

Guidelines for handling allegations of misconduct in research

1. The University of Stirling (“our” or “us” or “we”) has as its defining characteristic the commitment to being a research-led institution. To remain research-led, it is imperative that we safeguard integrity in all aspects of our research activity. Good practice encompasses every aspect of a piece of research, from the way it is planned to the way the results are disseminated and applied. Research should be undertaken in keeping with the core elements of research integrity: honesty; rigour; transparency and open communication; care and respect and accountability. The University of Stirling expects its employees, research staff and students to act with the highest professional standards.
2. Research misconduct will be handled very seriously by the University. It is both intrinsically undesirable and damaging to our staff, students, associates, sponsors and those taking part in research studies. This document applies to allegations of research misconduct involving a person who, at the time of the allegation, was employed by, the University of Stirling. We expect that all of our external partners and collaborators act with the highest professional standards. If allegations of research misconduct are made against an external partner, it is expected that this allegation will be handled in accordance with their own appropriate procedures.
3. It is the responsibility of all members of the University to report observed, suspected or apparent research misconduct.

Purpose of the Guidelines

4. The purpose of the guidelines for handling allegations of misconduct in research are:
 - To allow individuals to raise legitimate concerns relating to allegations of research misconduct
 - To provide a robust, transparent and fair process for dealing with allegations of research misconduct
 - To demonstrate that any allegation of research misconduct will be taken seriously by the University

Definition of Research Misconduct

5. Research misconduct is characterised as behaviour or actions that fall short of the standards of ethics, research and scholarship required to ensure the integrity of research is upheld¹.

¹ Universities UK The Concordat to support research integrity October 2019

6. Unacceptable conduct includes the following

- **Fabrication** – the creation of false results, other outputs or aspects of research, including documentation and participant consent, and presenting and/or recording them as if they were real
- **Falsification** – the inappropriate manipulation and/or selection of research processes, materials, equipment, data, imagery and/or consents;
- **Plagiarism** – Using others’ ideas, intellectual property or work (written or otherwise) without permission or acknowledgement;
- **Failure to meet** – the legal, ethical and professional obligations, for example:
 - Not observing legal, ethical and other requirements for human research participants, animal subjects, or for the protection of the environment
 - Breach of duty of care for humans involved in research, including failure to obtain appropriate informed consent
 - Misuse of personal data, including inappropriate disclosures of the identity of research participants and other breaches of confidentiality
 - Improper conduct in peer-review of research proposals, results or manuscripts submitted for publication. This includes failure to disclose conflicts of interest; inadequate disclosure of limited competence; misappropriation of the content of material and breach of confidentiality or abuse of material provided in confidence for the purposes of peer review.
- **Misrepresentation of:**
 - data, including the suppression of relevant results/data or knowingly, recklessly or by gross negligence presenting a flawed interpretation of data
 - involvement, inappropriate claims to authorship or attribution of work and denial of authorship/attribution to persons who have made an appropriate contribution
 - interests, including failure to declare competing interests of researchers or funders of a study
 - qualifications, experience and/or credentials
 - publication history, through undisclosed duplication of publication, including undisclosed duplicate submission of manuscripts for publication
- **Improper dealing with allegations of research misconduct** – including failing to address possible infringements, attempts to cover up misconduct or reprisals against whistle-blowers, or failing to adhere appropriately to agreed procedures in the investigation of alleged research

misconduct accepted as a condition of funding. Improper dealing with allegations of misconduct includes the inappropriate censoring of parties through the use of legal instruments, such as non-disclosure agreements.

Named Person

7. The Deputy Principal (Research) is the named contact point for confidential liaison for any person wishing to raise concerns.
8. The Research Integrity and Governance Manager is the first point of contact for anyone wanting more information on matters of research integrity.

Assessment of allegations of research misconduct

Informal Enquiries

9. Individuals within the University (staff, students or affiliates) who believe that they have recognised a case of research misconduct may attempt to resolve this issue informally, with the individual concerned or with the Dean of Faculty.
10. Individuals who are considering making a complaint but are not sure whether the complaint constitutes research misconduct should discuss the matter with their Principal Investigator or the Dean of Faculty in the first instance.
11. If informal resolution is not possible or unsuccessful, a formal allegation of research misconduct should be submitted in writing, with all evidence available, to the Deputy Principal (Research). In the event that the allegation concerns activities of illegal or criminal nature, steps will be taken by the Deputy Principal (Research) to inform the appropriate authorities.
12. The Deputy Principal (Research) will inform the Executive Director of Research and Innovation Services², of the allegation and request that a preliminary investigation be undertaken. The preliminary investigation will determine whether the matter may be resolved or whether a formal investigation is necessary.
13. During an initial assessment by the Executive Director of Research and Innovation Services an allegation of research misconduct can be classified into one of four categories.
 - Allegation not upheld: If the allegation of research misconduct is not upheld then the reasons for not pursuing the allegation will be communicated to the complainant in writing (this may

² Or an alternative, nominated by the Deputy Principal for Research, to initiate and supervise procedures in their absence.

include, for example, frivolous/mistaken allegations or informal resolution).

- Dangerous/Illegal Activity/Health and Safety risk: Such allegations warrant immediate action and may fall outside of the definition of research misconduct.
 - Outside of the research misconduct definition: If it is deemed that misconduct has occurred, that does not relate to research, which, however, still contravenes the policies and statutes of the University, the Executive Director of Research and Innovation Services will communicate to the complainant;
 - Why the allegation will not be investigated further through this channel,
 - Which complaints process is appropriate for handling the allegation (if any), and
 - To whom the allegation should be reported.
 - Research misconduct case: Where allegations cannot be discounted action will be undertaken in line with the appropriate University disciplinary procedure.
14. The Executive Director of Research and Innovation Services will confirm whether the University has any contractual/legal obligations towards a funder concerning any aspects of the investigation and ensure these obligations are fully met and fulfilled.