BBSRC GUIDELINES FOR DEALING WITH ALLEGED PLAGIARISM OF APPLICATIONS TO BBSRC

If communication is received about alleged plagiarism involving BBSRC supported research, the following procedure should be followed:

Initial Action

1. The Complaints Officer should be informed immediately.

2. The officer who has received the communication should acknowledge receipt of the complaint and say that the Complaints Officer will be in contact.

3. The appropriate information about the complaint and the relevant documents (the original application/grant and the one that may contain information that has been plagiarised) as well as any other information, should be sent to the Complaints Officer who will instigate an internal review of the matter by an appropriate officer and avoiding possible conflicts of interest. At this stage contact with all parties involved in the allegations should be through the Complaints Officer.

Internal Review

4. The office review, which should include a summary of the allegation and a view on whether the allegation is about an overlap of 'ideas' or 'wording', should be carried out and completed by the deadline as determined by the Complaints Officer. Where external scientific expertise is required, the Complaints Officer will contact an appropriate member of a BBSRC committee to assist with the review in strictest confidence.

Contact with the Complainant

5. While the internal review is on going, the Complaints Officer will write to the complainant about the process and explain the following:
   (a) The BBSRC Conditions of Grant and BBSRC Statement on Safeguarding Good Scientific Practice make it clear that is for the employer of the person accused to undertake the review in a timely manner and not for BBSRC.
   (b) The institution employing the person about whom the complaint has been made, should have in place procedures that meet BBSRC good practice guidelines. BBSRC's role is to see that these procedures are adhered to in a timely manner.
   (c) The documents involved in allegations of plagiarism are not public domain as they are applications to BBSRC and are therefore confidential with restricted access. The employer/institution concerned may need to see copies of these confidential documents if it is to conduct an inquiry. The complainant must therefore give written agreement to BBSRC that the plagiarised proposals can be sent to the investigating institution. (See paragraph 6).
   (d) The complainant should understand that without this agreement an investigation will not be possible.
   (e) It should also be understood that it will be difficult for the complainant to remain anonymous. Even if the institution concerned has a whistle blowing procedure, it will be fairly obvious who has made the complaint.

Moreover, the complainant would not be able to put their side if their name is withheld from the inquiry.

Contact with the Institution

6. Irrespective of the findings of the internal office review BBSRC will need explicit instructions and agreement from the complainant for BBSRC to alert the institution, for their name to be disclosed to the investigating institution and to allow a copy of the alleged plagiarised proposal as submitted to BBSRC (whether funded or not) to be sent to the institution. On receiving this agreement the Complaints Officer will write to the institution, giving the above information, and asking to be informed of the process the institution intends to take and the timescale.

7. If there is identical wording, then having the two documents may be sufficient for the institution to start the inquiry. If there is overlap of ideas, the institution may have to write to the complainant indicating that to undertake an inquiry it will require further details as why the ideas are not deducible from public domain information (e.g. publications; presentations at conferences), or are not a natural consequence of two groups pursuing independent but similar lines of inquiry.

BBSRC Action

8. BBSRC will have to decide at this stage on how to deal with the application from the accused:
   (a) If there is clear overlap of words, with the agreement of the relevant Group Director, the processing of the proposal should be stopped and, if applicable, funding not agreed and withheld until the allegations have been addressed.
   (b) If there is an overlap of ideas, the situation is less clear, but, in discussion with the relevant Group Director, the starting point should be that the processing of the proposal should continue.
   (c) If in fundable range, funding should normally be withheld until the complainant has responded to the Complaints Officer on whether they wish to proceed with a formal investigation.
   (d) If the complainant confirms then the next decision point would be the outcome of the institution initial review of whether there was a prima facie case to answer.
   (e) If the complainant does not want to proceed and BBSRC is content that proper procedures have taken place, then the matter is closed and all stopped applications will continue to completion and the accused will be able to resume submitting applications to BBSRC.

9. If there is a prima facie case to answer, BBSRC should continue to withhold processing of any existing proposals and not allow the accused employee(s) of the investigating institution to submit applications until the inquiry has been completed.

10. If the allegation is upheld, BBSRC would need to be informed of what actions the institution is taking against the accused. BBSRC will have to decide whether to continue to disallow applications from this applicant and for what period.

Points of Note

11. At all stages, it must be made clear to all parties that it is not BBSRC's role to carry out the inquiries. It is up to the employer of the accused.

12. Complaints about BBSRC procedures will be investigated by the Complaints Officer in line with the agreed procedures.

13. If the alleged plagiarism is against a BBSRC employee, the relevant institute will be asked to undertake the inquiry on behalf of BBSRC as employer.

14. At all stages the Complaints Officer must be kept informed of all exchanges of information and contact with all parties involved in the allegation.

BBSRC Complaints Officer
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