

Procedure for reporting and investigating research misconduct

Research at Birkbeck

1 Birkbeck, University of London is a research-intensive university. Central to our mission is the aim of maintaining and developing excellence in research and providing the highest quality research training in all our subject areas, and also of making available the results of research and the expertise acquired, through teaching, publication, partnerships with other organisations and the promotion of civic and public debate. It is embedded in the culture of Birkbeck that we should carry out excellent research across the entire range of disciplines represented in the College's faculties; that this research should range across 'blue skies' scientific work, cutting edge scholarship in the arts, humanities and social sciences, and highly applicable interventions in technology, social policy and artistic work; and that we seek to offer research-led and research-informed teaching at all levels.

2 Birkbeck's Research Integrity Code of Practice defines and promotes a culture of good practice in research, demonstrating the College's commitment to a culture and environment where high standards of personal and professional conduct are encouraged and expected.

The term "Research" refers to all aspects of the research process including developing research questions, preparing applications for research grants and contracts, literature review, research project design, recruiting research participants, generating data, data recording and analysis, writing-up and publishing and other forms of disseminating results.

Principles of good research

3 Birkbeck expects all members of the College, including staff and students and anyone conducting research on College premises or using College facilities, to observe the highest standards of professionalism, integrity, independent thought and application of ethical principles in the conduct of their research.

4 To foster and maintain its research culture, Birkbeck expects all researchers to understand the expected standards of rigour and integrity relevant to their research and to maintain the highest standards of rigour and integrity in their work at all times. Researchers are also expected to understand and observe these principles:

- Maintaining open and honest professional standards
- Exercising accountability in research
- Ensuring leadership in their personal research and cooperation in research groupings
- Taking special account of the needs of inexperienced researchers
- Ensuring training and supervision for researchers
- Planning and conducting research in accordance with the requirements of funders and all relevant College and external codes of practice, legislation and regulatory bodies
- Following best current ethical practice
- Exercising care and respect for participants in research projects
- Ensuring data is stored, shared, preserved and disposed of in an appropriate and responsible manner
- Documenting and making available research data
- Ensuring the results of research are openly accessible

- Acknowledging the contribution of others
- Taking appropriate measures to protect intellectual property
- Managing conflicts of interest in line with the Colleges policies
- Taking action if research misconduct is suspected.

The College undertakes to provide the necessary training to all researchers to enable them to understand and observe these principles.

Research misconduct

5 Research misconduct can take many forms, including:

- fabrication: making up results, other outputs (for example, artefacts) or aspects of research, including documentation and participant consent, and presenting and/or recording them as if they were real
- falsification: inappropriately manipulating and/or selecting research processes, materials, equipment, data, imagery and/or consents
- fraud
- plagiarism: using other people's ideas, intellectual property or work (written or otherwise) without acknowledgement or permission
- Mismanagement or inadequate preservation of data or materials – including interim results.
- Breach of duty or care (whether 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; unacceptable risk to or treatment of participants including 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; 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 of care for 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 meet: legal, ethical and professional obligations, for example:
 - not observing legal, ethical and other requirements for human research participants, animal subjects, or human organs or tissue used in research, or for the protection of the environment
 - 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 clearly 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 suppression of relevant results/data or knowingly, recklessly or by gross negligence presenting a flawed interpretation of data
 - involvement, including 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 misconduct: failing to address possible infringements, such as attempts to cover up misconduct and 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

Research misconduct does not include:

- Honest errors in research design, methodology or the interpretation of results.
- Consideration of unpopular or controversial ideas or methods.
- Challenging received understanding or consensus.
- Poor quality research, unless it involves the intention to mislead or deceive.

6. The College will take seriously any allegation of research misconduct. Plagiarism, deception or the fabrication or falsification of results is regarded as a serious disciplinary offence. All researchers are expected to report cases of suspected misconduct or malpractice and to do so in a responsible and appropriate manner in accordance with the College's procedures.

Researchers will:

- act in good faith with regard to allegations of research misconduct, whether in making allegations or in being required to participate in an investigation, and take reasonable steps, working with employers as appropriate, to ensure the recommendations made by formal research misconduct investigation panels are implemented
- handle potential instances of research misconduct in an appropriate manner; this includes reporting misconduct to employers, funders and professional, statutory and regulatory bodies as circumstances require
- declare and act accordingly to manage conflicts of interest

When the College receives an allegation of research misconduct it will:

- act with no detriment to whistle-blowers who have made allegations of misconduct in good faith, or in the public interest, including taking reasonable steps to safeguard their reputation. This includes avoiding the inappropriate use of legal instruments, such as non-disclosure agreements

- take reasonable steps to resolve any issues found during the investigation. This can include imposing sanctions, requesting a correction of the research record and reporting any action to regulatory and statutory bodies, research participants, funders or other professional bodies as circumstances, contractual obligations and statutory requirements dictate
- take reasonable steps to safeguard the reputation of individuals who are exonerated
- provide information on investigations of research misconduct to funders of research and to professional and/or statutory bodies as required by their conditions of grant and other legal, professional and statutory obligations
- support our researchers in providing appropriate information when they are required to make reports to professional and/or statutory bodies.

7. The College will take seriously any allegation of research misconduct. At the same time the College is committed to protecting its staff from malicious accusations. Plagiarism, deception or the fabrication or falsification of results is regarded as a serious disciplinary offence.

All members of the College are expected to report cases of suspected misconduct or malpractice and to do so in a responsible and appropriate manner in accordance with this procedure.

Anyone outside the institution wishing to report a case of research misconduct should also follow the information provided in this procedure. Further informal advice is available as described in paragraph 9 below.

This procedure applies to all researchers in the College (including employees, undergraduate and postgraduate students undertaking research projects, and honorary/visiting staff) and to anyone conducting research on the College premises or using College facilities.

The College may also receive allegations of Research Misconduct where the College is asked to apply this procedure to research which was undertaken at the College but the specific researcher(s) is(are) no longer employed by the College. In this scenario the College will undertake three reasonable attempts to contact the researcher cited in the allegation (in writing to the address given to HR at the point of departure, using professional contact details easily found through an internet search such as an email address at a different university from a web page which confirms CV details, and using professional social media such as LinkedIn). If it is not possible to make contact with the individual in this case the allegation will be investigated in good faith and to the best of the Colleges abilities in absentia.

It should also be noted that there are other practical limitations when investigating these historic cases of misconduct which may mean, for example, that these investigations take a longer time than the process described below and/or it is not possible to progress outcomes beyond noting what occurred.

8. Any investigation of research misconduct undertaken by the College will itself maintain the highest standards of integrity, accuracy and fairness; any investigations will be undertaken with sensitivity and confidentiality and with the presumption of innocence.

9 Anyone who suspects that research misconduct is taking place or has taken place should raise it as soon as possible. Normally, staff should first discuss their concerns with their line manager and students with their supervisor. However, the College recognises that misconduct in research is a serious matter and it may be difficult to discuss this with a line manager/supervisor and that a suspicion of research misconduct may originate outside the College. Informal advice can be sought in confidence at any time from the Head of Research Strategy Support. The Head of Research Strategy Support can provide advice on whether or not the suspicious event or activity constitutes (or may constitute) research misconduct, other possible avenues for mediation and resolution (if/where appropriate) including informal discussion, arbitration or dispute resolution, advice about other mechanisms which could be used e.g. to investigate the behaviour of research students, and/or the details of the process of making a formal allegation of research misconduct.

10 There is no time limit on how long an individual can seek confidential advice from the Head of Research Strategy Support before deciding whether or not to formally raise an allegation of research misconduct, and the College recognises it may take some time to consider all the issues and that both the individual raising the query and the Head of Research Strategy Support may need to seek additional advice elsewhere before a decision can be made. However, it is also recognised that the Head of Research Strategy Support has a duty of care to ensure that this process is not needlessly drawn out and that the individual is in a position to move to the next phase as quickly as is practical.

11 If an individual has raised concerns of research misconduct with their line manager or supervisor, then the line manager or supervisor can also seek informal advice from the Head of Research Strategy Support as defined in points 9 and 10 above. Other intermediaries (such as Executive Dean, Associate Dean for Research /Postgraduate Research, Head of School, Trade Union representative or officer of the Students Union or any other appropriate third party) may also follow this process. In this case, advice can also be sought about whether the intermediary is an appropriate person to raise a formal complaint and what other support mechanisms can be put in place if this is not appropriate.

12 Formal concerns about research misconduct should be raised with the Chair of the College Ethics Committee. If the Chair of the College Ethics Committee has a conflict of interest in relation to the matter, the concerns should be raised with the Deputy Secretary (Governance). The person making the allegation should put it in writing or email and include supporting evidence where possible.

13. Under certain circumstances the College may choose to initiate an investigation into research misconduct in the absence of a specific complaint from an individual; however, the process described in this procedure will still be followed, with an officer from the College (who is fully briefed and understands why the College has chosen to follow this route) taking on the role of the complainant.

14. If sufficient evidence has been presented to warrant investigation, the Chair of the College Ethics Committee (or the Deputy Secretary (Governance)) will formally acknowledge receipt of the allegation and notify the respondent that the allegation has been received with an explanation of the initial next steps in the process (emphasising that the initial stage is merely to assess whether or not the allegation constitutes research

misconduct) and if so whether or not there is evidence that research misconduct has or may have occurred.

15 The Chair of the College Ethics Committee will convene a screening panel to determine whether the allegations constitute evidence of research misconduct within the definition of research misconduct detailed above. The panel will comprise the PVC (Research) or their nominated representative, a suitable representative from HR and a senior researcher from an appropriate discipline (from within or outside the College). The Screening Panel should also ask the Head of Research Strategy Support if informal advice had been sought and any investigations undertaken, The Head of Research Strategy Support should respect that queries come in confidence and should only release information which is materially pertinent to the Screening Panels investigation The panel should operate under the principles of fairness, confidentiality, transparency, thoroughness, prevention of detriment and balance.

16 The screening panel does not determine whether misconduct occurred or who might be responsible; its role is to determine whether or not the allegation constitutes research misconduct and, if so whether or not there is evidence that research misconduct has or may have occurred.

It should be noted that, in more complex cases, or more than one meeting may be required. It should also be noted that in questions relating to more complex cases there may be circumstances where the screening panel feel it is necessary to ask the complainant and/or respondent for some additional information.

17. The screening panel should produce a full set of confidential minutes of their deliberations plus a summary which includes both their decisions and the reasons behind them for wider use in the process. This summary should provide enough information to allow for a transparent process but reflect the need for confidentiality and anonymity.

18. If the screening panel decides the allegations do not constitute research misconduct or that the evidence provided does not support the conclusion that research misconduct has or may have occurred, the allegations will be dismissed at this stage.

The result of the Screening Panel will be communicated to both the complainant and the respondent. If the complainant believes that their allegation has been misunderstood or that key evidence has been overlooked then they should seek advice from the Head of Research Strategy Support about the best way to proceed (as described in paragraphs 9 and 10).

In some cases the screening panel may recommend further investigation into other actions that may need to be taken, for example that a correction needs to be made to the research record, or that training or mentorship in a specific area should be strengthened.

19. If the screening panel decides there is a case to answer, then they should provide any necessary advice to the College about how to ensure a fair and accurate investigative process. It should be noted that in making these recommendations the panel is not being asked to make any judgements about the likely outcome of the formal inquiry, merely for advice about the conduct of the formal inquiry. For example, if there is a risk to individuals or that evidence might be destroyed, the panel may recommend that the College takes

action to secure relevant records and material, request the temporary suspension of an experiment or the respondent on full pay, or temporary barring of the respondent from part or all of the College premises and/or temporary restriction of contact with other staff at the College or partner organisations. The respondent should be reassured that these measures are not part of any disciplinary action but are essential to ensure the allegations of misconduct can be properly investigated. The respondent should be given copies of any records or material that are secured.

20. If, having reviewed the allegation, the screening panel considers there is a risk of harm to staff, participants or other persons, suffering to animals or negative environmental consequences, they should take immediate action to eliminate this risk. If necessary, appropriate legal or regulatory authorities should be notified, in consultation with the College Secretary.

21. The Chair of the College Ethics Committee will communicate the conclusion of the screening panel (in writing or by email) to the complainant and respondent. Normally, no more than 25 working days should have elapsed between the Chair of the College Ethics Committee acknowledging receipt of the allegation and this communication to the person making the allegation.

The Chair of the College Ethics Committee should emphasise to all parties that the information is confidential and that the allegation has either been reviewed by the screening panel and dismissed or is to be investigated, but is as yet unproven and that the presumption of innocence stands. In this case, the complainant and respondent should be given a summary of the allegations in writing and the synopsis of the screening panels considerations and its conclusions and, if a formal investigation is to be instigated, a copy of this procedure, a list of the names of individuals only referred to by job titles in this document, and an initial timetable for the next phase of the investigation. Alternatively, this communication may set out the reason why the allegation cannot be investigated using this procedure and what, if any, process might be appropriate for addressing the concerns raised.

22. If the allegation is deemed to provide evidence of research misconduct, within the definition of research misconduct above, the Chair of the College Ethics Committee will inform, in confidence, the following that a substantiated allegation of research misconduct has taken place, including the date of the allegation, the identity of the complainant and the respondent and details of sources of funding and collaborators for the research in question:

- Vice-Chancellor
- Head of HR
- Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research)
- Director of Finance
- Head of the Research Office

If Birkbeck is not the primary employer of the respondent, or if the allegation involves work undertaken as part of a collaboration, the Chair of the College Ethics Committee will normally contact the respondent's primary employer and/or the primary employer of the project collaborators to inform them of the allegation. The Colleges preferred route in these cases is to follow the principles laid out in the Russell Group Research Integrity Statement of Cooperation. In the event this is not acceptable to our partners in these cases, The Chair of the College Ethics Committee will seek approval from the Vice-Chancellor,

Director of HR, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research), Director of Finance and Head of the Research Office before an alternative investigation route is approved by the College.

23. If there are contractual obligations linked to the research project that require prescribed steps to be taken in the event of substantiated allegations of research misconduct, the Chair of the College Ethics Committee will work with the Head of the Research Office to ensure these are fulfilled, also liaising with HR as necessary to ensure that the rights of the complainant and respondent and the integrity of the investigation are not compromised. If the respondent is funded by, or is known to act as a reviewer for, one of the UK Research Councils, the Head of the Research Office will notify the relevant Research Council at this point.

24. If there is a case to answer, an investigating panel should be convened comprising an Executive Dean from a faculty which is not the faculty of the respondent or complainant (Chair), a suitable member of the College's professoriate (who is not a member of the faculty of the respondent or complainant), a senior representative from HR and two senior researchers from the discipline who are not members of the College. None of these people should have been involved in the screening panel who made the initial assessment of the allegation. The panel should operate under the principles of fairness, transparency, thoroughness, confidentiality, prevention of detriment and balance and should reflect equality and diversity considerations as much as is practical.

25. Both the respondent and the complainant may raise any concerns with the composition of the investigating panel to the Executive Dean who is chairing the panel. These concerns should be taken seriously; however, neither the respondent nor the complainant has the right of veto.

26. The investigating panel may wish to contact the UK Research Integrity Office for advice and guidance on investigating allegations of research misconduct.

27. The investigating panel has the right to call witnesses and review whatever evidence they deem appropriate. In addition, they should review the original complaint, a written response to it from the respondent (plus any supporting evidence provided with either statement); any relevant background information; and the confidential minutes of the screening panel phase.

28. The panel must hold a formal hearing in which the both the respondent and the claimant have the opportunity to set out and discuss their case.

29. The investigating panel should also consider whether to recommend action is taken under the College's disciplinary procedures against anyone who they feel has made frivolous, vexatious and/or malicious allegations of misconduct in research. Those who have made allegations in good faith should not be penalised.

30. All parties will be mindful that the panel operates under the presumption of innocence, and that there is a need for discretion and confidentiality to protect all parties and as such will only call those witnesses who are deemed to be absolutely necessary to the case, and will only disclose as much information to these witnesses as is necessary to conduct a full and fair investigation. However, the need to conduct a full and fair investigation outweighs all other considerations.

31. The investigating panel should endeavour to complete its investigation within 50 working days of being formally convened, and all parties should be notified as early as possible if the process is expected to take longer than this. If an investigation does take longer than 50 working days to conclude then the College should receive an interim report from the panel at this stage and then every 50 days thereafter. These reports should be sent to the Chair of the College Ethics Committee.

32. Once the investigating panel has completed its investigation and delivered their final report, the outcome will be disseminated to the respondent and complainant as described above for the screening panel part of the process. The Chair of the College Ethics Committee will also notify everyone called as a witness that the proceedings have been completed.

33. If the investigating panel have found that there is no case to answer then the case is dismissed.

34. If the investigating panel have found that either the case against the respondent has been proven or that the complainant made allegations which were frivolous, vexatious and/or malicious then the Chair of the College Ethics Committee, in liaison with HR and line managers, will initiate remedial training, mentoring and monitoring, or refer the matter to the appropriate College disciplinary procedure, normally directly to the formal stage, according to the recommendations of the investigating panel.

35. The investigating panel may also instruct the college to undertake other activities to ensure the research misconduct is resolved effectively, for example suggesting changes to the Colleges ethical approvals to ensure participant safety (or suggesting other procedural or operational issues which should be reviewed), correcting the research record, making a report (with relevant confidentiality) to external bodies such as regulators, initiating further investigations into other possible misconduct etc.

36. The disciplinary procedures (including the appeals procedures) for academic staff, the Vice Chancellor and the Clerk to the Governors, are set out in Statute 27.

39. The [disciplinary procedures \(including appeals procedures\) for professional and support, research, technical and teaching and scholarship staff](#) are available on the College website.

40. The [disciplinary procedures \(including appeals procedures\) for students](#) are available on the College website.

41. The officers and panels involved in reviewing and hearing disciplinary cases under these procedures should consider the following potential outcomes when considering cases involving allegations of research misconduct:

- The allegations are mistaken, frivolous, vexatious and/or malicious.
- There has been misconduct which is serious enough to merit disciplinary action.

- The allegations have some substance but due to a lack of intent to deceive or due to their relatively minor nature should be addressed through education, training or other non-disciplinary approach.

42. Normally, the officers and panels involved in the formal disciplinary procedure should not have been a member of either the screening or the investigating panel.

Approved by College Ethics Committee March 2022
Next review due March 2024