



THE CONCORDAT TO SUPPORT RESEARCH INTEGRITY

CONTENTS

Summary of commitments.....	1
Requirements and expectations of the concordat.....	1
Foreword by the signatories to the concordat	2
Introduction	4
Maintaining the highest standards of research integrity.....	6
Commitment 1.....	6
Commitment 2	8
Embedding a culture of research integrity.....	10
Commitment 3	10
Dealing with allegations of research misconduct	12
Commitment 4	12
A commitment to strengthening research integrity.....	15
Commitment 5.....	15
Annexe A: Definitions	18
References	19

SUMMARY OF COMMITMENTS

This concordat seeks to provide a national framework for good research conduct and its governance. As signatories to the concordat to support research integrity, we are committed to:

1. upholding the highest standards of rigour and integrity in all aspects of research
2. ensuring that research is conducted according to appropriate ethical, legal and professional frameworks, obligations and standards
3. supporting a research environment that is underpinned by a culture of integrity and based on good governance, best practice, and support for the development of researchers
4. using transparent, timely, robust and fair processes to deal with allegations of research misconduct should they arise
5. working together to strengthen the integrity of research and to review progress regularly and openly

The ways in which researchers, employers of researchers and funders of research are expected to meet these commitments are set out in relevant sections of this concordat.

SIGNATORIES TO THE CONCORDAT

Department for the Economy, Northern Ireland

Government Office for Science

Higher Education Funding Council for Wales

National Institute for Health Research

Scottish Funding Council

UK Research and Innovation

Universities UK

Wellcome Trust

FOREWORD BY THE SIGNATORIES TO THE CONCORDAT

We firmly believe in the quality of the research produced in the UK and in the integrity of our researchers. Researchers, employers of researchers and research funders have long worked together to support and promote research integrity, and they, alongside the signatories, continue to have a vital role to play. This concordat provides an agreed mechanism for us to work together and support future developments in this important area. However, it is not the only measure the sector takes to support research integrity and should be considered in that wider context.

Research in the UK is already subject to rigorous safeguards. Research ethics processes, standards for professional practice, and wider legal and governance obligations maintain these standards. Building on this, a shared commitment to supporting research that is founded on rigour, integrity and excellence should remain an absolute priority. We must be able to demonstrate that we are taking our responsibilities seriously and that misconduct will be dealt with appropriately, while recognising that mistakes and honest errors can be made in any field of human endeavour.

This concordat recognises that the strength of UK research on the world stage is founded on researchers themselves; on the autonomy of our research establishments; on academic freedom; and on a funding environment that rewards excellence. Any overarching approach to research integrity needs to work within these existing systems, acknowledging the complementary roles and responsibilities of all parties performing, funding or otherwise supporting research.

In 2012, the signatories to the concordat recognised a need for greater openness and transparency, and to ensure adherence to consistently high standards across the research community. In 2019, these needs are greater still. Public trust in research is essential: to secure public participation in research; to maintain public support for the funding of research; and to ensure that research findings are mobilised as effectively as possible.

Internationally, there are established principles of research integrity. The Singapore Statement on Research Integrity (2010)¹ sets out the four principles of responsible research, and outlines responsibilities that should be common to all good research. The publication of the Montreal Statement on Research Integrity in Cross-Boundary Research Collaborations (2013) builds on the initial statement, setting out responsibilities relevant to collaborating partners. In 2017, a revised edition of The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity was published by All European Academies (AEA, 2017).

We welcome and support the principles outlined in these documents. This concordat is a statement of our own commitment to research integrity, and a framework through which those principles can be articulated and understood in the UK context.

The signatories to this concordat will publish an annual statement outlining what we, as a sector, have been doing to further strengthen the integrity of UK research. Representatives of the signatories to the concordat will convene an annual research integrity stakeholder forum to provide a focus for debates on research integrity. In turn, this concordat requires employers of researchers to publish an annual statement on research integrity. This expectation applies to all employers of researchers, irrespective of type and size.

¹ See References on p.19 for links to this and other publications mentioned.

Research integrity is an issue that must be continually revisited, to ensure that its principles are widely understood and accepted. In 2018, the Science and Technology Select Committee of the House of Commons concluded that the language of the concordat should be tightened, so that compliance could be more easily assessed. In the same report, the committee considered the effect of new developments in research practice on the concordat. The concordat has been revised in order to meet the recommendations of the committee. As signatories, we are committed to ensuring that this concordat remains fit for purpose, through a process of regular review, which the signatories will undertake every five years.

This revised concordat is based on the original concordat (published in 2012), which was written and developed with large higher education institutions in mind. The commitments set out in the concordat apply to all employers of researchers, but implementation is likely to vary subtly across different employers.

INTRODUCTION

This revised concordat represents a renewed ambition to further strengthen the *Concordat to support research integrity*, which was published in 2012. It provides the principles and commitments to ensure that research produced by, or in collaboration with, UK universities, research institutes and others undertaking research is underpinned by the highest standards of rigour and integrity.

All those engaged with research have a duty to consider how the work they undertake, host or support affects society and the wider research community. Implementation of the commitments set out in this concordat helps demonstrate to the public, government, business and international partners that they can continue to have confidence in the research we produce. It provides the standards expected of all stakeholders, identifying five commitments that all those engaged with research must be able to make.

By acting in accordance with this concordat, members of the research community can demonstrate that they:

1. uphold the highest standards of rigour and integrity in all aspects of research
2. ensure that research is conducted according to appropriate ethical, legal and professional frameworks, obligations and standards
3. support a research environment that is underpinned by a culture of integrity and based on good governance, best practice, and support for the development of researchers
4. use transparent, timely, robust and fair processes to handle allegations of research misconduct when they arise
5. work together to strengthen the integrity of research

The concordat documents the different responsibilities of researchers, employers of researchers and funders of research under each commitment. The signatories recognise that other organisations also play a vital role in strengthening research integrity. These include professional, statutory and regulatory bodies; journals and publishers; academies and learned societies; representative bodies; and organisations that provide support and guidance, such as the UK Research Integrity Office.

The concordat:

- **applies to all fields of research.** The highest standards of integrity are needed in all fields of research; the commitments outlined in the concordat are relevant to all disciplines in which research is undertaken.
- **designates responsibilities and accountabilities.** Ensuring research integrity requires all stakeholders to play their part. The concordat describes the responsibilities and accountabilities of each of the key participants – researchers, their employers, and funders of research – and acknowledges the important role of other organisations that support research and researchers.
- **complements existing frameworks.** The concordat does not supersede or replace statutory and regulatory standards that already exist to govern research practice, any discipline-specific guidance, or conditions of grants from funding bodies. It is designed to be complementary and to set existing guidance in a broader national framework.

- **recognises the autonomy of employers.** Employers of researchers must have the freedom to strengthen policies and procedures relating to research as appropriate to their circumstances. The concordat provides a framework to help employers ensure that they can fully discharge their responsibilities.

MAINTAINING THE HIGHEST STANDARDS OF RESEARCH INTEGRITY

COMMITMENT 1

We are committed to upholding the highest standards of rigour and integrity in all aspects of research.

The definition of research integrity used in this concordat draws on a number of existing definitions in a way that is applicable to all areas of research. The core elements are:

- **honesty** in all aspects of research, including in the presentation of research goals, intentions and findings; in reporting on research methods and procedures; in gathering data; in using and acknowledging the work of other researchers; and in conveying valid interpretations and making justifiable claims based on research findings
- **rigour**, in line with prevailing disciplinary norms and standards, and in performing research and using appropriate methods; in adhering to an agreed protocol where appropriate; in drawing interpretations and conclusions from the research; and in communicating the results
- **transparency and open communication** in declaring potential competing interests; in the reporting of research data collection methods; in the analysis and interpretation of data; in making research findings widely available, which includes publishing or otherwise sharing negative or null results to recognise their value as part of the research process; and in presenting the work to other researchers and to the public
- **care and respect** for all participants in research, and for the subjects, users and beneficiaries of research, including humans, animals, the environment and cultural objects. Those engaged with research must also show care and respect for the integrity of the research record
- **accountability** of funders, employers and researchers to collectively create a research environment in which individuals and organisations are empowered and enabled to own the research process. Those engaged with research must also ensure that individuals and organisations are held to account when behaviour falls short of the standards set by this concordat

These core elements of research integrity apply to all aspects of research, including the preparation and submission of grant and project proposals, the publication and dissemination of findings, and the provision of expert review on the proposals or publications of others (that is, peer review).

Researchers must be able to exercise freedom in their academic choices, and must also accept responsibility for the decisions that they make. Thus, the primary responsibility for ensuring that they act in accordance with these principles in all aspects of their research work, including peer review, lies with the individual. Employers of researchers, funders of research and other organisations engaged with supporting research and researchers also have important roles to play.

Researchers are responsible for:

- understanding the expected standards of rigour and integrity relevant to their research
- maintaining the highest standards of rigour and integrity in their work at all times

Employers of researchers are responsible for:

- maintaining a research environment that develops good research practice and embeds a culture of research integrity, as described in commitments 2 to 5
- supporting researchers to understand and act according to expected standards, values and behaviours
- defending researchers when they live up to the expectations of this concordat in difficult circumstances
- demonstrating that they have procedures in place to ensure that research is conducted in accordance with standards of best practice; systems to promote research integrity; and transparent, robust and fair processes to investigate alleged research misconduct

Funders of research will:

- publish clear statements of their expectations of researchers and employers of researchers with respect to standards of professionalism and integrity
- take research integrity into account in the development of policies and processes
- encourage adoption of the concordat by associating it with their funding conditions

Where research is being conducted collaboratively, and particularly within interdisciplinary or international partnerships, there needs to be clear agreement on, and articulation of, the standards and frameworks that will apply to the work. The Montreal Statement on Research Integrity in Cross-Boundary Research Collaborations (2013), and The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (2017) provide helpful advice on this point.

COMMITMENT 2

We are committed to ensuring that research is conducted according to appropriate ethical, legal and professional frameworks, obligations and standards.

Research is governed by a range of ethical, legal and professional frameworks, obligations and standards. The frameworks that regulate research practice will change over time. Ethical concerns also change over time, and new legal obligations and professional standards will be introduced. All parties have a responsibility to ensure they have up-to-date knowledge of the frameworks, standards and obligations that apply to their work.

Other organisations engaged with supporting research and researchers (such as professional, statutory and regulatory bodies; academies and learned societies; and the UK Research Integrity Office) have considerable experience in developing professional codes of conduct, ethical frameworks and other guidelines that provide both general and discipline-specific guidance. Funders of research may provide similar forms of guidance and may sometimes also specify guidelines that must be adhered to as part of their conditions of grant. Relevant and appropriate resources must be drawn on by researchers when they undertake research and may also be of use to employers of researchers.

Researchers must:

- comply with ethical, legal and professional frameworks, obligations and standards as required by statutory and regulatory authorities, and by employers, funders and other relevant stakeholders
- ensure that all their research is subject to active and appropriate consideration of ethical issues

Employers of researchers must:

- have clear policies on ethical review and approval that are available to all researchers
- make sure that all researchers are aware of, and understand policies and processes relating to ethical approval
- support researchers to adopt best practice in relation to ethical, legal and professional requirements
- have appropriate arrangements in place through which researchers can access advice and guidance on ethical, legal and professional obligations and standards

To support researchers and employers of researchers, **funders of research** will:

- through engagement with the signatories and other stakeholders, explore ways of streamlining their requirements to reduce duplication, inconsistency and/or conflict
- ensure that their requirements are, through regular review, proportionate, relevant and consistent with the expectations of the concordat
- incorporate proportionate checks, where appropriate, in the application and award processes related to legal and ethical requirements

- only provide funding to organisations that can demonstrate that appropriate structures are in place to ensure research integrity in their research activities
- clearly identify and indicate any specific codes of practice and other policies that researchers and employers of researchers are expected to comply with, beyond those that might be generally expected

Other organisations working to support research and researchers should continue with their efforts to further strengthen the integrity of research. In particular, the work of organisations to develop recognised ethical guidelines and codes of conduct for different research disciplines is invaluable. Collaboration between organisations has led to the development of shared approaches to cross-institutional ways of working, and the further development of this guidance should be encouraged.

EMBEDDING A CULTURE OF RESEARCH INTEGRITY

COMMITMENT 3

We are committed to supporting a research environment that is underpinned by a culture of integrity and based on good governance, best practice and support for the development of researchers.

Maintaining the highest standards in research requires the right environment. It is the main responsibility of employers of researchers – and all those undertaking, supporting or otherwise engaging with research – to maintain a culture that encourages good practice. Those with a responsibility for the research environment include universities, research institutes, funders of research, professional and representative bodies, and individual organisations with a regulatory role.

A research environment that helps to develop good research practice and embeds a culture of research integrity must, as a minimum, have:

- clear policies, practices and procedures to support researchers
- training on research ethics and research integrity with suitable learning, training and mentoring opportunities to support the development of researchers' skills throughout their careers
- robust management systems to ensure that policies relating to research, research integrity and researcher behaviour are implemented
- awareness among researchers of the standards and behaviours that are expected of them
- systems within the research environment that identify potential concerns at an early stage
- mechanisms for providing support to researchers in need of assistance
- policies in place that ensure that there is no stigma attached to researchers who find that they need assistance from their employers
- clear processes for any staff member to raise concerns about research integrity

Most employers of researchers will recognise the above features in their own research environment, and it is expected that these will develop over time. Employers of researchers should, therefore, have mechanisms in place that periodically review research practice and culture to ensure that practice remains fit for purpose. The concordat should act as a tool for stimulating this reflection.

Researchers will:

- take responsibility for keeping their knowledge up to date on the frameworks, standards and obligations that apply to their work
- collaborate to maintain a research environment that encourages research integrity
- design, conduct and report research in ways that embed integrity and ethical practice throughout

Employers of researchers will:

- embed these features in their own systems, processes and practices
- reflect recognised best practice in their own systems, processes and practices
- implement the concordat within their research environment
- participate in an annual monitoring exercise to demonstrate that the institution has met the commitments of the concordat
- promote training and development opportunities to research staff and students, and encourage their uptake
- identify a named senior member of staff to oversee research integrity and ensure that this information is kept up to date and publicly available on the institution's website
- identify a named member of staff who will act as a first point of contact for anyone wanting more information on matters of research integrity, and ensure that contact details for this person are kept up to date and are publicly available on the institution's website

Other organisations engaged with supporting research and researchers will have considerable experience in assisting researchers and employers to develop and sustain a culture of research integrity. Researchers and employers of researchers should consider how they might best use these sources of help.

Funders of research will:

- promote adoption of the concordat within the research community
- support the implementation of the concordat through shared guidance, policies and plans
- identify within their organisation a senior member of staff responsible for oversight of research integrity and ensure that this information is publicly available on the organisation's website
- identify within their organisation a named lead contact for research integrity, and ensure that contact details for this person are kept up to date and are publicly available on the organisation's website
- consider whether their policies and processes create disincentives for the creation and embedding of a positive research culture
- work in partnership with employers and researchers to embed a culture of integrity within the research community
- encourage adoption of the concordat by associating it with their funding conditions

DEALING WITH ALLEGATIONS OF RESEARCH MISCONDUCT

COMMITMENT 4

We are committed to using transparent, timely, robust and fair processes to deal with allegations of research misconduct when they arise.

Research misconduct is characterised as behaviours or actions that fall short of the standards of ethics, research and scholarship required to ensure that the integrity of research is upheld. It can cause harm to people and the environment, wastes resources, undermines the research record and damages the credibility of research. The concordat recognises that academic freedom is fundamental to the production of excellent research. This means that responsibility for ensuring that no misconduct occurs rests primarily with individual researchers.

Research misconduct can take many forms, including:

- **fabrication:** making up results, other outputs (for example, artefacts) or aspects of research, including documentation and participant consent, and presenting and/or recording them as if they were real
- **falsification:** inappropriately manipulating and/or selecting research processes, materials, equipment, data, imagery and/or consents
- **plagiarism:** using other people's ideas, intellectual property or work (written or otherwise) without acknowledgement or permission
- **failure to meet:** legal, ethical and professional obligations, for example:
 - not observing legal, ethical and other requirements for human research participants, animal subjects, or human organs or tissue used in research, or for the protection of the environment
 - breach of duty of care for humans involved in research whether deliberately, recklessly or by gross negligence, including failure to obtain appropriate informed consent
 - misuse of personal data, including inappropriate disclosures of the identity of research participants and other breaches of confidentiality
 - improper conduct in peer review of research proposals, results or manuscripts submitted for publication. This includes failure to disclose conflicts of interest; inadequate disclosure of clearly limited competence; misappropriation of the content of material; and breach of confidentiality or abuse of material provided in confidence for the purposes of peer review
- **misrepresentation of:**
 - data, including suppression of relevant results/data or knowingly, recklessly or by gross negligence presenting a flawed interpretation of data
 - involvement, including inappropriate claims to authorship or attribution of work and denial of authorship/attribution to persons who have made an appropriate contribution
 - interests, including failure to declare competing interests of researchers or funders of a study

- qualifications, experience and/or credentials
- publication history, through undisclosed duplication of publication, including undisclosed duplicate submission of manuscripts for publication
- **improper dealing with allegations of misconduct:** failing to address possible infringements, such as attempts to cover up misconduct and reprisals against whistle-blowers, or failing to adhere appropriately to agreed procedures in the investigation of alleged research misconduct accepted as a condition of funding. Improper dealing with allegations of misconduct includes the inappropriate censoring of parties through the use of legal instruments, such as non-disclosure agreements

Honest errors and differences in, for example, research methodology or interpretations do not constitute research misconduct.

It is imperative that when an allegation of research misconduct arises that suitable procedures are in place to deal with it effectively and fairly. Employers have a duty of care to the researchers they employ, and there needs to be appropriate protection for the rights and interests of all parties. There must be accountability when things go wrong and, where concerns are upheld, appropriate action must be taken.

Employers of researchers have primary responsibility for investigating allegations of research misconduct. This responsibility includes:

- ensuring that any person involved in investigating allegations has the appropriate knowledge, skills, experience and authority to do so
- taking reasonable steps to ensure that the investigation is independent and avoids any potential conflicts of interest
- ensuring that the investigation is well documented and occurs over a reasonable timeframe

Researchers will:

- act in good faith with regard to allegations of research misconduct, whether in making allegations or in being required to participate in an investigation, and take reasonable steps, working with employers as appropriate, to ensure the recommendations made by formal research misconduct investigation panels are implemented
- handle potential instances of research misconduct in an appropriate manner; this includes reporting misconduct to employers, funders and professional, statutory and regulatory bodies as circumstances require
- declare and act accordingly to manage conflicts of interest

Employers of researchers must:

- have clear, well-articulated and confidential mechanisms for reporting allegations of research misconduct
- have robust, transparent and fair processes for dealing with allegations of misconduct that reflect best practice. This includes the use of independent external members of formal investigation panels, and clear routes for appeal (see the references section)

- ensure that all researchers and other members of staff are made aware of the relevant contacts and procedures for making allegations
- act with no detriment to whistle-blowers who have made allegations of misconduct in good faith, or in the public interest, including taking reasonable steps to safeguard their reputation. This should include avoiding the inappropriate use of legal instruments, such as non-disclosure agreements
- take reasonable steps to resolve any issues found during the investigation. This can include imposing sanctions, requesting a correction of the research record and reporting any action to regulatory and statutory bodies, research participants, funders or other professional bodies as circumstances, contractual obligations and statutory requirements dictate
- take reasonable steps to safeguard the reputation of individuals who are exonerated
- provide information on investigations of research misconduct to funders of research and to professional and/or statutory bodies as required by their conditions of grant and other legal, professional and statutory obligations
- support their researchers in providing appropriate information when they are required to make reports to professional and/or statutory bodies
- provide a named point of contact or recognise an appropriate third party to act as confidential liaison for whistle-blowers or any other person wishing to raise concerns about the integrity of research being conducted under their auspices. This need not be the same person as the member of staff identified to act as first point of contact on research integrity matters, as recommended under commitment 3

Employers should also be mindful that minor infractions, including honest errors, particularly by less experienced researchers or where there is no evident intention to deceive, may often be addressed informally through mentoring, education and guidance.

Funders of research will:

- publish clear statements of what constitutes research misconduct
- ensure that recipients of funding are aware of requirements regarding the investigation and reporting of research misconduct, and that these are openly stated
- work with employers of researchers to manage funding appropriately, including any staff supported by an affected project
- treat all allegations with confidentiality and abide by data protection laws with respect to data management
- take appropriate action when research misconduct is reported to them. In the most serious case, this could include funding sanctions or mandatory improvements

Other organisations may be able to offer advice, guidance and practical assistance to all those involved in handling allegations of research misconduct. The references section identifies some resources that can help organisations ensure that systems for handling allegations of misconduct are effective.

A COMMITMENT TO STRENGTHENING RESEARCH INTEGRITY

COMMITMENT 5

We are committed to working together to strengthen the integrity of research and to reviewing progress regularly and openly.

All signatories to the concordat are committed to the ongoing development of a culture that supports and nurtures research integrity, and of mechanisms that provide assurances and, when things go wrong, to ensuring appropriate investigation and action are forthcoming. Importantly, we must be able to account for our efforts in an open and transparent way.

Researchers will ensure their own integrity and help to develop a culture of integrity in their groups, departments and institutions.

Employers of researchers will:

- take steps to ensure that their environment promotes and embeds a commitment to research integrity, and that suitable processes are in place to deal with misconduct
- produce a short annual statement, which must be presented to their own governing body, and subsequently be made publicly available, ordinarily through the institution's website. This annual statement must include:
 - a summary of actions and activities that have been undertaken to support and strengthen understanding and the application of research integrity issues (for example postgraduate and researcher training, or process reviews)
 - a statement to provide assurance that the processes the institution has in place for dealing with allegations of misconduct are transparent, timely, robust and fair, and that they continue to be appropriate to the needs of the organisation
 - a high-level statement on any formal investigations of research misconduct that have been undertaken, which will include data on the number of investigations. If no formal investigation has been undertaken, this should also be noted
 - a statement on what the institution has learned from any formal investigations of research misconduct that have been undertaken, including what lessons have been learned to prevent the same type of incident re-occurring
 - a statement on how the institution creates and embeds a research environment in which all staff, researchers and students feel comfortable to report instances of misconduct
- periodically review their processes to ensure that these remain fit for purpose

To improve transparency, a link to the statement should be sent to the secretariat of the signatories to the concordat.

Funders of research will:

- periodically review their policies and grant conditions to ensure that they support good practice in research integrity
- periodically review their processes and practices to ensure that these are not providing inappropriate incentives

Finally, it is important that those involved in embedding the concordat can learn from each other and disseminate good practice more widely. The signatories to this concordat commit to convening an annual research integrity forum to assess progress and to draw out lessons for the sector. To ensure openness and accountability, the signatories to the concordat will work together to produce an annual narrative statement on research integrity. This statement will be based on input from the signatories to the concordat and will be produced by the secretariat of the concordat.

ANNEXE A: DEFINITIONS

Research: Drawing on the UK funding bodies' definition used in the Research Excellence Framework, as described in *Assessment framework and guidance on submissions* (Hefce, Hefcw, SFC, DEL, 2011), 'research' is defined as, 'a process of investigation leading to new insights, effectively shared... It includes work of direct relevance to the needs of commerce, industry, and to the public and voluntary sectors; scholarship; the invention and generation of ideas, images, performances, artefacts including design, where these lead to new or substantially improved insights; and the use of existing knowledge in experimental development to produce new or substantially improved materials, devices, products and processes, including design and construction'.

Researchers: Following the UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO) *Code of practice for research* (2009), 'researchers' are defined as any people who conduct research, including but not limited to: as an employee; as an independent contractor or consultant; as a research student; as a visiting or emeritus member of staff; or as a member of staff on a joint clinical or honorary contract.

Research integrity: There is no universal definition of research integrity. This concordat identifies five core elements of research integrity, and these are described under commitment 1. The Singapore Statement on Research Integrity (2010), referenced within this concordat, provides a further definition. In addition, the UKRIO has set out principles of research integrity in its Code of Practice (UKRIO, 2009).

Employers of researchers: Drawing on the UKRIO *Code of practice for research* (2009), a broad definition of 'employer' is used. 'Employers of researchers' are any bodies that: conduct or host research; employ, support or host researchers; teach research students; or allow research to be carried out under their auspices.

Funders of research: These may be in the public-, third- or private sector. Funders may also be employers of researchers, and they may also commission research, and/or provide block grants or hypothecated funds. The definition includes organisations that provide financial sponsorship for research and/or researchers.

Other organisations: A diverse range of other organisations are involved in supporting the integrity of research. 'Other organisations' engaged with supporting research and researchers include: professional, statutory and regulatory bodies; academies and learned societies; professional and subject-specific representative bodies; journals and publishers; and organisations offering advice, guidance and support, such as the UKRIO.

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