

**Health and Medical Research Fund**  
**Guidelines to Administering Institution**  
**for Investigation of Scientific Misconduct Cases**

“Scientific misconduct” refers to practices that seriously deviate from those that are commonly accepted within the scientific community for proposing, conducting, or reporting research. It does not include honest error or honest differences in interpretations or judgements of data.

Furthermore, scientific misconduct, if substantiated, will lead to serious consequences including but not limited to disqualification in the concerned funding exercise, debarment in all capacities in all funding schemes administered by the Research Fund Secretariat (RFS) of the Health Bureau, recovery of grants and downgrade of rating of new funding application(s) being reviewed. The *Management of Track records of Applicants* is available on [RFS website](#).

In the event of a suspected scientific misconduct case, the Principal Applicant (PA) / Fellowship Applicant (FA) concerned will be invited for clarification. After reviewing PA’s/FA’s clarification, depending on the nature and gravity of the case, the RFS will require the Administering Institution (AI) concerned to report the findings of its own investigation to the RFS within 30 calendar days from the date of RFS’ request or a date specified by RFS.

Here below are the general principles and guidelines for AIs’ reference in conducting an investigation -

**1. Composition of Investigation Panel (IP)**

The AI should assign a senior official such as the Vice-President/Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research or Dean of the Faculty to appoint an IP. The IP can comprise three to four members (including the Chairperson) with relevant expertise and without conflict of interest<sup>1</sup> with the PA/FA concerned. To ensure a fair and impartial review, it is advisable to have at least one member who is not connected to the PA’s/FA’s Faculty or Research Institute. If considered necessary, experts from outside the AI could be appointed to the IP.

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<sup>1</sup> A conflict of interest situation arises when the *private interest* of a member of a committee competes or conflicts with the interest of the committee. “Private interest” includes both financial and other interests of members and those of their connections including family members, relatives, friends, clubs and societies to which they belong, as well as people to whom they owe a favour or are obligated in any way.

## **2. Duties of the IP**

The IP is required to conduct a formal investigation, decide whether the allegation is substantiated and recommend any necessary actions such as penalty actions and corrective measures to prevent similar cases from happening.

## **3. Investigation Process**

The IP must carry out the investigation with fairness and impartiality, ensuring the process is comprehensive and encompasses the following actions –

- (a) To obtain an official response from the PA/FA in question.
- (b) To conduct interviews with PA/FA and /or individual(s) who may provide insight into the research process.
- (c) To gather supporting documents, including raw data, laboratory log books, Case Report Forms/data records, study protocols, standard operating procedures, emails and correspondences, publication drafts, and related materials.

## **4. Preparation of the Investigation Report to RFS**

- (a) After the investigation, the IP should prepare an investigation report covering the following –
  - (i) To document findings in a clear and structured format.
  - (ii) To include PA's/FA's response, witness statements, interview records, and supporting documents.
  - (iii) To analyse the collected evidence, evaluate whether research misconduct has occurred based on the collected evidence and determine the extent of the misconduct, if any.
  - (iv) To state clearly IP's conclusion about the investigation and whether the allegation is substantiated, and recommend appropriate actions such as penalty actions and corrective measures.
- (b) The investigation report should be submitted to the senior official(s) of the AI such as Vice-President/Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research and Dean of the Faculty for endorsement of the report and any follow-up actions. The endorsed investigation report should be submitted to the RFS for further action(s)

## **5. Appeal Mechanism**

The AI should establish an appeal mechanism if considered necessary.

Research Fund Secretariat  
Research and Data Analytics Office  
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