

FAIRS Delphi survey 1.2

Confirmation of consent

Re Delphi survey on Fostering Accountability for the Integrity of Research Studies (FAIRS). I confirm I have read the information sheet 1.0 (approved by Central University Research Ethics Committee Approval Reference: MSC IDREC 750906) and give my consent to participate in this study. *

- Yes
- No

Instructions: please read carefully before going further

Our goal is to identify the range of opinions that people hold about serious research misconduct. The term "research misconduct" is defined somewhat differently across research integrity experts in different countries, but generally covers fabrication, falsification and plagiarism. Here we also include reckless or negligent behaviour with the potential to cause harm. We use the specifier "serious" to make it clear that our definition is restricted to cases where there is intention to mislead, and where it is appropriate to consider applying some kind of sanctions to the person committing the misconduct. In effect, we are restricting consideration to cases where researchers intentionally commit fraud or disregard safety issues.

We exclude milder forms of misconduct that might involve carelessness or use of questionable research practices. We do not mean to imply that these milder infringements of research norms are unimportant, but our priority is to explore questions such as who should be responsible for investigating allegations of serious research misconduct, and what sanctions should be applied. We also appreciate that it is not always clear whether a behaviour meets criteria for serious research misconduct. However, our focus here is less on definitions and criteria, and more on appropriate responses when serious research misconduct is found.

The survey is divided into pages with one or two items per page. You will be offered the opportunity to take a break at the end of each page. Please do not pause mid-page as you may lose the responses on that page if the system times out. Some items are simple multiple choice; others require you to rank order a set of statements. In both cases, a text box is provided where you can elaborate your answer if you wish.

It is particularly useful if you can back up your responses with a source of evidence in the public domain (e.g. reference to a published article or online material). You may also wish to report personal experiences but please do not include information that might identify you.

Your responses are anonymised. The study moderators hold a key linking your email address to your personal code, so we can match responses across sessions. This key will be destroyed when the survey is complete.

You have until 13th January (5 pm UK time) to complete the survey.

Thank you for taking part. If you have any questions about the survey, please contact kush.kale@sjc.ox.ac.uk.

Priorities

1A. Which of these should be a primary focus for discussion? (1 for low priority, 3 for high priority). Try to avoid selecting the same response for all options, so that we can identify their relative importance. *

	1	2	3
What constitutes serious research misconduct?			
How allegations of serious research misconduct are handled			
Sanctions for serious research misconduct			

1B. (Optional) Any comments on this item? Feel free to propose other ideas not included in this item.

Burdens of serious research misconduct

2A. How common is the problem of serious research misconduct? (select one) *

- Serious research misconduct is rare relative to the amount of published research literature
- Serious research misconduct is becoming more prevalent and starting to pose a threat to the research literature
- Serious research misconduct is already common enough to pose a major threat to the research literature

2B. (Optional) Any comments on this item? Feel free to cite sources of evidence if you wish.

3A. How harmful are the impacts of serious research misconduct to different segments of society? Please code as 1 (low harm) to 5 (strong harm) *

	1	2	3	4	5
Consumers of research findings, e.g. patients whose treatment is informed by medical research or policy-makers who depend on research findings					
Other researchers who try to build on fraudulent findings					
Funders, whose funds are wasted					
Institutions, whose resources are diverted to tackling misconduct					
Society, when public trust in research is eroded					

3B. (Optional) Any comments on this item? Feel free to cite sources of evidence if you wish.

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Goals of those responding to serious research misconduct

4A. In responding to serious research misconduct, several goals may be considered.

Please rate how important each of these is, from 1 (unimportant) to 4 (very important) *

	1	2	3	4
To maintain academic integrity, including to correct the academic record				
To punish offenders				
To deter others from committing fraud				
To maintain trust and rigour in research				

4B. (Optional) Any comments on this item?

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Factors hindering academic institutions' response to serious research misconduct

5A. Various factors may hinder academic institutions' response to serious research misconduct. Please rate the following from 1 (not much of a hindrance) to 5 (substantial hindrance)*

	1	2	3	4	5
Lack of co-ordination between relevant research actors, such as institutions, funders and publishers					
Conflict of interest for institutions investigating their own researchers					
Lack of resources					
Lack of expertise					
Concern about legal repercussions					
Large number of vexatious/trivial accusations of misconduct					
Bureaucratic delays or inefficiencies in the investigation process					
Complexity of cases					
Due process concerns to ensure fairness to all involved in the case					

5B. (Optional) Any comments on this item? If you have useful sources for any evidence on these points, please provide here.

Factors driving serious research misconduct

6A. What is the impact of these factors in encouraging researchers to commit serious research misconduct?

Please rate from 1 (little impact) to 5 (large impact) *

	1	2	3	4	5
Low probability of being detected and/or reported					
Low probability of being punished if detected and/or reported					
'Publish or perish' culture and incentive structure in research (e.g. progression, promotion, recognition)					
Fear of losing one's job if not sufficiently productive in publishing in prestigious journals					

6B. (Optional) Please add any comments on this item, including relevant sources of evidence where appropriate

Role of social media

7A. On balance, the role of social media in detecting and reporting serious research misconduct has been: (select one) *

- predominantly negative - it makes it too easy for vexatious individuals to raise unwarranted complaints, often under the guise of anonymity
- neither positive nor negative on balance
- positive - it provides a route for speedy commentary when concerns are discovered

7B. (Optional) Any comments on this item? As well as sources of evidence, you might like to report specific experiences here, but please do not include information that might identify you.

Reporting serious research misconduct

8A. Official channels for reporting misconduct are often slow and obstructive (select one option) *

- Strongly agree
- Moderately agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Moderately disagree
- Strongly disagree

8B. (Optional) Any comments on this item? As well as sources of evidence, you might like to report specific experiences here, but please do not include information that might identify you.

Models for addressing serious research misconduct

9A. In an ideal world where resources are not an issue, which is the most suitable model/system for addressing serious research misconduct?

Rank these in order from 1= most preferred, to 4 = least preferred*

	1	2	3	4
Self-regulation approach, where academic institutions are responsible for conducting investigations and determining sanctions when one of their staff is accused				
National governance approach, where government regulatory agency is set up for this purpose				
National guidelines approach; for example, UK's Committee for Research Integrity, which does not have a regulatory role, but aims to ensure all institutions work to a common framework				
Regulatory agency independent of Government				

9B. (Optional) Any comments on this item? Please include any other preferred options, and provide citations for relevant evidence if appropriate.

Role of employers

10A. Prospective employers should undertake rigorous due diligence and, as far as possible, check with previous employers to ask if there have been any investigations into serious research misconduct. *

- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree

10B. (Optional) Any comments on this item? Please provide sources for relevant evidence where appropriate.

11A. Employers, funders and publishers of research should be legally required to share information to support investigations of serious research misconduct. *

- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree

11B. (Optional) Any comments on this item? Please provide sources for relevant evidence where appropriate.

Solutions to serious research misconduct

12A. Given that we have finite resources, which solutions to serious research misconduct should be prioritised in funding?

Rate the following options from 1 = most preferred, to 5 = least preferred *

	1	2	3	4	5
Changing criteria for hiring/promotion/funding away from publish/perish model, so that researchers won't be motivated to commit fraud					
Research ethics training for all researchers					
Funding/training of research integrity officers					
Infrastructure to collect and report on serious research misconduct nationally					
Support for individuals/organisations who have expertise in detection of serious research misconduct					

12B. (Optional) Any comments on this item, or suggestions for other options?
Please add sources for relevant evidence if appropriate.

Role of publishers

13A. It is not the responsibility of publishers or journal editors to determine whether serious research misconduct has occurred, but they are responsible for ensuring the literature is decontaminated from erroneous work promptly. Please rate the following statements in accordance with your views on how this should work, from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. *

	1	2	3	4	5
Articles that contain serious errors that undermine confidence in the findings should be retracted promptly, without waiting for an institutional investigation					
Publishers and institutions should work together to facilitate sharing of key information when serious research misconduct is suspected					
If conditions for retraction are not met, an expression of concern may be added to an article while an institution conducts an investigation					
When an institutional investigation is completed, the institution should directly approach the publisher of articles affected by severe research misconduct and request retraction					
When a publisher finds the same author repeatedly flagged for erroneous material, they should communicate this to research integrity officer at the author's institution					
When a publisher or institution finds the same researcher repeatedly flagged for erroneous material, their name should be added to a database. (NB. If there is sufficient endorsement of this statement, there would need to be discussion of how this works in terms of legal, practical and ethical aspects.)					

13B. (Optional) Any comments on this item, or suggestions for other options?
Please add sources for relevant evidence if appropriate.

Whistleblowers and bystanders

14A. Please rate your agreement with the following statements about whistleblowers from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree *

	1	2	3	4	5
There are disincentives for researchers to report serious research misconduct					
Usually there is insufficient protection for whistleblowers who report serious research misconduct					
It is important to be aware of and mitigate collateral damage that may be caused to other members of a research group if one member is found to have committed serious research misconduct					
Whistleblowers should have their identities protected, with confidential channels for reporting suspected serious research misconduct					

14B. (Optional) Any comments on this item, or suggestions for other options? As well as sources of evidence, you might like to report specific experiences here, but please do not include information that might identify you.

When serious research misconduct is confirmed

15A. Which of these practices should be options for institutions when serious research misconduct is confirmed.

Please give your rating from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.*

	1	2	3	4	5
Educational retraining for researchers who have been found to commit serious research misconduct					
Restorative justice approaches; e.g. requirement to meet those affected by the misconduct to discuss its impact					
Sanctions such as demotion or dismissal					
Report on the investigation made public, with identities of those found to have committed serious research misconduct disclosed					

15B. (Optional) Any comments on this item. Please add sources for any relevant evidence as appropriate.

Unintended consequences/barriers to progress

16A. Please rate your agreement with the following statements about unintended consequences/barriers to progress from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree

*

	1	2	3	4	5
Fear of reputational harm makes institutions less likely to take action on serious research misconduct					
Investigations of serious research misconduct divert researchers and associated resources from more productive research work					
There is a danger that structures developed to investigate serious research misconduct could be weaponised by those with political agendas - e.g. on topics such as vaccination, climate change, sexual health.					
Failure to address serious research misconduct at the institutional/employer level could lead to more bureaucracy from external agencies					

16B. (Optional) Any comments on this item. Please add sources for relevant evidence, where appropriate.

17A. "One of the likely drivers of trust and distrust in research is the way research institutes, publishers, and funders respond to allegations of research misconduct" (Bouter, 2024) *

- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree

17B. (Optional) Any comments on this item? Please add sources for any relevant evidence, where appropriate.

We anticipate that patterns of responses may be different for those who are primarily involved in raising concerns about serious research misconduct (e.g. sleuths, whistleblowers, victims of research fraud) and those whose job it is to respond to reports of such concerns (e.g. research integrity officers, those devising policies for research integrity). Could you please specify here which of those groups you identify with most strongly - or whether neither applies to you. Thanks.

- Group 1: Sleuths, etc
- Group 2: Research integrity officers, etc
- Group 3: Neither of the above

Final thoughts

Any other comments about this survey. E.g. Are there questions that you think we should have asked but didn't?