Summary annual report on research integrity (2016-17)

1. Background

The QMUL Research Integrity Policy (approved in 2014) provides a high level statement regarding research integrity and outlines the structures for oversight of the policy. A further document outlines the policy and processes for Investigating Allegations of Misconduct in Research.

As part of QMUL’s commitment to upholding the highest standards of research integrity we have adopted the five commitments of the 2012 UUK Concordat to Support Research Integrity. The Concordat recommends that institutions present a short annual statement to their governing body that:

- summarises actions and activities that have been undertaken to support and strengthen understanding and application of research integrity issues;
- provides assurance that the processes for dealing with allegations of misconduct are transparent, robust and fair;
- provides a high-level statement on any formal investigations of research misconduct that have been undertaken.

This report to the Audit and Risk Committee of Council is intended to provide such assurances. The Concordat recommends that annual statements on Research Integrity are made publically available to improve accountability and this summary statement will be published in the Research Integrity section of the Queen Mary website.

2. Summary of research misconduct investigations (2016-17)

Cases of potential research misconduct reported to the end of August 2017: 3

In February we were made aware of allegations about data integrity in some publications by a QMUL academic. These allegations were made by “Clare Francis”, a pseudonym for a person or persons who regularly report such allegations to universities. A senior member of QMUL academic staff with no personal connections to the allegations was appointed to investigate if there was evidence for a formal enquiry. This investigation did not find evidence of violations of research integrity. It did conclude that one very similar or identical diagram was published in two separate publications in work led by a group in another country that the QMUL author had worked with, and we asked this group to issue a corrigendum to the journals involved, to include the correct data in both cases.

In March we were informed that a QMUL academic had claimed that another QMUL academic had used their research results in a publication without acknowledgement or permission. A senior member of QMUL academic staff with no personal connections to the allegation was appointed to determine if there was prima facie evidence for conducting a formal investigation. This investigation reviewed the evidence available for this claim and concluded that this was
insufficient to warrant a further formal investigation. The plaintiff has accepted this decision and indicated that they do not wish to proceed with any further action. This investigation was kept confidential from the accused, with full agreement from the plaintiff, in order not to potentially prejudice good academic relations in the event of no further action being taken.

In April we were informed that an academic was the subject of an allegation of copyright infringement in respect of some work done with a PhD student, jointly supervised with another university. After taking legal advice, we concluded that no such infringement had taken place and provided this information to those making the allegation. This matter is now considered closed.

Past cases with continuing ramifications: 1
A case from 2014 where an investigation of research misconduct concluded that there was evidence of the fabrication of data has had some continuing consequences – the individual ("X") found by the investigation to be solely responsible for the misconduct, who resigned from QMUL before the investigation was completed, had also entered into some contractual relationships with companies, and there had been some sharing of data with them. Investigations were undertaken to ensure that all such data was correctly obtained. In one case this could not be shown and the company claimed financial losses on this basis. After some mediation an agreement was reached with this company in 2016.
In December 2016 the MHRA contacted QMUL to give notice of an inspection of laboratories early in 2017, in relation to the activities of X. We worked with the inspectors to facilitate this. The inspectors gave a clean bill of health with regard to the data in the trials conducted by X. They made a separate recommendation on a change to processes, which has been adopted.

Other cases: 1
In December we were informed by another university that a publication which had a QMUL author amongst others had been found by a formal investigation by that university to contain manipulated figures, and the paper was to be withdrawn. Full responsibility for these manipulations was accepted by the corresponding author, from the university mentioned, and the investigation concluded that no other authors bore any responsibility. In view of this outcome, this case was not investigated by QMUL under its procedures.

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