

Managing risks of research misuse associated with grant funding activities

Joint BBSRC, MRC and Wellcome Trust policy statement

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wellcometrust

The three organisations

Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC)

- supports basic and strategic biological research
- spend over £330m (\$575m) per annum



Medical Research Council (MRC)

- supports research in all areas of medical and related science
- spend over £450m (\$785m) per annum



Wellcome Trust

- independent biomedical research charity
- spend approx. £450m (\$785m) per annum



Key policy drivers

- Developments in the UK
 - new legislation introduced
 - increasing Parliamentary attention
 - UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office: stakeholder engagement for BTWC meetings in 2005
- Developments in the US
 - awareness of the US political response
 - National Academies' ("Fink") report was influential in informing our thinking



Position statements on terrorist misuse of research

- appropriate systems should be set in place to manage risks of research misuse
- risks must be balanced against benefits
- dissemination of research outcomes is crucial to the scientific enterprise
- importance of international collaboration and training
- the need for self-governance within the scientific community
- commitment to examine our grant funding procedures

Strong existing frameworks

- funding decisions are based on **peer review** by leading experts in the field (external referees and funding committees)
- the host institution is responsible for ensuring that the requirements of all regulatory authorities are met
- advisory mechanisms exist for rare cases where additional ethical and social issues are raised
- actively promote best practice in funded research:
 - guidelines on good practice in research
 - research misconduct policies

Working in partnership

- BBSRC, MRC and Wellcome Trust committed to work together to:
 - examine how funding procedures could be strengthened in light of concerns over research misuse
 - develop a **consistent policy approach** across the three organisations
- work was informed by a **joint consultation exercise** of funding and advisory committee members
 - views of 32 committee members gained
 - recognition of importance of the issue & support for specific guidance, and some procedural changes
- issues were discussed at a joint Royal Society and Wellcome Trust workshop held in October 2004

Joint policy statement

- joint BBSRC, MRC and Wellcome Trust policy statement published in September 2005
- statement sets out agreed changes to policies and procedures in four areas:
 - **guidance for applicants** – introduction of a question on application forms
 - **guidance for referees** – explicit mention of research misuse as an issue to consider
 - **guidance for funding committees** – clear guidance on process for assessing cases where concerns raised
 - **good practice guidelines** – modification to include specific reference to research misuse

The wider context

- these procedural changes aim to help:
 - ensure risks of misuse considered at research proposal stage
 - raise awareness of the issue in scientific community
- fully recognise that these changes will not be sufficient on their own in preventing research being misused
- other processes within the research environment are crucially important, including:
 - governance at institutional level
 - adherence to health and safety regulations
 - appropriate caution in making appointments

Next steps...

- implementation of the agreed changes is underway
- the three organisations will:
 - actively monitor the procedures and keep them under review
 - continue to engage in policy discussions on these issues
- feedback and queries on the policy greatly appreciated
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