

# Department of Biotechnology (DBT) Statement on the handling of allegations of research misconduct.

Integrity is naturally expected in communication of science in seminars, meetings and in publications. This policy statement is intended to address situations where this foundation of integrity may be compromised.

Training and mentoring at every level of one's scientific career is important if instances of misconduct are to be unusual. We expect that such training programmes be in place in all research institutions, thereby meeting the requirements of best practices. The DBT expects that all institutions, which receive DBT support, have in place publically accessible statements on good research practices.

## 1. Research misconduct

1.1 Research misconduct is defined by the DBT as: Fabrication, falsification, plagiarism, self-plagiarism, or deception in proposing, carrying out or reporting results of research. Deliberate, dangerous or negligent deviations from accepted practices in carrying out research. It includes failure to follow established protocols if this failure results in unreasonable risk or harm to humans or the environment and facilitating of misconduct in research by collusion in, or concealment of, such actions by others. It also includes intentional, unauthorized use, disclosure or removal of, or damage to, research-related property of another, including apparatus, materials, writings, data, hardware or software or any other substances or devices used in or produced by the conduct of research.

## 2. Responsibilities of the organisation

The DBT considers that it is the responsibility of the organisation to investigate all allegations of research misconduct made against its staff and students. Findings of research misconduct would be matters for consideration under the organisation's disciplinary procedures. All organisations supported by the DBT are expected to have in place formal, publicly notified, processes for addressing the issue of research misconduct. It is advisable that these processes are in consonance with the spirit of this (i.e. DBT's) policy statement. Organisations must ensure that these processes contain provisions that apply to visiting researchers while based in the organisation and to the organisation's staff while visiting elsewhere. It is the responsibility of the organisation to inform the DBT, in confidence and without prejudice, at the earliest opportunity, about allegations of serious research misconduct that concern grantholders whenever there is prima facie credibility in allegations of a serious nature. It is the responsibility of the organisation to determine what constitutes 'serious misconduct' and to document it

as part of its notified processes. The organisation is also responsible for informing the DBT of the outcome of any such investigation. It is the responsibility of the organisation to inform the DBT, in confidence, of all instances of research misconduct involving grantholders that have resulted in the allegations being substantiated, as well as of the outcome of the disciplinary process resultant therefrom.

The policy statement and process notification of the organisation should have in place components relating to the treatment of whistleblowers, including a clear statement that research misconduct is taken seriously in the organisation and that any member of staff raising bona fide concerns can do so confidentially, and without fear of suffering any detriment, as also that mala fide allegations will invite disciplinary action. The statement should include a clear indication of the procedures in which such bona fide concerns by staff may be brought to the attention of a designated individual within the organisation.

## 3. Principles for investigation by organisations of allegations of research misconduct

Each organisation must have in place formal written procedures for dealing with allegations of research misconduct against its staff and students and other researchers. Organisations should, where appropriate, take legal advice on implementing these procedures to ensure that the procedures comply with all legal obligations for the conduct of such investigations from time to time in force. Organisations should endorse the following principles when implementing these procedures. The responsibilities of those dealing with the allegation should be clear and understood by all interested parties. Measures should be in place to ensure an impartial and independent investigation and to ensure that line-management obligations or other interests of those dealing with the allegation do not conflict with these procedures. Those undertaking research at the organisation should be contractually obliged to participate in and comply with the procedure. The organisation should consider the confidential nature of the investigation and how to safeguard the rights to confidentiality of the interested parties. All interested parties should be informed of the allegation at an appropriate stage in the proceedings. Anyone accused of misconduct should have the right to respond. A policy should be in place to ensure that no employee who makes an allegation in good faith against another employee shall suffer a detriment, but equally that disciplinary procedures are in place to deal with malicious allegations. The allegation should be dealt with in a fair and timely manner. Proper records of the proceedings should be kept. The outcome should be made known as quickly as possible to all interested

parties. Anyone found guilty of misconduct should have the right to an appeal. Appropriate sanctions and disciplinary procedures should be in place for cases when the allegation is upheld. If appropriate, efforts should be made to restore the reputation of the accused party if the allegation is dismissed.

## 4. Involvement of the DBT

### 4.1. Receipt of allegations

The DBT recognises that there may be instances where an allegation of research misconduct is made directly to a member of the DBT's staff or the Secretary rather than to an individual within the organisation. In such instances, the DBT will contact an appropriate individual at the organisation and the organisation will then be responsible for taking suitable action in line with its formal written procedures for handling allegations of research misconduct.

### 4.2 Investigations by the DBT

As stated above, it is the organisation's responsibility to investigate allegations of research misconduct made against its staff and students and this would be the DBT's preferred course of action in most cases. In exceptional cases, however, the DBT may wish to undertake its own investigation into alleged cases of research misconduct that concern grantholders (for example where the DBT's reputation is at risk or where the DBT is dissatisfied with the investigation undertaken by the organisation). Any investigations by the DBT would only be undertaken following consultation between the DBT and the appropriate representative's of the organisation.

## 5. Sanctions

5.1. Sanctions by the host organisation are expected to be according to its statement on research misconduct and its rules and regulations.

5.2 If the organisation or the DBT determines that the allegation of research misconduct is substantiated, the DBT may also consider appropriate sanctions. These may include, but are not restricted to:

- A letter of reprimand.
- The withdrawal of funding.
- Requiring the withdrawal or correction of pending or published abstracts and papers emanating from the research in question.
- Changes to the staffing of the particular project.
- Special monitoring of future work.
- Barring of the grant holder from applying for DBT funds for a given period.
- Repayment of grant plus interest at the DBT's discretion.
- Discussion with the host organisation on its implementation of appropriate administrative disciplinary procedures.

5.3 At all times, in line with its grant conditions, the DBT reserves the right to withdraw funding with immediate effect. ■