABLE RESEARCH CONDUCT

1.1 Unacceptable Research Conduct' is defined by the University as:

- **Fabrication**, including the creation of false data and other aspects of research, including documentation and participant consent
- **Falsification**, including the inappropriate manipulation and/or selection of data, imagery and/or consents
- **Plagiarism** is the use, without adequate acknowledgment, of the intellectual work of another person. A researcher cannot be found to have committed plagiarism where it can be shown that they have taken all reasonable care to avoid representing the work of others as his or her own.
- **Misrepresentation** including;
  - misrepresentation of data, such as suppression of relevant findings and/or data, or knowingly, recklessly or by gross negligence, presenting a flawed interpretation of data
  - undisclosed duplication of publication, including undisclosed duplicate submission of manuscripts for publication
  - misrepresentation of interests, including failure to declare material interests either of the researcher or of the funders of the research
  - misrepresentation of qualifications and/or experience, including claiming or implying qualifications or experience which are not held
  - misrepresentation of involvement, such as inappropriate claims to authorship and/or attribution of work where there has been no significant contribution, or the denial of authorship where an author has made a significant contribution
- **Mismanagement or inadequate preservation of data and/or primary materials** including failure to:
  - keep clear and accurate records of the research procedures followed and the results obtained including interim results
  - hold records securely in paper or electronic form
  - make relevant primary data and research evidence accessible to others for reasonable periods after the completion of the research (*data should normally be preserved and accessible for 10 years but for projects of clinical or major social, environmental or heritage importance, for 20 years or longer*)
  - manage data according to the research funder's data policy and all relevant legislation
  - wherever possible, deposit data permanently within a national collection
- **Financial impropriety in accounting for research funds, intentional unauthorised use,**

- **Disclosure or removal of, or damage to, research-related property of the University or of another**, including apparatus, materials, writings, data, hardware or software or any other substances or devices used in or produced by the conduct of research.
- **Breach of Duty of Care (deliberately, recklessly or by gross negligence)** including
  - disclosing improperly the identity of individuals or groups involved in research without their consent, or other breach of confidentiality
  - placing any of those involved in research in danger, whether as subjects, participants or associated individuals, without their prior consent, and without appropriate safeguards even with consent; including reputational danger where that can be anticipated
  - not taking all reasonable care to ensure that the risks and dangers, the broad objectives and the sponsors of the research are known to participants or their legal representatives, to ensure appropriate informed consent is obtained properly, explicitly and transparently
  - not observing legal and reasonable ethical requirements or obligations for the care of animal subjects, human organs or tissue used in research, or for the protection of the environment
  - improper conduct in peer review of research proposals or results (including manuscripts submitted for publication); this includes failure to disclose conflicts of interest; inadequate disclosure of clearly limited competence; misappropriation of the content of material; and breach of confidentiality or abuse of material provided in confidence for peer review purposes
  - Failure to follow established protocols

1.2 It does not include honest error or honest differences in the design, execution, interpretation or judgement in evaluating research methods or results, or unacceptable research conduct unrelated to the research process. Similarly it does not include poor research unless this encompasses the intention to deceive.

## **2 THE UNIVERSITY'S ATTITUDE**

2.1 The University will investigate all allegations of unacceptable research conduct made against its staff and students. Such allegations against staff must be made in writing and addressed to the Secretary to the University. The Secretary will arrange for the allegations to be investigated by a small committee convened by a Vice-Principal (normally the Vice-Principal with responsibility for research) and including, where appropriate, the relevant Head of College, Head of School/Department and a subject specialist, who may be a member of staff or an external assessor invited to assist with the investigatory process. In undertaking the investigation the Committee will follow the General Principles of the University's Disciplinary Procedures, and where necessary, will consult with the Director of Human Resources. If the Committee upholds an allegation of unacceptable research conduct, it will determine an appropriate penalty. The member of staff will be advised that under the terms of the University's Disciplinary Procedures a case may be made to the Principal seeking his/her dismissal on grounds of gross misconduct. The member of staff will also be

advised of his/her rights of appeal against the decision as described within the Disciplinary Procedures.

An allegation of unacceptable research conduct by a registered student will be dealt with under the Code of Practice on Student Discipline. If unacceptable research conduct is established, their programme of study/research may be terminated through the Student Disciplinary Procedures.

- 2.2 The University's procedures will apply to visiting researchers while based in the University and should be brought to their attention as part of the organisation of the visit. Where a case of unacceptable research is established this will be reported to the home institution of the visiting researcher. A member of staff visiting another institution must familiarise him/herself with the host institution's policy on unacceptable research conduct and adhere to its requirements in addition to the requirements of this policy.
- 2.3 The University will immediately inform, in confidence, the appropriate Director of an external funding agency about any allegations of serious unacceptable research conduct which might concern external funding agencies (including acting as a supervisor for an externally-funded postgraduate student or engaged in peer review activities) specifically where it seems that there are reasonable grounds to believe that the allegation may be substantiated on investigation. In all cases involving suspension it will inform the external funding body. It is at the discretion of the University to determine what constitutes 'serious misconduct'. The University will also inform the appropriate Director of the outcome of any such investigation.
- 2.4 The University will inform the appropriate Director, in confidence, of *all* instances of unacceptable research conduct involving externally funded researchers that have resulted in the allegations being substantiated.
- 2.5 The University has a Code of Practice on Whistleblowing relating to the treatment of whistleblowers under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998. This includes a clear statement that unacceptable research conduct is taken seriously by the University and that any member of staff raising *bona fide* concerns in good faith can do so confidentially, and without fear of suffering any detriment, but equally disciplinary procedures are in place to deal with malicious allegations. The Code of Practice also includes a clear indication of the procedures in which such *bona fide* concerns by staff may be brought to the attention of a designated individual within the institution.

### **3 PRINCIPLES FOR INVESTIGATION BY THE UNIVERSITY OF ALLEGATIONS OF UNACCEPTABLE RESEARCH CONDUCT**

- 3.1 The University has in place formal written procedures (contained within the general Disciplinary Procedures) for dealing with allegations of unacceptable research conduct against its staff and students. The University would, where appropriate, take legal advice on implementing these procedures to ensure that the procedures comply with all legal obligations for the conduct of such investigations from time to time in force.
- 3.2 The University endorses the following principles when investigating allegations of unacceptable research conduct:
  - the responsibilities of those dealing with the allegation must be clear and understood by all interested parties;

- measures are in place to ensure an impartial and independent investigation and to ensure that line management obligations or other interests of those dealing with the allegation do not conflict with these procedures;
- those undertaking research at the University are contractually obliged to participate in and comply with the procedures;
- the University will treat investigations of unacceptable research conduct confidentially;
- anyone accused of unacceptable research conduct should have the right to respond and to be accompanied by a person of his/her own choosing at any formal misconduct hearing;
- all interested parties will be informed of the allegation at an appropriate stage in the proceedings;
- the allegation will be dealt with in a fair and timely manner;
- proper records of the proceedings will be kept;
- the outcome will be made known as quickly as possible to all interested parties;
- anyone found guilty of unacceptable research conduct will have the right to an appeal;
- if appropriate, efforts will be made to restore the reputations of the accused party if the allegation is dismissed.

The appropriate general Disciplinary Procedures include guidance in respect of appeals against an investigation decision.

#### **4 INVOLVEMENT OF EXTERNAL FUNDING AGENCIES**

##### **4.1 Receipt of allegations**

External funding agencies may receive allegations of unacceptable research conduct made to them directly, rather than to an individual within the University of Aberdeen. The appropriate Director will contact an appropriate individual at the University of Aberdeen which will then be responsible for taking suitable action in line with its formal written procedures for handling allegations of unacceptable research conduct.

##### **4.2 Investigations by external funding agencies**

As stated above, it is the University's responsibility to investigate allegations of unacceptable research conduct made against its staff and students and this would be funding agencies preferred course of action in most cases. However, in exceptional cases, external funding agencies may wish to undertake their own investigation into alleged cases of research misconduct which concern their funded researchers (for example where the reputation of an external funding agency is at risk or where they are dissatisfied with the investigation undertaken by the University). Any investigations by an external funding agency would normally only be undertaken following consultation between the Appropriate Director of the external agency and the appropriate representative(s) of the University.

If an allegation of unacceptable research conduct is substantiated, an external funding agency may consider its own appropriate sanctions in addition to those applied by the University.

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