

Responding to Allegations/ Complaints of Research Misconduct

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1. Purpose and Scope

- 1.1 This procedure is made under the **Research Integrity Policy for the Promotion of the Responsible Conduct of Research**.
- 1.2 The procedure applies to:
 - a) The handling of Allegation/ Complaints of possible misconduct in research, received by NTU.
 - b) Particular circumstances may dictate deviation from the normal procedure when deemed by the Provost or the Vice-President (Research) or any person authorised by them to decide, to be in the best interests of NTU. Any deviation from the normal procedure must also ensure fair treatment to the Respondent.

2. Definitions

Terms used in this document are defined as follows:

- a) **Allegation / Complaint:** Any written or oral statement or other form of indication of possible Research Misconduct, made to NTU.
- b) **Board of Discipline:** NTU Board of Discipline set up in accordance with Statute 6 on Student Discipline.
- c) **Committee of Inquiry (COI):** The Committee appointed by the Provost pursuant to the [Framework for Investigation and Disciplinary Proceedings \(Faculty and Research Staff\)](#) or the Board of Discipline. Members of the Committee will be senior members of the faculty, including those with expertise in the matters being considered. External members may also be appointed.
- d) **Conflict of Interest:** The real or apparent interference of a person's own interests with the interests of another person or NTU, or where potential bias may occur due to prior, existing or future personal or professional relationships.
- e) **Good Faith Allegation:** An Allegation/ Complaint made with the honest belief that Research Misconduct, as defined in part (h) below, may have occurred. An Allegation/ Complaint is not made in good faith if it is made with reckless disregard for or wilful ignorance of facts that may disprove the Allegation/ Complaint.

- f) **Investigation:** Refers to the gathering of information, initial fact-finding and possible Investigation Committee actions to determine whether an Allegation/ Complaint warrants formal investigation under Disciplinary procedures. The purpose of the Investigation is to make an evaluation of the available evidence to determine whether there is sufficient evidence of possible Research Misconduct to warrant the establishment of a Committee of Inquiry or Board of Discipline or any other appropriate action. The findings of the Investigation must be documented in an investigation report.
- g) **Investigation Committee:** Any *ad hoc* group convened by the RIO to assist him/her in preliminary investigations of an Allegation/ Complaint. This may also refer to sub-groups of the NTU Institutional Review Board (IRB) or the NTU Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) formed to investigate breaches of ethical approvals reporting to the RIO through the respective committees.
- h) **Research Misconduct:** Includes fabrication, falsification or misrepresentation of data, Plagiarism, or other wrongdoing in printing, designing, performing, recording, supervising and reviewing research, or in reporting research results, or in breaching relevant national legislation, rules and guidelines concerning the ethical conduct of research in human subjects and animals. Plagiarism is as defined in the [Student Academic Integrity Policy and Procedures](#). Research Misconduct also includes self-Plagiarism with the undisclosed publication of similar papers in different journals. It does not include honest error or honest differences in interpretations or judgments of data.
- i) **Research Record:** Any data, document, computer file, computer storage device, or any other written or non-written account or object that provides or may reasonably be expected to provide evidence or information regarding the proposed, conducted, or reported research that constitutes or relates to the subject of an Allegation/ Complaint. A Research Record includes, but is not limited to: grant or contract applications, whether funded or unfunded; grant or contract progress and other reports; laboratory notebooks; notes; correspondence; videos; photographs; X-ray film; slides; biological materials; computer files and printouts; manuscripts and publications; equipment use logs; laboratory procurement records; animal facility records; human and animal subject protocols; consent forms; medical charts; and patient research files.
- j) **Respondent:** The person or persons against whom an Allegation/ Complaint is directed or the person or persons whose actions are the subject of the Investigation or COI or Board of Discipline.
- k) **Retaliation:** Any action that adversely affects the employment or other institutional status of a person that is taken at NTU, because the person has made an Allegation/ Complaint; or of inadequate institutional response thereto; or has cooperated in the Investigation; or COI or Board of Discipline, notwithstanding that such Allegation/ Complaint shall have been made or such co-operation shall have been rendered in good faith. Under the [NTU Whistle Blowing Procedure](#), "Whistleblowers may at any time submit, in good faith and without fear of dismissal or retaliation of any kind any incident or concern that falls within the scope of the Whistle Blowing Policy".

- l) **RIEO:** Refers to the Research Integrity & Ethics Office and its Director and staff.
- m) **RIO:** An individual appointed by the Vice-President (Research) to oversee the development and implementation of the university's research integrity policy (compliance), relevant education and training programmes, as well as to receive and assess allegations of possible breaches of research integrity determine when such allegations warrant an investigation or inquiry and to oversee such investigations and inquiries.
- n) **Whistle-blower / Complainant:** A person who makes an Allegation/ Complaint.

3. Procedure for Responding to Allegations/ Complaints of Research Misconduct

3.1 Conducting the Investigation and Inquiry

3.1.1 Initiation of the Investigation

3.1.1.1 Upon receipt of the Allegation/ Complaint, the RIO or a nominated person from Senior Management is to undertake a preliminary inquiry into the matter that has been reported. In cases of Allegations/ Complaints related to research ethics, an Investigation Committee (consisting of IRB or IACUC members, and facilitated by RIEO) is set up to review evidence available, and a preliminary report will be sent to the RIO.

3.1.1.2 Preliminary inquiries should be carried out within 45 days or as soon as practicable, based on a best endeavours basis.

3.1.1.3 If, following his/her preliminary assessment, the RIO determines that an Allegation/ Complaint provides sufficient information to warrant action on the part of NTU, the RIO will as soon as practicable report to the Vice-President (Research) with recommendations as follows:

- a) Recommend dismissal of the Allegation/ Complaint;
- b) Recommend minor sanctions on the Respondent to be imposed by the Vice-President (Research), who will also inform the Provost, Associate Provost (Faculty Affairs), Chief HRO, College Dean and School Chair or other appropriate person;
- c) Where the Respondent has admitted to the Allegation/ Complaints, to recommend appropriate sanctions in consultation with the College Dean and School Chair or other appropriate person. The Vice-President (Research) will subsequently inform the Provost, Associate Provost (Faculty Affairs) and Chief HRO of the sanctions to be imposed;

or

- d) Recommend that there is presumptive evidence which warrants a formal disciplinary inquiry proceeding. Vice-President (Research) will invite the Provost to determine the appropriate sanctions, and decide whether the case should be referred to a Committee of Inquiry (COI), or Board of Discipline (for students), or any other actions. The RIO should clearly state the original Allegation/ Complaint,

and the investigation report should highlight any related issues that should be evaluated.

3.1.1.4 All findings of any Investigation must be documented in an investigation report, and all reports needs to be archived for a minimum of 10 years. The Respondent (where applicable) and Whistle-blower/ Complainant (where known) should be informed of the outcome of any investigation.

3.1.2 Sequestration of the Research Records

On receipt of a complaint, the RIO (or nominated person), through the RIEO, must ensure that all original Research Records and/or copies of the same (if originals are not available), are immediately secured.

3.1.3 Committee of Inquiry (COI)

Details of a duly convened COI, including its procedure, are contained in the [Framework for Investigation and Disciplinary Proceedings \(Faculty and Research Staff\)](#).

3.1.4 Termination of University Employment by Resignation Prior to Completion of Investigation/Preliminary Inquiry or COI

If the Respondent, without admitting to the Allegation/ Complaint, elects to resign his/her position prior to completion of an Investigation or Preliminary Inquiry or COI, but after an Allegation/ Complaint has been reported, NTU may at its discretion proceed to continue with its Investigation or Preliminary Inquiry nevertheless.

Even if the Respondent refuses to participate in an Investigation or Preliminary Inquiry or COI, the RIO, College Dean or Centre Director and the COI may use their best efforts to reach a conclusion concerning the Allegation/ Complaint, noting in its report the Respondent's failure to cooperate and its effect on the Investigating Committee's review of all the evidence. Failure of the Respondent to assist or cooperate with RIO or Preliminary Inquiry or a COI shall be taken into account.

3.1.5 Applicability of Sections 3 and 5 in the Framework for Investigation and Disciplinary Proceedings

The details of the University's rights for interim suspension and administrative action; and the general applications of confidentiality and protection of Whistle-blower/ Complainant are in Section 3 and Section 5 of the [Framework for Investigation and Disciplinary Proceedings](#) respectively.

3.2 **Record Keeping and Retention and Reporting**

3.2.1 After completion of an Investigation or a COI or Board of Discipline proceedings and all ensuing related actions, the RIO will prepare a complete file, including the records of any Investigation or Inquiry and copies of all documents and other materials furnished to the RIO. The file, after completion of the case, will be deposited in NTU's archives and be held for a minimum of 10 years, to permit later assessment of the case as necessary. Additionally, significant findings arising from preliminary investigations will be sent to the Office of Human Resources.

- 3.2.2 NTU will report, annually or as requested, to the Audit and Risk Committee of the Board of Trustees, through the university's senior management, on any Allegation/ Complaints and Inquiries completed during the preceding year and these may be published in the interests of transparency and the protection of NTU's reputation and interests.

3.3 Liability

- 3.3.1 Nothing in this Procedure is intended nor shall be taken as rendering any employee or officer of NTU or other person appointed or authorised by NTU personally liable in respect of or arising from any Investigation or Inquiry or proceedings.

4. Roles and Responsibilities

4.1 Respondent

- 4.1.1 As outlined in the Research Integrity Policy and the Promotion of the Responsible Conduct of Research, all NTU personnel have a duty to cooperate with the RIO, RIEO, and other employees or officers of NTU or other persons engaged by NTU in the review of Allegation/ Complaints and the conduct of investigations and preliminary investigations and with formal disciplinary COIs.

4.2 Research Integrity Officer (RIO)

- 4.2.1 The RIO will have responsibility, under the Vice-President (Research)'s direction, for the implementation of these procedures. The RIO may, at his/her discretion, seek advice from internal/external experts.
- 4.2.2 Upon NTU's receipt of an Allegation/ Complaint, the RIO will assess the Allegation/ Complaint to determine whether there is sufficient evidence to warrant an Investigation and whether external applications for funding are involved. Upon completion of a Preliminary Inquiry or Investigation, the RIO will report his/her findings to the Vice-President (Research).

4.3 Research Integrity and Ethics Office (RIEO)

- 4.3.1 RIEO supports the RIO in the implementation of this procedure by serving as the secretariat for matters related to investigations into allegations reported. Such duties include, but are not limited to:
- a) Liaising with the investigation committees and relevant parties to facilitate investigations.
 - b) Recording of minutes for investigation meetings.
 - c) Securing of research records pertaining to allegations.

4.4 Vice-President (Research)

- 4.4.1 The Vice-President (Research) shall review the preliminary investigation report from the RIO, who will then take appropriate action (especially in relation to research staff), or decide whether to invite the Provost to appoint a COI to consider the Allegation/ Complaint under the Framework for Investigation and Disciplinary Proceedings for Faculty and Research Staff, or if the Respondent is a student, decide whether to refer to the Board of Discipline, or take any other appropriate action.

5. Consulted Parties

5.1 The following have been consulted in the drafting of this document:

Name	Designation	College/School/Department
Mr Tony Mayer	NTU RIO	President's Office
Prof Timothy John White	Research Director	President's Office
Prof Theng Yin Leng	Research Director	President's Office
Prof Soh Wai Lin, Christina	Deputy Associate Provost (Faculty Affairs)	President's Office
Ms Tay Hsiu Chieh	General Counsel and Chief,	Legal and Secretarial Office
Mr Choy Kam Luen	Deputy Director	Plans Office / Corporate Governance

6. Related Legislation, Policies, Procedures and Guidelines

Type	Document Title
Policy	NTU Statute 6 on Student Discipline
Policy	Framework for Investigation and Disciplinary Proceedings for Faculty and Research Staff
Policy	Research Integrity Policy and the Promotion of the Responsible Conduct of Research
Policy	Care and Use of Live Vertebrate Animals in Research and Teaching
Guidelines	Bioethics Advisory Committee
Guidelines	NACLAR Guidelines
Procedure	SOP for Management of Reported Concerns Related to Animal Use

7. Responsible Parties and Contacts

Procedure Owner: Vice-President (Research)

Responsible Office: Research Integrity and Ethics Office (RIEO)

For clarification on this policy, please contact:

Name	Designation	Email	Telephone
A/Prof Roderick Bates	NTU Research Integrity Officer	nturio@ntu.edu.sg	-
Dr Willie Koh	Director, RIEO	d-rieo@ntu.edu.sg	6904 7038

8. Revision History

Version	Approved By	Approval Date	Effective Date	Sections Modified
1		23 July 2012		New release
2	President's Council	27 Mar 2018	27 Mar 2018	Procedure content translated to latest version of NTU procedure template.



				<p>Under Section 2, reordering of definitions and elaboration of definition of Research Misconduct. Addition of role of RIEO. NTU Student Board of Discipline referred to as Board of Discipline.</p> <p>Modification of Section 3.1.1,</p> <p>Addition of Roles and Responsibilities to Section 4.</p>
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