Research Integrity Advisors Procedures

Section 1 - Purpose and Scope

(1) These procedures set out the role of Research Integrity Advisors and the process for their appointment.

(2) These Procedures

a. give effect to the Principles set out in the Research Quality, Standards and Integrity Policy;
b. support the implementation of the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (the Code), and particularly:
    i. Principle 8, 'Promotion of responsible research practices', which requires institutions to 'Promote and foster a research culture and environment that supports the responsible conduct of research',
    ii. Responsibility 6, which states that institutions are required to 'Identify and train Research Integrity Advisors who assist in the promotion and fostering of responsible research conduct and provide advice to those with concerns about potential breaches of the Code';
c. adopt the following:
    i. Australian Research Council Research Integrity Policy;
    ii. National Health and Medical Research Council Research Integrity and Misconduct Policy;
    iii. NHMRC Research Integrity Advisors Guide.

(3) These procedures should be read together with the:

a. AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research 2020;
b. National Health and Medical Research Council's Ethical Conduct in Research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and Communities: Guidelines for Researchers and Stakeholders;
c. NHMRC Guide to Managing and Investigating Potential Breaches of the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research;
d. National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2023;
e. Australian Code for the Care and Use of Animals for Scientific Purposes;
f. Research Quality, Standards and Integrity Policy;
g. Research Integrity Procedures – Staff;
h. Research Integrity Procedures - Higher Degree Researchers (Students);
i. The University's Code of Conduct;
j. Harassment, Bullying and Discrimination Prevention Policy;
k. Complaint Policy – Staff;
l. Complaints Policy – Students and Members of the Public;
m. Work, Health and Safety Policy;
n. Safe Work Procedures.

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Scope

(4) These Procedures apply to all staff and students who carry out research under the auspices of the University. This includes research undertaken as part of coursework.

Section 2 - Definitions

(5) For the purpose of these Procedures, the following definitions apply:

a. Allegation means an Allegation of a breach of the Code;
b. Breach means a failure to meet the principles and responsibilities of the Code and may refer to a single breach or multiple breaches;
c. Code means the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research 2018;
d. Conflict of Interest exists in a situation where an independent observer might reasonably conclude that the professional actions of a person are or may be unduly influenced by other interests. This refers to a financial or non-financial interest which may be perceived, potential or actual conflict of interest;
e. Evidence means any document (hard copy or electronic, including email, images and data), information, tangible item (for example biological samples) or testimony offered or obtained that may be considered during the process of managing and investigating a potential breach of the Code;
f. Investigation describes the action of investigating an allegation of a breach of the Code by the Panel, following a preliminary assessment. The purpose of the Investigation is to determine whether a breach of the Code has occurred, and if so, the extent of that breach, and to make recommendations about further actions;
g. Office of the Senior Deputy Vice Chancellor (SDVC) has responsibility for a culture of responsible conduct of research at Southern Cross University. These responsibilities include the identification, appointment and training of RIAs. The Office of the SDVC has the responsibility to respond to potential and found breaches of the Code;
h. Preliminary assessment means the gathering and evaluating of evidence to establish whether a potential breach of the Code warrants further investigation;
i. Research - the concept of research is broad and includes the creation of new knowledge and/or the use of existing knowledge in a new and creative way so as to generate new concepts, methodologies, inventions and understandings. This could include synthesis and analysis of previous research to the extent that it is new and creative. For the purposes of these procedures, research includes research training;
j. Researcher means a person who conducts, or assists with the conduct of, research;
k. Respondent means a person against whom an Allegation has been made;
l. Research Integrity Advisor (RIA) is a person or persons with knowledge of the Code and institutional processes nominated by the University to promote the responsible conduct of research and provide advice to those with concerns or complaints about potential breaches of the Code;
m. Staff (for the purpose of this Policy) means all persons who are academic or professional employees of Southern Cross University, including full time, part time, fixed term and casual and all adjunct, visiting, emeritus and conjoint appointees who are engaged in supervisory and other research roles on behalf of the University;
n. Student means a person who is registered as a student of the University regardless of whether at the time of the Allegation, they are currently enrolled in a course of study conducted by or within the University;
o. Third Party means a person, or persons or institutions outside of Southern Cross University and includes industry partners, volunteers, former students, media/journalists, participants in human research and members of the public.

Section 3 - Research Integrity Advisor Role

(6) Research Integrity Advisors (RIAs) are nominated, trained and supported by Southern Cross University to promote the responsible conduct of research by providing advice on research practices and researcher responsibilities as well as advice to those with concerns or complaints about potential breaches of the Code.

(7) The Code sets out the principles and responsibilities that both researchers and institutions are to follow when conducting research.

(8) Critical to this endeavour are the moral leadership and espoused values of Southern Cross University, and the shared values and expectations of honesty and integrity that characterise the leadership and culture at SCU. RIAs help the University to promote this culture.

(9) RIAs are people with research experience, analytical skills, empathy, good communication skills, knowledge and understanding of the University's processes and the Code.

(10) RIAs should have a demonstrated track record of responsible research conduct.

(11) RIAs will also have a good understanding of related Southern Cross policies.

(12) RIAs will have a substantive Fixed-Term or Continuing Appointment at Southern Cross University at Academic Levels C – E.

(13) Adjunct or Visiting appointees are not eligible to act as RIAs.

(14) At Southern Cross University, the role of RIA is to:

a. Provide confidential advice to researchers on responsible research practices and potential breaches of the Code;
b. Assist researchers in understanding their responsibilities under the Code and institutional policies related to research;
c. Suggest strategies that may help staff or students resolve any concerns they have about research conduct;
d. Guide researchers on the appropriate steps to take if they have remaining concerns about research conduct including how to lodge a concern for formal preliminary assessment, as set out in the Research Integrity Procedures (Staff) and Research Integrity Procedures – Higher Degree Researchers (Students).

(15) Research Integrity Advisors do not:

a. Advocate for or on behalf of anyone involved in a possible concern about research conduct;
b. Investigate or manage any formal allegations;
c. Advise on any matters where they have an actual or perceived conflict of interest;
d. Manage concerns or provide advice about sexual misconduct, bullying or harassment which should be managed in accordance with the relevant Southern Cross University policy, such as:
    i. Harassment, Bullying and Discrimination Prevention Policy,
    ii. Sexual Misconduct (Prevention and Response) Policy;
    iii. Complaint Policy – Staff,
    iv. Complaint Policy – Students and Members of the Public.

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Section 4 - Appointment of Research Integrity Advisors

(16) At least one RIA is appointed within each Faculty.

(17) In the case of large Faculties with diverse research groupings more than one RIA may be appointed.

(18) RIAs may be appointed within Colleges or that responsibility may be assigned to a Faculty RIA with appropriate research experience.

(19) RIAs are appointed by the Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor (SDVC) for a term of two years, which may be renewed.

(20) The SDVC will communicate to Executive Deans of Faculties/Colleges the number of RIAs required within their work unit.

(21) The SDVC will solicit nominations for RIA positions from Executive Deans/College Deans of Faculties/Colleges as positions become vacant.

(22) Executive Deans/College Deans may call for expressions of interest in the role of RIA or directly approach suitably qualified individuals who they consider have the necessary qualities to successfully undertake the role.

(23) All nominations provided by Executive Deans/College Deans should comprise the resumé of the nominee and a one-page summary of how their skills and experience align with the criteria set out in Section 3 of these Procedures.

(24) In the event of more than one nomination for a vacant RIA position, the SDVC will determine the appointment.

(25) The appointment may be made solely through consideration of the nominee’s documentation or through informal interviews with the nominee.

(26) The appointment of RIAs should be undertaken with consideration of the University's commitment to develop a staff profile that reflects the diversity of its students and the general community, including its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

(27) Once appointed, the names of RIAs, their contact details and details of the role will be disseminated widely across the University.

(28) Clear and accessible information about RIAs will also be presented on the Research Integrity section of the external facing website.

Section 5 - Training and Support for Research Integrity Advisors

(29) The Office of the Senior Deputy Vice Chancellor (SDVC) and HR Services will organise formal induction of new RIAs to the role.

(30) The Office of the SDVC in conjunction with HR Services will review areas (in consultation with RIAs) in which additional training and support may be required. This is intended to ensure that RIAs are kept abreast of developments related to the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research, relevant legislation, University policies and procedures, and current issues in research integrity.

(31) This ongoing review will form the basis for an annual training program for all RIAs.

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(32) In addition, RIAs will be encouraged and supported to attend external workshops, meetings and conferences relevant to research integrity.

Section 6 - Seeking Advice from Research Integrity Advisors

(33) Individuals may approach RIAs about any aspect of the responsible conduct of research including: research practices and researcher responsibilities, as well as seeking advice with concerns or complaints about potential breaches of the Code.

(34) An individual is not limited to seeking advice from the RIA from their own Faculty or College.

(35) In the case of concerns regarding research integrity, it is recommended that in the first instance, the RIA hold discussions at the local level with the researchers involved.

(36) If the concerns are not alleviated at a local level, or it is not possible to have those conversations, an appropriate RIA should be contacted to discuss the concerns.

(37) In accordance with the Research Integrity Procedures (Staff) and Research Integrity – Higher Degree Researchers (Students), an RIA should always be contacted before a formal allegation is made.

(38) The individual raising the concern should do so in general terms but provide enough information for the RIA to understand the context of the concern.

(39) RIAs should respond in a timely manner or advise if further time is required for them to seek advice.

(40) RIAs may choose to seek advice from other RIAs or the Office of the SDVC.

(41) RIAs should respond in a supportive, respectful and confidential manner in order to enable discussion of:

a. Responsible research practices as described in the Code and its supporting guides;
b. Concerns about potential breaches of the Code;
c. The process and information required for reporting a potential breach of the Code and other appropriate pathways to manage concerns that are not necessarily related to research integrity.

(42) The RIA should establish shared expectations from the outset about the extent to which the RIA will be able to keep information confidential and when they may have an obligation to report the matter. The person seeking advice can then decide whether to disclose details to the RIA, seek general advice only, or seek an alternative source of advice.

(43) RIAs must keep confidential records of all interactions.

(44) The RIA's records should be kept in a safe, secure location and disposed of in accordance with Southern Cross University's Records Management Policy. Staff recordkeeping responsibilities are summarised here.

(45) The RIA's records of confidential discussions are not part of any investigation process. However, if a matter is referred for investigation, these records may be required as evidence.

(46) RIAs will provide advice about appropriate institutional rules and policies and the options available, which include:

a. Not proceeding if the concern is clearly not related to a breach of the Code;
b. Proceeding under a different University complaint process;

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c. Making an Allegation about a potential breach of the Code via SCU's online Research Integrity Database.

(47) Consistent with the requirements of the Code for all those involved in research, RIAs have an obligation to report potential breaches of the Code to the Office of the SDVC.

(48) The RIAs role does not extend to the assessment or investigation of a complaint. The RIA will not contact the person who is the subject of the concern.

(49) If an RIA judges, in the course of discussions, that a serious breach of University policy or legislation has occurred, they are required to escalate the matter immediately using the channels set out in the relevant University Policy. This includes but is not limited to matters that:

a. Pose a possible threat to the health, safety or life of any person;
b. Could be a serious risk to the operations or reputation of the University;
c. May involve corrupt conduct or criminal behaviour.

Section 7 - Addressing Conflicts of Interest or Bias

(50) An RIA is disqualified from offering any advice regarding research conduct if there is any actual or perceived bias or conflict of interest. A conflict of interest includes but is not limited to:

a. Any connection to the research that the concern is being raised about;
b. Any personal relationship of a social or intimate nature between:
    i. The RIA, Researcher or Respondent concerned; or
    ii. Any other person who may be connected to the research concerned;
c. Financial or non-financial interest that may be perceived as a potential or actual conflict of interest.

(51) If an individual raising a concern recognises a conflict with their Faculty RIA they may seek to raise the concern with another RIA or the Office of the SDVC.

(52) If the RIA contacted recognises a conflict of interest, they should seek advice from the Office of the SDVC regarding the concern being considered by an alternative suitable RIA.

(53) If a Third Party recognises a conflict of interest in an RIA offering advice, they should inform the Office of the SDVC.

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Status and Details

Status	Current
Effective Date	24th September 2024
Review Date	24th September 2027
Approval Authority	Academic Board
Approval Date	19th September 2024
Expiry Date	Not Applicable
Responsible Executive	Mary Spongberg Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor +61 7 55893361
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