4. POLICY AND GUIDELINES ON GOOD RESEARCH CONDUCT &
STATEMENT ON HANDLING ALLEGATIONS OF UNACCEPTABLE RESEARCH CONDUCT

The following outlines the University policy and guidelines on good research conduct, and its formal statement on handling allegations of unacceptable research conduct.

4.1. Policy and Guidelines on Good Research conduct

4.1.1. Introduction

Research integrity applies throughout the research life cycle, from the initial idea or concept to the publication of research outcomes. These guidelines describe the standards of good research conduct which are required by the University and which are intended to satisfy the requirements of all funding bodies. They apply to all individuals involved in research, including visiting researchers, research support staff, students and research managers and administrators.

The onus is on 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, Deans of Research and Heads of Schools, the Graduate School and Supervisors.

The Policy and Guidelines will be reviewed as part of an annual review of this wider Handbook document by the Research Policy Committee to ensure they continue to reflect the highest integrity and rigour in research conduct, and to help in maintaining 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.

4.1.2. 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, deception or the fabrication 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 and to do so in a responsible and appropriate manner (Whistleblowing Policy).

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

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1 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.
4.1.3. Openness in Research

While recognising the need for researchers to protect their own research interests and any contractual obligations which the University may have, 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 grants access to data and materials through appropriate Data Transfer and Material Agreements. These will be arranged through Research and Innovation and researchers should contact their school Business Development Officer. 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 or a contractual obligation to the funder of the research. However, any such period of delay in publication should be kept to a minimum.

4.1.4. 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.

4.1.5. 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 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 should receive the University of Aberdeen Handbook for Research Ethics and Governance 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 on the University's Policy and Guidelines on Good Research Conduct at their induction and throughout their programme of study. It is a condition of their transition beyond their first year that they have been trained in good research practice and understand 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 Coordinators, Heads of School, Heads of Graduate School and College Postgraduate Officers).

4.1.6. 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 management or ownership. It is generally the case that the University will own the data, samples and results arising from research in the first instance, though there may be contractual arrangements with third parties which govern the 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 Research Records.

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 (e.g. a duplicate record stored on a separate drive). Please note that any records kept on a University managed drive (shared or home space) are regularly backed up as per the Backup Schedule here. Within Life Sciences and Medicine, all research staff should follow the Guidelines on the Storage and Backup of Electronic Data – staff login is required to access this document. These guidelines are in place to manage the storage and backup of all electronic data generated through research. They are also designed to ensure that researchers fulfil their obligations to funding bodies, for management of research data.

Guidance on retention periods can be found in the University Retention Schedules and taking account of guidelines published internally by the institution, and also externally, by funding bodies, scientific and learned societies, and other professional bodies, as relevant.

4.1.7. Ethical Practice in Research

All researchers must adhere to the University Framework for Research Ethics (see Section 3).

Research involving human participants

Where it is necessary to conduct research involving humans (including their tissue, organs or data) the University will conform to the highest standards of research ethics and governance and to relevant legislation, and will carry out its research with the utmost care and respect for human welfare and rights. This applies to all forms of research involving human participants, from clinical research to social science.

Research involving humans must normally take place under informed consent. Research participants must take part voluntarily and free of any coercion. All research staff and participants must normally be informed fully about the purpose and methodologies of the research, the associated risks of participation and the proposed uses of the research. For example, consent must be sought for any samples or data which might be used for future research.

Ethical consideration must be given to all research involving human participants or biological samples. Researchers should consult Section 4 of this document for general information on requirements for ethical approval, but it is expected that most cases will require full review by the relevant committee. 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.

Research involving animals

As noted in Section 3 of this Handbook, all research undertaken by the University which involves the use of animals must be fully compliant, with the Animal (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 (Amended 2012 following transposition of the European Directive 2010/63/EU on 1 January 2013 following its approval by the UK Parliament). Research in this area is governed institutionally by the Advisory Group to the Establishment Licence Holder and the Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Body (AWERB). AWERB is responsible for carrying out robust ethical review on all research proposals which are submitted to the
Home Office as part of a project licence application. Researchers must also consider throughout the lifecycle of any project in this area, from an early stage in the design their research, the opportunities for reduction, replacement and refinement of animal involvement (the 3Rs).

**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.

**4.1.8. 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 from the relevant Dean of Research as to which steps might be taken to minimise such risks. Researchers should also consider whether any of their research activities may be subject to counterterrorism legislation (see section xx Prevent).

**4.1.9. Publication, Authorship Practice and Inventorship**

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 normally 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.

Where there is a dispute between contributing authors in relation to authorship, the issue should be referred to the relevant research lead or head of research group by way of seeking resolution between the affected parties. If this is not considered appropriate, for whatever reasons, the issue should be referred to the relevant Dean of Research.

The University of Aberdeen must be correctly named in the author contact details for any 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.

Many funders require acknowledgement of funding as part of the terms and conditions of funding, and may insist on a particular format on how the grant reference numbers should be rendered.

It should be noted that the criteria for deciding who should be considered an inventor on any patent application are quite different to those normally applied in determining authorship of a scientific research paper. Although there are no actual rules laid down in law, there are a number of specific approaches generally applied within the UK. If there is any doubt about what the invention(s) may be, the matter should be discussed with the Technology Transfer Team within Research and Innovation who will engage an appropriate patent agent for their expert input.

In general terms, an inventor will not usually include anyone who:

- Simply carried out work under instruction (regardless of how much skill and effort this took) particularly if the work took no initiative and required no modifications to carry out as instructed;
- Had no part in the research, regardless of whether or not they funded it, or were associated with it in other ways, or owned the facilities which were used in the research, or published earlier relevant work, or contributed very general work or assistance;
- Has been a Project Manager or Supervisor but did not contribute technically to the actual invention.

Every individual found to have actually devised any invention covered by the patent application should
be named as an inventor. There is no significance in the order that the names are published in a patent specification.

4.2. Statement on the Handling of Allegations of Unacceptable Research conduct

This statement provides a detailed definition of “Unacceptable Research Conduct” and details the University's processes for dealing with allegations of unacceptable research conduct. It should be read in conjunction with the University's Policy and Guidelines on Good Research Conduct (above). 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.

The University maintains that the primary responsibility for ensuring that no unacceptable research conduct occurs rests primarily with individual researchers. However, it also recognises the importance of its role as an institution in sustaining research integrity, and this is reflected in the processes outlined below.

4.2.1. Definition of Unacceptable Research Conduct

The UUK Concordat to Support Research Integrity notes that unacceptable research conduct is characterised as behaviour or actions that fall short of the standards of ethics, research and scholarship required to ensure that the integrity of research is upheld.

Unacceptable Research Conduct can take many forms, including the following (as defined by the University):

- **Fabrication**, including the creation of false data and other aspects of research, including documentation and participant consent and presenting such outputs as if they were real

- **Falsification**, including the inappropriate manipulation and/or selection of data, imagery and/or consents

- **Plagiarism** comprises the misappropriation or use of others’ ideas, intellectual property or work (written or otherwise), without acknowledgement or permission. 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:
  
  - wherever possible, deposit data permanently within a national collection and link to relevant Pure entry
  - 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
Further information on electronic data storage can be found in the IT Services web site under Services for Researchers (See Data Storage and Archiving)

- Financial impropriety in accounting for research funds, intentional unauthorised use

- Failure to meet ethical, legal and professional obligations; for example (noting most of these examples are also covered elsewhere under this definition), failure to declare competing interests; misrepresentation of involvement or authorship; misrepresentation of interests; breach of confidentiality; lack of informed consent; misuse of personal data

- Disclosure or removal of, or damage to, research-related property of the University or of another, including apparatus, materials, writings, data, samples, 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 disclose competing interests
  
  - failure to follow established protocols

- Improper Dealings with Allegations of Unacceptable Research Conduct

  - failure to address possible infringements, such attempts to cover up misconduct and reprisals against whistle-blowers

  - failure to deal appropriately with malicious allegations, which should be handled formally as breaches of good conduct

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
4.2.2. Reporting Allegations of Unacceptable Research Conduct

All stakeholders in research, including all academic staff, technical support staff, administrative support staff and students, have responsibility for reporting any allegation of unacceptable research conduct. Any formal allegation must be made in writing to the University Secretary (further details given under 2.3). Where a member of staff would like to discuss any allegation of unacceptable research conduct prior to making a formal complaint, they should, in the first instance, contact their line manager. If the staff member would initially be more comfortable discussing the issue with another party, they should contact one of the following:

- The Chair of the appropriate Research Ethics Review Board/Committee
- The appropriate Dean of Research
- The Vice Principal for Research and Knowledge Exchange

The University has a Policy and Procedure on Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblowing) relating to the treatment of whistle-blowers 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. Disciplinary procedures are in place to deal with malicious allegations. The Policy and Procedure on Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblowing) 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.

2.3. Position and Process for Dealing with Allegations of Unacceptable Research Conduct

The University has primary responsibility for, and 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 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 against 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. 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.

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.

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.

4.2.4. Principles for Investigation of Allegations of Unacceptable Research Conduct
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.

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.

4.2.5. Involvement of External Funding Agencies

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.

Likewise there will also be cases where the University might have a responsibility to comply
with reporting requirements to external funding agencies on the outcomes of any
investigation relating to unacceptable research conduct involving the use of such funds.

For example, the University has agreed a specific statement with the
United States Public Health Service in order to be eligible to receive United States National Institute of
Health funding.

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.