

Russell Group Statement of Cooperation in respect of cross-institutional research misconduct allegations

1. Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of The Russell Group is to provide strategic direction, policy development and communications for 24 major research-intensive universities in the UK; we aim to ensure that policy development in a wide range of issues relating to higher education is underpinned by a robust evidence base and a commitment to civic responsibility, improving life chances, raising aspirations and contributing to economic prosperity and innovation. We welcome the opportunity to provide evidence to this inquiry.
- 1.2 A Statement of Cooperation in respect of cross-institutional research misconduct allegations has been developed by the Russell Group Research Integrity Forum on behalf of Russell Group universities. This Forum was established in 2013 and is a network of the professionals with lead responsibility within their universities for supporting the efforts of their researcher communities to foster research integrity (also known as good practice in research or the responsible conduct of research).
- 1.3 The text of the Statement is at Annex A.

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Annex A

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Introduction

1. This Statement of Cooperation acts as a public acknowledgement of the principles agreed between the Russell Group Universities¹ in respect of managing investigations of alleged research misconduct. It also sets out the desired standards for cross-institutional investigations between Russell Group members and other universities and/or research organisations (including those outside the UK).
2. This Statement is intended as a set of principles regarding the approach to *managing the review* of cross-institutional research misconduct allegations. It is not intended to direct how the review process itself is conducted as this is dictated by the relevant institutions policies.
3. **Note:** The term 'investigation' is used in its broadest sense and refers to the whole process, from receipt of an allegation to completion of the process.

Purpose

4. Institutions have a responsibility to properly consider all allegations of potential research misconduct, in order to ensure the integrity of research undertaken in their name.
5. Investigating allegations of research misconduct is a complex, challenging and highly sensitive process that, because of the risk of lasting and damaging effects on careers and reputations, impacts upon the emotional and mental wellbeing of those involved and others associated with the work, including those involved with the investigation process. It is therefore essential that the process is managed thoroughly and efficiently, in a timely manner, and with due care and regard for the wellbeing of all individuals. This includes providing clarity regarding their right to confidentiality and the extent to which this might be overridden by an institution's duty to uphold the integrity of research carried out in its name.
6. The process of considering allegations of research misconduct becomes more challenging when investigations cross institutional boundaries; such as when individuals (staff members or students) move to another institution, or a staff member or project is based at multiple institutions. These factors naturally increase the complexity of the process as well as potentially extend the time frame for completion. Institutions have a responsibility to work together towards an efficient conclusion of the matter, while ensuring the integrity of the process.

Objectives

7. When in receipt of an allegation of research misconduct that crosses institutional boundaries Russell Group members will:
 - Endeavour to ensure that allegations are considered fully, proportionately and fairly;

¹ <http://russellgroup.ac.uk/about/our-universities/>

- Maintain respectful cooperation and communication between all institutions involved;
- Be open and transparent while ensuring that legal obligations and duty of care to staff are maintained;
- Avoid unnecessary duplication;
- Be supportive to enable each institution to meet their responsibilities in respect of reviewing misconduct allegations, as well as the responsibilities they bear as an employer of any individual against whom allegations are being considered;
- Ensure that all individuals involved, affected institutions and relevant research funders are kept apprised of progress, as required.

8. To support this, when allegations arise, members of the Russell Group will:

- Contact the party institution(s);
- Agree from the outset whether it would be most appropriate for a single institutional process, separate processes, or a combination of processes to be followed.
- Where a single institutional process is to be followed, agree what involvement the other institutions will have in the process (for example, providing observers or panel members, approving Terms of Reference of any formal investigation panel);
- Where appropriate, agree a lead institution, with clear lines of responsibility for and within each institution, including contact points;
- Contact relevant funders (at the stage required by the funder) and other third parties who may need to be notified (e.g. regulators, hospital trusts) to inform them of an allegation/investigation;
- Agree clear lines of communication between the institutions for both during and after the review process, including contact points and agreements on relevant data sharing;
- Agree clear lines and points of communication during and after the review process, both to those involved in the process, as well as those affected, such as funders (in accordance with funders' policies), journals and other third parties as necessary. This would include agreeing what information is shared, as well as with and by whom it is shared, prior to any information sharing (with due regard for responsibilities under relevant data protection and employment legislation and any contractual agreements).
- Agree timescales regarding the investigation process as well as agreed points of communication as stated above, including informing the relevant institutions and individuals of any need to extend timelines.