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# Policy Statement on Professional Integrity in Research

Everyone involved in research in an institution of higher education owes a duty of accountability to society, to their profession, to their institution and to the funders of the research, to accept full responsibility for the integrity of their own conduct of that research, and for the activities of any staff or students under their direction. This extends to accountability for the ethical basis of the research, for the safety of all involved in the research process, for the probity of the financial management of the project, and for seeking to provide optimum value for the public or private funds invested in the project. These responsibilities extend in turn to ensuring the effective management of any agreed timetable for the project, together with the timely provision of any tangible outcomes scheduled to be delivered to an external sponsor.

***Research-related misconduct as unacceptable to the consensus on professional standards***

Misconduct can arise for a variety of reasons. One relatively recent development is that universities have been subjected over the last decade to extraordinary pressures to become more competitive in research. With such competitive pressure to be both innovative and productive, professional integrity risks becoming a casualty, and misconduct may be the regrettable result.

The comments which follow on examples of research-related misconduct illustrate instances which are unacceptable to the consensus amongst staff on the standards and values to which they wish to subscribe. The extensive recent experience of the United States Public Health Service in addressing the issue of misconduct in science is informative. The University commends to its staff the recommendations made in 1995 by the US Commission on Research Integrity (CRI) to Congress and the Secretary of Health and Human Services (Ryan 1995:34-5).

The specific examples of research-related misconduct given in the CRI recommendations include the following: misappropriation of someone else’s intellectual research property by plagiarism or breach of confidence as a reviewer; interference by theft, sequestration or damage of other people’s research-related property; misrepresentation by deception or lying; obstruction, including withholding, destroying or falsifying evidence; giving false testimony or influencing witnesses; and failing to comply with statutory or institutional regulations. The University believes that all the instances of misconduct exemplified above would be unacceptable to it staff.

Further examples which are not included in the CRI definitions include failure to declare or resolve a conflict of personal interest, breach of confidentiality required by external contracts, and false accounting and piracy (the deliberate commercial exploitation of ideas from others without acknowledgement). This final offence of piracy is mentioned by the Royal College of Physicians in their 1991 report on fraud and misconduct in research.

**Conflicts of Interest**

Conflicts of interest pose potential problems of professional integrity. There are four main types of conflict of interest that members of staff engaged in research should keep in mind. These are examined below. Some are obvious, but others are more insidious and merit special attention. Prior disclosure and discussion of any perceived risk of conflict of interest is the professional and responsible way to avoid such risks maturing into problems.

*Conflict of interest in competing commitments such as consultancy*

Conflicts of commitment result from competition for the activities of the member of staff between the University as full-time employer and some other shorter-term employer. Where individual members of staff hold a full-time appointment, they are deemed to be working exclusively for the University. Engaging in other paid work such as consultancy and lecturing on short courses is acceptable under the terms set out in the Policy on Consultancy Practices.

*Conflict of interest and influence on decisions*

Conflicts of interest may involve the risk of abuse of influence, where the individual member of staff stands to gain personally or financially from some University activity. Examples include situations where members of staff who are in a position to influence the outcome of procurement decisions by the University have an undeclared financial or other interest in the purchase. The risk of undeclared interest also includes the interest of the family of the member of staff. This also extends to any undeclared interest in influencing appointments or promotions.

*Conflict of interest and privileged access to information*

Conflict of interest may involve the risk of abuse of privileged access, where a member of staff transmits University-supported ideas, products, research results, materials or other confidential information to someone outside the University for financial or personal gain, without due authorisation.

*Conflict of interest arising from ex gratia payments*

The fourth type of conflict of interest arises from the acceptance of gifts or money from anyone with whom the University does (or may do) business, under circumstances which could be seen as influencing the actions of the member of staff.

***Disclosure of conflicts of interest***

Where members of staff think that there is any risk of a conflict of interest arising in their activities, they should disclose this fully to their Head of Resource Centre. When Heads of Resource Centre are personally involved in any conflict of interest, they should disclose the risk to the Vice Chancellor. In all cases of potential conflicts of interest, written agreement should be obtained before any commitment is made.