**Research integrity concordat: HEFCE Consultation on proposed implementation from 2013-14**

December 2012 | ref: 2012/32

**Executive summary of the** [**HEFCE consultation document**](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/hefce/content/pubs/2012/201232/Research%20integrity%20concordat%20consultation.pdf)

**Purpose**

1. It is proposed that higher education institutions (HEIs) eligible to receive public funding for research through the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) should comply with a research integrity concordat published earlier this year.This consultation invites comments on whether compliance should become a mandatory requirement for HEIs, and how this might best be monitored.

**Key points**

2. Research integrity refers to carrying out research to the highest standards of professionalism and rigour. It is secured when individual researchers, institutions and funding bodies work together to create effective systems and processes for ensuring that all the research for which they are responsible is conducted to such standards, and that any shortcomings in process or practice are identified and dealt with.

3. The UK research base enjoys a very high reputation for the excellence and integrity of its activity and outputs. Research integrity is fundamental to maintaining this, and to ensuring that these outputs can confidently be used to contribute to economic growth and national wellbeing.

4. On 11 July 2012, Universities UK (UUK) published a concordat to support research integrity. This was developed in collaboration with HEFCE, Research Councils UK, the Wellcome Trust and Government, and in consultation with HEIs and other bodies with an interest in research. The concordat coexists with and supports the mechanisms that some funders of research already have in place to promote best practice.

5. This consultation sets out how the Council’s current accountability framework provides for the investigation of cases of reported research misconduct, and invites comments on the following proposals:

1. That HEFCE should require compliance with the research integrity concordat by all HEIs eligible to receive our grant for research, and that this requirement should be set out in HEFCE’s Financial Memorandum among the terms and conditions of HEFCE funding.
2. That institutions in receipt of HEFCE research funding should provide assurance of compliance with the concordat, through the Council’s established assurance mechanisms including the annual assurance return.

As these proposals are straightforward, this consultation consists of only two questions.

**Action required**

6. Responses to this consultation should be made online by **noon on Friday 8 March 2013**,using the [electronic response form](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/consult/?survey=uhy7gtf5dre6tfg) which can be accessed alongside this document.

**Action for BU Staff and Students**

Your views are sought on the two consultation questions:

1. Do you agree that compliance with the research integrity concordat should be a condition of HEFCE grant?
2. Do you agree with the proposal that demonstrating compliance with the research integrity concordat should be integrated into HEFCE’s existing reporting requirements, and that this represents a proportionate and reasonable way to ensure compliance?

The requirements of the research integrity concordat are summarised on the following pages for information. You can either respond to the consultation individually by **noon on Friday 8 March 2013** or submit any views/comments that you would like to be considered for inclusion in BU’s institutional response to Colette Cherry, Policy Advisor to the Vice-Chancellor (ccherry@bournemouth.ac.uk) by **noon on Friday 22 February 2013**.

**Requirements of the Research Integrity Concordat**

1. On 11 July 2012 Universities UK (UUK) published a concordat to support research integrity. This was developed in collaboration with HEFCE, Research Councils UK, the Wellcome Trust and Government, and in consultation with HEIs and other bodies with an interest in research. The concordat coexists with and supports the mechanisms that some funders of research already have in place to promote best practice.
2. The concordat seeks to provide a comprehensive national framework for good research conduct and its governance. It includes five top-level commitments with associated actions for researchers, employers of researchers, and funders of research.
3. We are currently assessing BU’s level of compliance with the requirements. You can access a full copy of the Research Integrity Concordat [here](http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/Publications/Pages/concordattosupportresearchintegrity.aspx).

Commitment #1: We are committed to maintaining the highest standards of rigour and integrity in all aspects of research.

**Researchers** will:

* understand the expected standards of rigour and integrity relevant to their research
* maintain the highest standards of rigour and integrity in their work at all times

**Employers of researchers** are responsible for:

* collaborating to maintain a research environment that develops good research practice and nurtures a culture of research integrity, as described in commitments 2 to 5
* supporting researchers to understand and act according to expected standards, values and behaviours, and defending them when they live up to these expectations in difficult circumstances

**Funders of research** expect:

* **researchers** to adhere to the highest standards of professionalism and integrity
* **employers of researchers** to have procedures in place to ensure that research is conducted in accordance with standards of best practice; systems to promote research integrity; and transparent, robust and fair processes to investigate alleged research misconduct

Commitment #2: We are committed to ensuring that research is conducted according to appropriate ethical, legal and professional frameworks, obligations and standards.

**Researchers** will also:

* ensure that all research is subject to active and appropriate consideration of ethical issues
* comply with ethical, legal and professional frameworks, obligations and standards as required by statutory and regulatory authorities, and by employers, funders and other relevant stakeholders

**Employers of researchers** are responsible for:

* having clear policies on ethical approval available to all researchers
* making sure that all researchers are aware of and understand policies and processes relating to ethical approval
* supporting researchers to reflect best practice in relation to ethical, legal and professional requirements
* having appropriate arrangements in place through which researchers can access advice and guidance on ethical, legal and professional obligations and standards

**Funders of research** will expect **researchers** and **employers of researchers** who receive funding to conform to the ethical, legal and professional standards relevant to their research; this includes any specific codes of practice, legal requirements and other policies that the funder identifies as part of their conditions of grant.

To support researchers and employers of researchers, **funders of research** will:

* clearly identify any specific codes of practice, legal requirements and other policies that researchers and employers of researchers are expected to comply with
* explore ways of streamlining requirements to reduce any duplication and inconsistency

Commitment #3: We are committed to supporting a research environment that is underpinned by a culture of integrity and based on good governance, best practice and support for the development of researchers.

**Employers of researchers** will:

* embed these features in their own systems, processes and practices
* work towards reflecting recognised best practice in their own systems, processes and practices
* implement the concordat within their research environment

As part of a commitment to ensuring that research integrity receives appropriate consideration, the concordat also recommends that **employers of researchers** should identify a senior member of staff to oversee research integrity and to act as first point of contact for anyone wanting more information on matters of research integrity.

**Funders of research** are responsible for:

* promoting adoption of the concordat within the research community
* supporting the implementation of the concordat through shared guidance, policies and plans
* Funders of research could encourage adoption of the concordat by associating it with their conditions of grant.

Commitment #4: We are committed to using transparent, robust and fair processes to deal with allegations of research misconduct should they arise.

**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
* 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

As part of existing mechanisms and conditions of grant, **employers of researchers** should already:

* have clear, well-articulated and confidential mechanisms for reporting allegations of research misconduct
* have robust, transparent and fair processes for dealing with allegations of misconduct that reflect best practice (see Annexe II)
* ensure that all researchers are made aware of the relevant contacts and procedures for making allegations
* act with no detriment to whistleblowers making allegations of misconduct in good faith
* provide information on investigations of research misconduct to funders of research and professional and/or statutory bodies as required by their conditions of grant and other legal, professional and statutory obligations
* support their researchers in providing appropriate information to professional and/or statutory bodies

Additionally, the concordat recommends that **employers of researchers** provide a named point of contact or recognise an appropriate third party to act as confidential liaison for whistleblowers or any other person wishing to raise concerns about the integrity of research being conducted under their auspices. This need not be the same person as the member of staff identified to act as first point of contact on research integrity matters, as recommended under Commitment #3.

**Funders of research** will:

* have clear expectations of what constitutes research misconduct
* ensure that recipients of funding are aware of requirements regarding the investigation and reporting of research misconduct, and that these are openly stated

Commitment #5: We are committed to working together to strengthen the integrity of research and to reviewing progress regularly and openly.

**Employers of researchers** already take steps to ensure that their environment promotes and nurtures a commitment to research integrity, and that suitable processes are in place to deal with misconduct. It is important that these efforts continue to be suitable and that they are communicated more effectively, and that the same high standards apply to all. The concordat therefore recommends that **employers of researchers** should present a short annual statement to their own governing body that:

* provides a summary of actions and activities that have been undertaken to support and strengthen understanding and application of research integrity issues (for example postgraduate and researcher training, or process reviews)
* provides assurances that the processes they have in place for dealing with allegations of misconduct are transparent, robust and fair, and that they continue to be appropriate to the needs of the organisation
* provides a high-level statement on any formal investigations of research misconduct that have been undertaken

To improve accountability, and provide assurances that measures being taken continue to support consistently high standards of research integrity, this statement should be made publicly available.

**Employers of researchers** also need to be confident that the procedures and practices they have in place are robust. Given the changing nature of concerns relating to research integrity and the emergence of new types of research, it is important that employers periodically review their processes to ensure that they remain ‘fit for purpose’. Likewise, funders of research will periodically review their policies, grant conditions and processes.

Colette Cherry

Policy Advisor to the Vice-Chancellor

10 January 2013