



Department
for Education



Department for
Business, Energy
& Industrial Strategy

Rt Hon Norman Lamb
Chair, Science and Technology Committee
House of Commons
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Chris Skidmore MP
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Dear Norman,

Further to the Government's response last year and my commitment to the Select Committee in March, I am writing to provide an update on my commission to UKRI to provide advice about implementing the Select Committee's recommendations to establish a National Research Integrity Committee.

UKRI has investigated several different models which could deliver against the Committee's recommendations. In developing the proposal, UKRI has engaged with key UK sector stakeholders, including the devolved administrations, Wellcome Trust, Universities UK (UUK), UKRIO, Cancer Research UK (CRUK), Association of Medical Research Charities (AMRC) and the Royal Society, as well as with internal lawyers and UKRI funding assurance experts (to address questions of governance and accountability). UKRI has also engaged internationally and examined various international exemplars. Its final proposals, if implemented, would bring the UK in line with international best practice on research integrity, in particular Canada and Australia, where there are similar systems for public funding of research.

The UKRI Board proposes to proceed with a Research Integrity Committee established under the auspices of UKRI, with a secretariat and independent Chair, as the most pragmatic way to achieve the functions and objectives set out by the Science & Technology Select Committee. This would provide assurance in relation to UKRI funding, and ensure that UKRI's own assurance processes are robust. UKRI explored the option of establishing an "independent" body, however there are significant legal issues with regard to data-sharing which would seriously constrain any independent body without a basis in statute to carry out its main function. The remit of a UKRI Committee would not therefore provide assurance to other research funders but UKRI is exploring the question of the potential remit of the research integrity committee with the Devolved Administrations.

The new UKRI Research Integrity Committee will champion best practice and produce an annual report on the health of the sector regarding research integrity. It will check that institutions have complied with terms and conditions of UKRI funding when investigating research misconduct, and provide oversight of UKRI research grant funding by reviewing investigations undertaken by individual research institutions and providing an annual assurance statement. It would apply sanctions if deemed necessary.

This will provide a far greater level of assurance over public funds than present, and more legal safeguards, as UKRI would be 'investigating' compliance with its own terms and conditions (which will be revised to reflect the responsibilities of the new Committee). This approach is in line with the Canadian model, which was highlighted by the Select Committee.

While the remit of the UKRI Committee would not extend explicitly to other research funders, in practice, as Quality-related Research (QR) funding is unhypothecated, higher education institutions in receipt of QR funding from UKRI should report almost all instances of alleged research misconduct to UKRI's research integrity committee, even in those cases where a specific research project is funded by others, as it will have been underpinned by UKRI's QR funds.

I have agreed that UKRI proceed with this approach. UKRI will begin the appointment process of independent chair and panel, and will provide the Science and Technology Committee with an update in the Autumn. The intention is that the Committee will commence operations in Early Summer 2020.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Chris Skidmore". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal line.

CHRIS SKIDMORE MP