Research Integrity @UNSW

1 January – 31 December 2024

About this Report

This report has been collated by Conduct and Integrity to provide insight into research integrity activities and complaints about UNSW researchers and research between 1 January and 31 December 2024.

Limitations

Information in this report is based on records in the university's complaints management system on 14 May 2025.

Conduct and Integrity
Office of Assurance and Integrity
Division of Vice-Chancellor and President

AUGUST 2025

Contents

New complaint and case management system

In February 2024, UNSW launched a new complaint and case management system for recording and managing complaints and reports of potential breaches of the Code of Conduct and Values, including research misconduct.

About Conduct and Integrity

Conduct and Integrity investigates and resolves serious complaints and wrongdoing at UNSW, managing:

- Serious student conduct and academic integrity matters
- Research integrity matters
- Reports of serious wrongdoing
- Complex complaints
- UNSW's SpeakUp Strategy of building and fostering a culture of respect and integrity at the University
- UNSW's Complaints Management System

Conduct and Integrity collaborates with Schools, Faculties and the Division of Research to promote research integrity, and to manage reports of potential breaches of the university's Code of Conduct and Values by UNSW researchers in the conduct of research.

2024 AT A GLANCE

Complaints and enquiries received

37%
Fewer complaints

58 complaints, alerts and enquiries
about UNSW research and researchers. (page 6)

Majority were about data **and/or image manipulation in research** (page 6)

Majority related to **medicine and health** disciplines (page 7)

Complaints made against **a very small proportion of the UNSW's 11,804 researchers** (page 7)

0.5%
of UNSW researchers

Complaints investigated and resolved

51 cases involving **190 allegations** investigated in preliminary assessment (page 10)

39% About a third related to current and former UNSW researchers in **Medicine & Health** (page 12)

35% About a third of matters involved the university's **most experienced researchers** (page 12)

Investigation findings...

No breach found
39%
of cases

0.2%
Breached Research Code

13
Major & Serious breaches

Majority of cases involved no breach of the Research Code

A **very small proportion** (25 of 11,804) UNSW researchers breached the Research Code

There were 13 (0.1%) UNSW researchers found to have **major & serious breaches** of the Research Code

INTRODUCTION

Until May 2024, the UNSW *Research Code of Conduct* (**Research Code**) outlined the principles of a responsible research conduct and standards of behaviour expected of all researchers at UNSW.

On 17 May 2024, the Research Code of Conduct was replaced with new UNSW *Code of Conduct and Values* (the **Code**), applying to all members of the UNSW community[1]. The Code's principles and responsibilities guide and support the UNSW community to act with integrity, honesty and trust, in a positive, productive and open culture.

Shared responsibility for research integrity

The university recognises that maintaining research integrity is a shared responsibility with its researchers and the broader research community. We deliberately focus on creating an ecosystem that supports a culture of research integrity, where UNSW researchers demonstrate responsible research practice and standards of behaviour which are consistent with the Code. UNSW researchers are supported by faculties, schools and divisions working in close collaboration to:

Figure 1: Principles of Responsible Conduct of Research at UNSW

- promote and raise awareness and understanding of the importance of research integrity

- provide mandatory research integrity training for all UNSW researchers.

- improve research infrastructure to support responsible research practices.

  This includes providing facilities for safe and secure storage and management of research data, records and primary materials.

- ensure supervisors of Higher Degree Research (**HDR**) candidates have the appropriate skills, qualifications, experience and resources to supervise research

- educate research students and career researchers on responsible research practice and research integrity.

  This includes providing a comprehensive induction program for HDR candidates and training for HDR supervisors

- develop, disseminate, implement and regularly review the university's processes that promote adherence to the Code; and

- ensure mechanisms and processes enable complainants and respondents to feel safe in the knowledge that concerns will be addressed confidentially, sensitively and managed according to the principles of procedural fairness

- manage complaints about alleged breaches of the Code; and

- ensure compliance with statutory and legal requirements, and regulations, set by a range of external bodies (Figure 2).
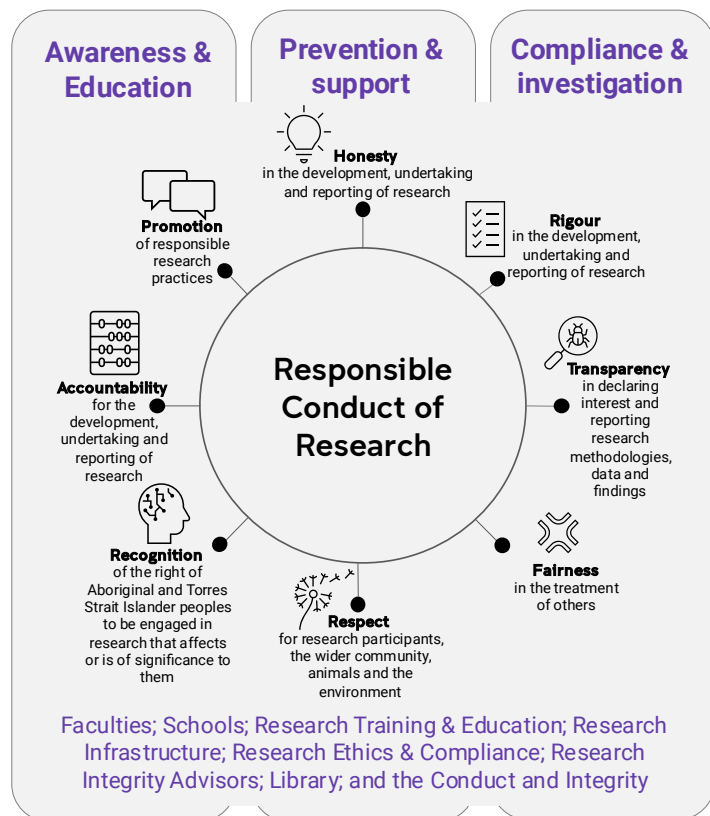
---

[1] The UNSW community comprises students, employees, affiliates, and certain contractors/consultants.

Supporting responsible research practice

The university provides a range of resources to support UNSW researchers in conducting their research responsibly. In addition to guidance on expected conduct provided by the code of conduct, and various research policies and procedures, resources include:

- guidance on the university's position on the use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (**AI**) in Research
- discipline specific resources and subject guides on copyright, open access, and ethical publishing
- researcher training programs, courses and professional development
- specialised researcher training in human and animal research ethics, export controls, radiation safety, drone operations, poisons and therapeutic substances, gene technology, quarantine and biosecurity; and
- research technology and data management services and training to protect the integrity of researchers' work.
- online videos and guidance on managing authorship disputes and using plagiarism detection software, iThenticate.

Managing unacceptable research practice

On 12 February 2024, UNSW's *Complaints Management and Investigation Policy and Procedure* (**CMIPP**) was launched, replacing the *Research Misconduct Procedure* (**RMP**), and maintaining its alignment with the *Guide to Managing and Investigating Potential Breaches of the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research* [2] (the **Guide**).

Complaints about potential breaches of research integrity are managed by Conduct and Integrity according to the applicable code of conduct at the time of the alleged conduct, and the complaint management procedure applicable at the time the report or complaint was made. As part of the complaint management process Conduct and Integrity also identifies:

- any individual or institutional failures which may have contributed to an individual's breach of the relevant Code;
- institutional gaps and systemic failures which may have contributed to the breach of research integrity; and
- recommended corrective actions to be undertaken to address them.

The university is required to comply with a range of statutory, legal, and other regulations set by a range of external authorities, including reporting and responding to questions on its handling of complaints of breaches of research integrity. Figure 2 below sets out some of the key bodies.
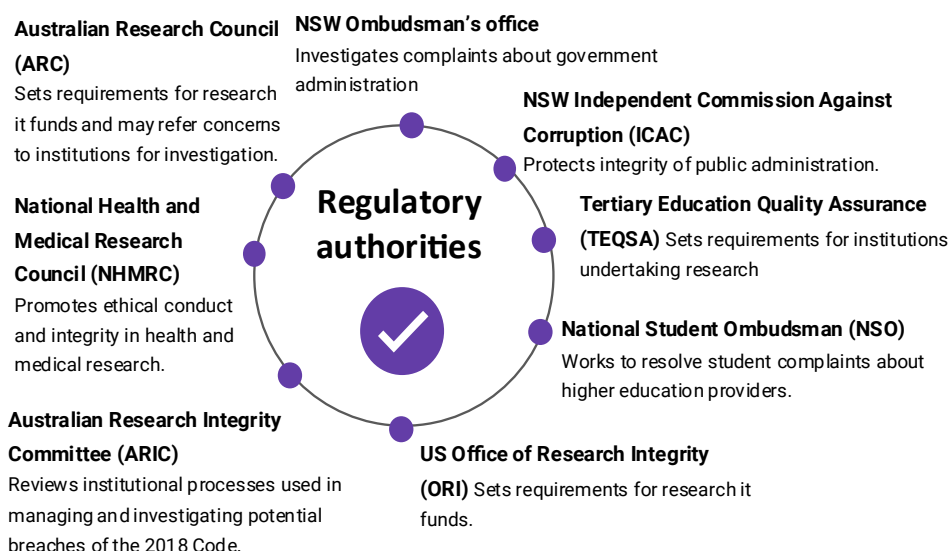

Australian Research Council (ARC)
Sets requirements for research it funds and may refer concerns to institutions for investigation.

National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC)
Promotes ethical conduct and integrity in health and medical research.

Australian Research Integrity Committee (ARIC)
Reviews institutional processes used in managing and investigating potential breaches of the 2018 Code.

NSW Ombudsman's office
Investigates complaints about government administration

NSW Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC)
Protects integrity of public administration.

Tertiary Education Quality Assurance (TEQSA) Sets requirements for institutions undertaking research

National Student Ombudsman (NSO)
Works to resolve student complaints about higher education providers.

US Office of Research Integrity (ORI) Sets requirements for research it funds.

Regulatory authorities

Figure 2: Key bodies.

---

[2] *Guide to Managing and Investigating Potential Breaches of the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research* 2018. National Health and Medical Research Council, Australian Research Council and Universities Australia. Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra
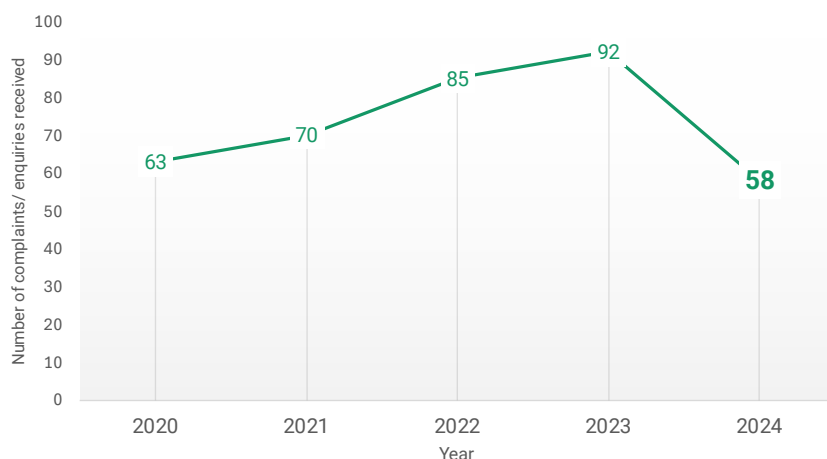
COMPLAINTS AND ENQUIRIES RECEIVED

Figure 3: Annual comparison of cases raised 2020 to 2024.

In 2024, the university received 58 complaints, alerts, and enquiries relating to UNSW research and researchers. Most of these (86% or **50), were complaints**, or expressions of dissatisfaction or concern raised by individuals seeking a response from the university. This represents 37% fewer complaints than was received in 2023, and the lowest number of complaints received over the last four years.

37% Fewer complaints

What the complaints and enquiries were about

Type of concern	Number of complaints and queries				
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Data/Image manipulation	5	6	8	15	13
Authorship	9	9	16	6	10
Conflict of Interest	3	3	5	3	5
Plagiarism	6	6	12	10	5
Animal Research Ethics	10	8	2	8	4
Supervision & Mentoring	1	4	2	8	1
Human Research Ethics	3	6	6	6	3
Intellectual Property	3		2	1	3
Peer Review					2
Export control/DTC					2
Publication/Dissemination			7	1	1
Grant management	1	2	1	3	1
Recordkeeping/ Data Handling	1	4		1	1
Gene Technology					1
Import/Export & Quarantine			2		1
Privacy (Research)		3		2	
Responsible research conduct a)	20	15		8	
Other b)	1	4	22	20	5
TOTAL	**63**	**70**	**85**	**92**	**58**

Table 1: Types of concerns raised in complaints and queries received

Note:

a) Refers to a failure by a researcher to support a culture of responsible conduct of research.

b) In 2023, 'Other' included three student complaints about academic concerns. In 2022, 'Other' included 10 research student complaints/enquiries not related to the conduct of research or potential breach of the Code which were managed according to the UNSW *Student Complaints Procedure*.

Which faculties the complaints related to

As shown in Table 2 below, complaints and enquiries received in 2024 were made against a relatively small proportion (0.5%) of researchers at the university. As in previous years, the three faculties at the university with the most number of researchers received the most number of complaints. In total, complaints in the faculties of Medicine and Health, Engineering, and Science, represented just under three-quarters (74%) of the 58 complaints and enquiries received.

About a third (31% or 18) of the 58 complaints and enquiries received were made about research and conduct of research in, or affiliated with, the Faculty of Medicine and Health, which has the most number of researchers (as shown in Table 2), and receives over half of all research grants awarded to the university. The Faculties of Engineering and Science also received a significant proportion of complaints and enquiries.

Faculty	Number of enquiries & complaints received in 2024	Number of researchers[3]	Proportion of researchers in the Faculty
Medicine & Health	18	4,656	0.4%
Engineering	16	2,130	0.8%
Science	9	2,153	0.4%
UNSW Canberra	6	808	0.7%
Arts, Design & Architecture	4	1,223	0.3%
Business School	1	546	0.2%
Law & Justice	1	288	0.4%
Not identified	3		
Total	**58**	**11,804[3]**	**0.5%**

0.5%
of UNSW researchers

Complaints have been made against a very small proportion of researchers at UNSW[3]

Table 2: Breakdown of complaints by Faculty

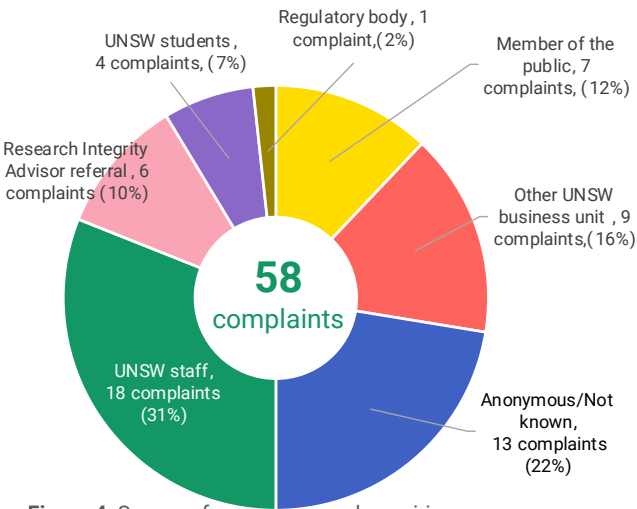## Who the complaints were from

Figure 4: Source of complaints and enquiries

As indicated by Figure 4, just under a third (31%) of the 58 complaints and enquiries were raised by UNSW staff. Of these, eight complaints raised concerns about authorship, including four complaints raised alleging wrongful exclusion of authors.

Of note is that just under a quarter (22% or 13) of the 58 complaints were raised anonymously or under a pseudonym on PubPeer[4]. Through this forum, the university was alerted to six instances of data or image manipulation, each involving between three and seven research papers and a PhD thesis, dating between 2013 and 2022. All were found to be funded by the National Health and Medical Research Council (**NHMRC**) and involved UNSW conjoint[5] staff.

---

[3] Source: BORIS on 10 July 2025 – comprising full- and part-time researchers employed by UNSW, including visiting, adjunct and conjoint researchers), and Higher Degree Research candidates [PhD and Masters (Research)].

[4] PubPeer is a website that enables users, usually other researchers, to discuss and review published research.

[5] Conjoint titles are conferred to individuals from institutions which have a formal affiliation with the university and contributes to teaching and/or research.

How they were managed

Complaints involving UNSW researchers and their conduct of research which may breach the Research Code, or the Code[6], are managed by Conduct and Integrity.

In 2024, complaints received before 12 February 2024 were managed according to the RMP and those received on, or after, 12 February were managed according to the CMIPP.

Initial assessment/Preliminary enquiry

All 50 complaints received were assessed to determine if they involved:

1) the conduct of research
2) a UNSW researcher
3) a potential breach of the Research Code or the Code.

Conduct & Integrity then determined whether the complaint:

1) may be addressed locally by the School/Faculty or Division[7]
2) referred for consideration under another UNSW policy or procedure
3) addressed through another mechanism or referred externally
4) may be resolved through facilitated resolution; or
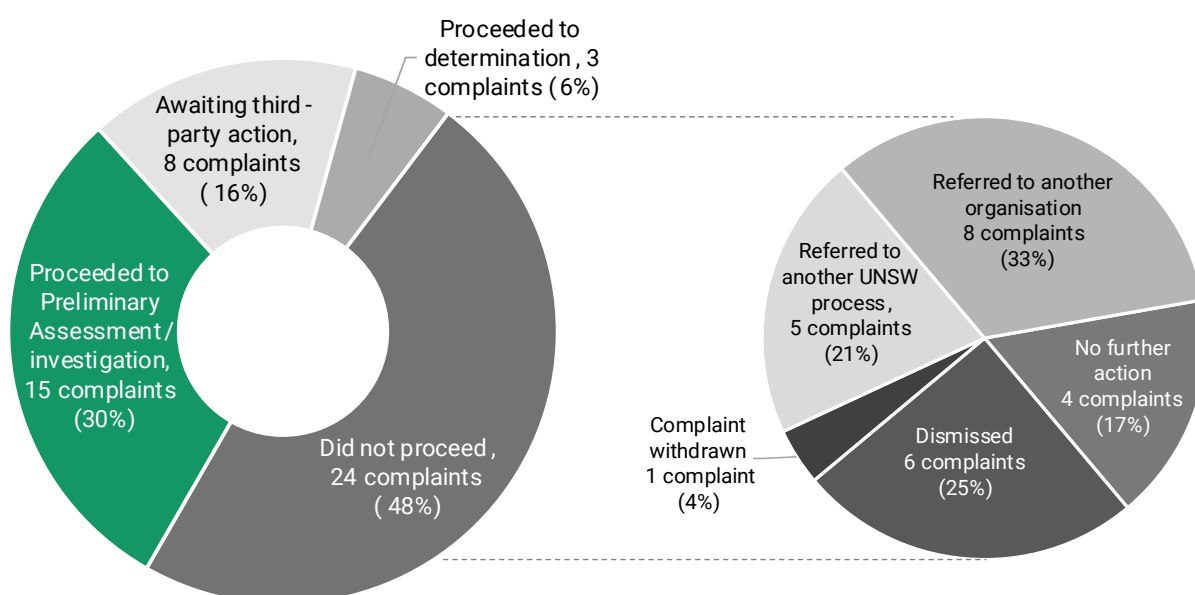5) required a preliminary assessment according to the RMP or investigation according to the CMIPP.

30%
Complaints investigated

Figure 5: Outcomes of the 50 complaints - and breakdown of the 24 complaints that did not proceed further.

As illustrated by Figure 5 above, of the 50 complaints received:

- 15 complaints proceeded to a preliminary investigation into the research conduct of 39 researchers.
- just under half (48% or 24 complaints) did not proceed.

  Of these, about half (13 complaints 54%) were referred to be managed according to another UNSW process or referred to another institution to manage[8].

  For example, the six complaints raised in PubPeer of suspected image manipulation involving UNSW conjoint staff were referred to the Children's Cancer Institute to manage as the employer.

---

[6] Applicable from 17 May 2024.

[7] Examples of such cases include authorship disputes about unpublished research.

[8] This occurs where the conduct related to a non-UNSW researcher; or they were not a UNSW researcher at the time the research was undertaken; or the corresponding author of the research paper is affiliated with another institution.
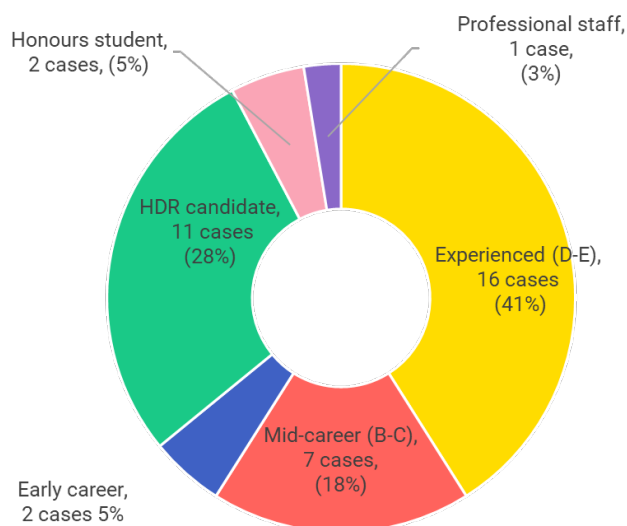
- 30% (or 10 complaints) required further investigation.

  The purpose of the investigation is to make findings of fact to enable an assessment of whether a breach of the relevant requirement in the Code, policy or procedure has occurred, the extent of any breach of the Code, and if any further action is required.

- 16% (or 8 complaints) are awaiting action by a third party.

  Of these, one is an authorship dispute being managed at the local level.

  These include cases which are contingent on outcomes of another research integrity case or university process.

Of note is that 77% (or 10) of the 13 complaints raised in PubPeer involved conjoint staff with an UNSW affiliated institution or corresponding authors from another institution. These were referred to the respective institutions to be managed.

From the 15 complaints, 39 cases were raised (Figure 6). They included cases against two undergraduate students undertaking research as part of their Honours program, one student in the Faculty of Medicine and Health for not obtaining necessary human ethics approval, and the other in the Faculty of Science for falsifying research data.

Figure 6: Breakdown of the 39 cases by level of researcher experience

Case Study

A post on PubPeer raised concerns about the integrity of the methodology and results reported in a research paper co-authored by a UNSW Higher Degree Research (**HDR**) candidate and international collaborators. While the initial post identified inconsistencies in one publication, a subsequent review by Conduct and Integrity identified similar issues in three additional papers authored by the same research group.

In total, four papers were found to contain potentially falsified, fabricated, misleading and/or misrepresented information related to their methodology and results.

As all four publications involved corresponding authors based in another country, UNSW's capacity to conduct a full investigation was limited. The concerns were therefore referred to the corresponding author's affiliated research institution for further examination. The case involving the HDR candidate remains open, pending outcome of that external investigation.

COMPLAINTS INVESTIGATED AND RESOLVED

In 2024, the university resolved 17 complaints, and closed 51 cases, with each case involving a current or former UNSW researcher. This is consistent with the number of cases closed in 2023 (54 cases).

This section of the report examines the outcomes of the 51 cases, and 190 allegations investigated and resolved following investigation.

Findings of allegations investigated

Type	Not substantiated	Partially substantiated	Substantiated	No finding*	Total
Data Methodology	**47**		**41**		**88**
Fabrication/falsification	47		38		85
Misrepresentation			2		2
Lack of robust methodology			1		1
Authorship (of published research)	**33**	**4**	**21**	**11**	**69**
Wrongful inclusion	32	4	21	6	63
Wrongful exclusion	1				1
Misleading affiliation				4	4
Failure to acknowledge contribution				1	1
Plagiarism	**2**		**3**	**4**	**9**
Self-plagiarism	1			1	2
Inappropriate referencing			1	1	2
Other	1		2	2	5
Animal Research Ethics			**7**		**7**
Research without necessary approval			5		5
Deviation/breach of approved protocol			2		2
Research supervision	**1**		**4**	**1**	**6**
Failure to guide and mentor	1		2	1	4
Failure to monitor			2		2
Human Research Ethics	**3**			**1**	**4**
Research without necessary approvals	1			1	2
Deviation/breach of approved protocol	2				2
Failure to declare conflict of Interest	**1**			**1**	**2**
Failed legal and other obligation	**1**				**1**
Poor record keeping/data handling	**1**				**1**
Grant Management related	**1**		**1**		**2**
Other		**1**			**1**
Total	**90**	**5**	**77**	**18**	**190**

Table 3: Breakdown of allegations and findings of investigations concluded in 2024.

*NOTE: 'No findings' were made against 11 allegations which did not proceed in three cases as they were being considered in another related case or was investigated by the corresponding author's institute. No finding was also made where there was insufficient evidence to make a finding.
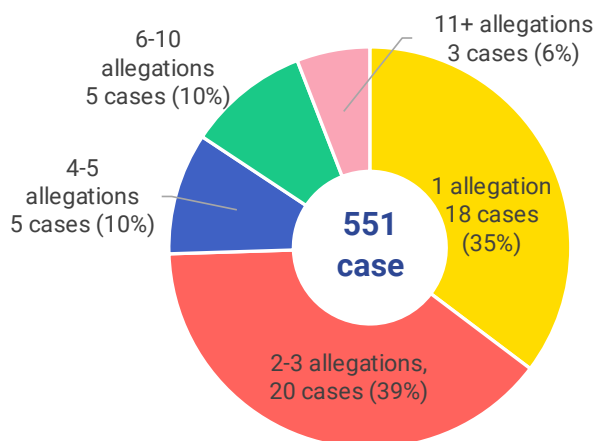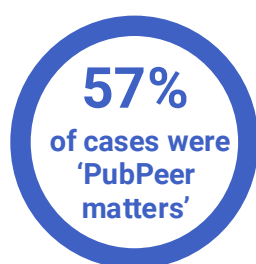
Figure 7: Breakdown of case complexity - number of allegations investigated.

As indicated by Figure 7 above, most (84%) of the 51 cases closed in 2024 involved between one and five allegations. As indicated in the adjacent case study, there were two cases which involved 17 and 29 allegations respectively.

All three cases involving 11 allegations or more were related to 'PubPeer matters'.

57%
of cases were 'PubPeer matters'

Of note is that 'PubPeer matters' comprised just over half (57% or 29) of the 51 cases closed in 2024.

Most (86 or 98%) of the 88 allegations of data or image fabrication/manipulation and (73% or 51) of the 69 allegations related to authorship identified in Table 3 were related to 'PubPeer matters'.

Of these:

- 40 (47%) of the 86 allegations of image manipulation that were investigated were substantiated; and

- 24 (47%) of the 51 allegations of wrongful inclusion as an author of a research output were substantiated or partially substantiated

There were fewer cases involving animal research ethics.

Two lead researchers self-reported minor breaches of approved ethics protocol for their research projects. Five cases of animal research (involving fish) without ethics approval involved three publications and came from one complaint about the same research team. Two of the researchers responsible for conducting the animal research admitted to the breach, confirming the allegation raised in all five cases. However, only the researchers who carried out the animal testing were found to have breached the Code.

'PubPeer matters'

In 2024, the university concluded a lengthy initial investigation into a series of complex cases. These were collectively dubbed the 'PubPeer matters' as three complaints brought the University's attention to PubPeer posts in late-2021. The PubPeer posts alleged multiple instances of fabricated images and/or data in published research.

In total, Conduct and Integrity investigated 86 allegations against 29 current and former UNSW researchers for alleged falsification/ fabrication/ misleading images, as well as allegations of plagiarism and 'gift authorship', in 20 papers and two PhD theses, dating between 2011 and 2021.

Of note is that:

- 13 researchers were found not to have breached the university's Research Code (applicable at the time the research was conducted)

- six researchers were found to have minor breaches of the Research Code; and

- ten researchers were referred to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Research and Enterprise, with a recommendation to convene an investigation panel to consider if their conduct might constitute Research Misconduct.
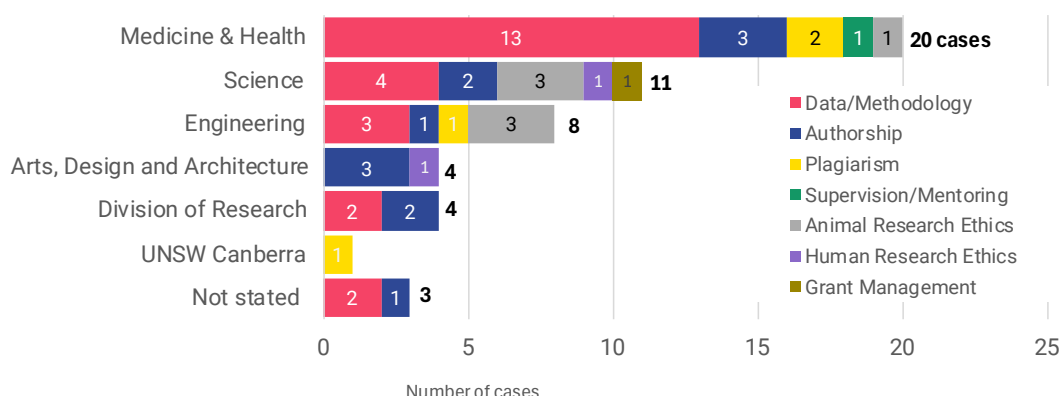
Faculty/Division

Figure 8: Breakdown of cases finalised in 2024 by Faculty/Division.

Figure 8 reflects cases linked to 'PubPeer matters'. While most of the researchers involved in the 'PubPeer matters' were primarily affiliated with the Faculty of Medicine and Health, researchers in the faculties of Engineering and Science, and the Division of Research were also involved. All four cases in the Division of Research were linked to the 'PubPeer matters'.

Of note is that all four cases in the Faculty of Arts, Design and Architecture were in the School of Built Environment.
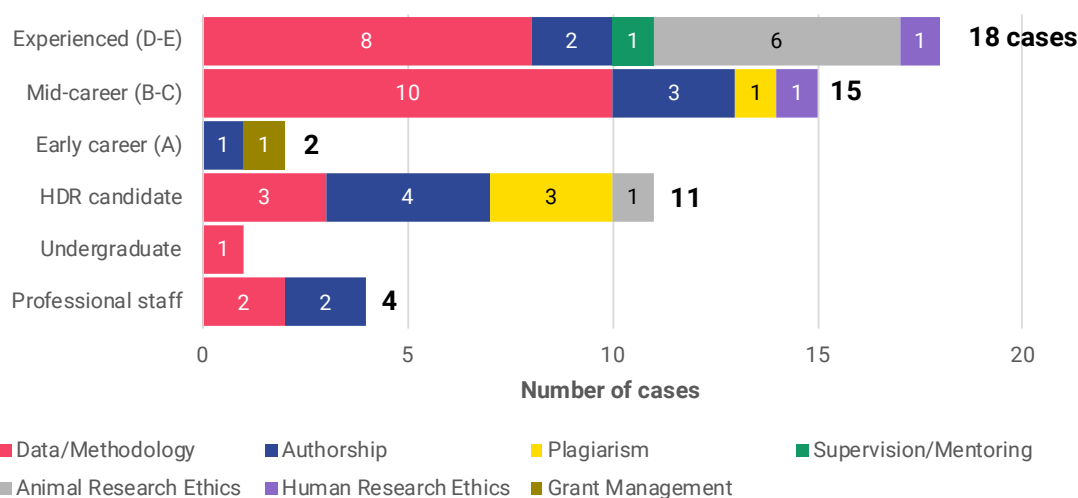
Researcher experience

Figure 9: Breakdown of cases by *primary* allegation type and level of researcher experience.

As indicated in Figure 9, most of the cases involving experienced and mid-career researchers related to concerns about integrity of data or methodology. Most of these cases related to the 'PubPeer matters' and involved concerns of image fabrication/manipulation, and 'gift authorship'[9] in publications dating between 2013 and 2021. Of note is that most of the allegations related to image duplication arose from research conducted as part of a research thesis.

Four professional staff, including three from the Mark Wainwright Analytical Centre (MWAC), were associated with the 'PubPeer matters'

---

[9] Unethical practice of including someone as an author on research output who hasn't met the criteria for authorship.

Findings

Table 4 below, sets out findings of the *primary* allegations raised against 51 researchers in 2024.

While instances of fabrication and falsification were identified in investigation of 'PubPeer matters', some allegations against certain researchers were dismissed after it was determined that they were not involved in the conduct.

	No finding/ Did not proceed	Not substantiated	Partially substantiated	Substantiated	Total
Data/Methodology		**13**	**10**	**1**	**24**
Experienced		4	4		8
Mid-career		5	4	1	10
HDR candidate		2	1		3
Professional		1	1		2
Undergraduate Student		1			1
Authorship	**3**	**3**	**4**	**2**	**12**
Experienced		1	1		2
Mid-career	1			2	3
HDR candidate	2	1	1		4
Professional			2		2
Early Career		1			1
Animal Research Ethics				**7**	**7**
Experienced				6	6
HDR candidate				1	1
Plagiarism		**1**	**1**	**2**	**4**
Mid-career		**1**			**1**
HDR candidate			**1**	**2**	**3**
Human Research Ethics		**2**			**2**
Experienced		**1**			**1**
Mid-career		**1**			**1**
Supervision/Mentoring				**1**	**1**
Experienced				**1**	**1**
Grant Management			**1**		**1**
Early Career			**1**		**1**
Total	**3**	**19**	**16**	**13**	**51**

Table 4: Findings of cases investigated in 2024 by level of researcher experience

Outcomes

According to the CMIPP, the severity of a breach of the university's Code, is determined following consideration of the following factors:

i.   The extent of deviation from expected behaviour

ii.   The extent to which members of the UNSW community, university resources, external parties, and/or the integrity of UNSW's courses or programs are or may be adversely affected by the breach

iii.   Any prior breaches of the Code by the individual

iv.   Whether any institutional failures contributed to the breach

v.   Any mitigating or aggravating circumstances

vi.   The experience, training or seniority of the individual

vii.   The extent to which research participants, animals, the community or the environment are, or may have been, adversely affected by the breach

viii.   The extent to which there is, or may have been, incorrect information on the public record, or the potential to have incorrect information on the public record

ix.   The extent to which the breach affects the soundness or reliability of the research

x.   The extent to which the behaviour is intentional, reckless, or negligent.

Research Misconduct

Responsible Conduct

(No breach)

Minor (Less Serious) Breach

Major (Serious) Breach or Repeated Breaches

Figure 10: Illustration of severity of breaches of the Code

As shown in Figure 10, most (39% or 20) of the cases concluded with a finding that the researcher did not breach the Research Code. Despite the finding, nine researchers were asked to take corrective action to undertake further research integrity training as well as to contact journal publishers to correct information contained in published journal articles.

Figure 11: Breakdown of outcome of investigations in 2024

Six cases were dismissed after the concerns were either referred to the corresponding authors' affiliated institution or addressed through alternative university processes. In one instance, corrective action had been taken and the researcher involved had already left UNSW.

Minor breaches of the Research Code, which applied at the time of the conduct, were found in about a quarter (24% or 12) of the 51 cases. Of these, 10 researchers were asked to take corrective actions to address the breaches. Actions included correcting information contained in published work, including plagiarised sections, and receiving further guidance on researcher supervision.

Major and serious breaches of the Research Code were found in 13 cases. Of these:

- three researchers were asked to take corrective action to address the breach;
- 10 cases, which were part of the 'PubPeer matters' and involved alleged falsification, fabrication and misleading images in research, were referred to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Research and Enterprise to consider convening an investigation (Research Misconduct Inquiry) panel.
  Of the 10 researchers involved, four are experienced researchers, four are mid-career researchers, one was a PhD candidate at the time of the conduct, and one is a professional staff member.

In summary, a very small proportion (0.2% or 25) of 11,804 UNSW researchers have breached the Code.
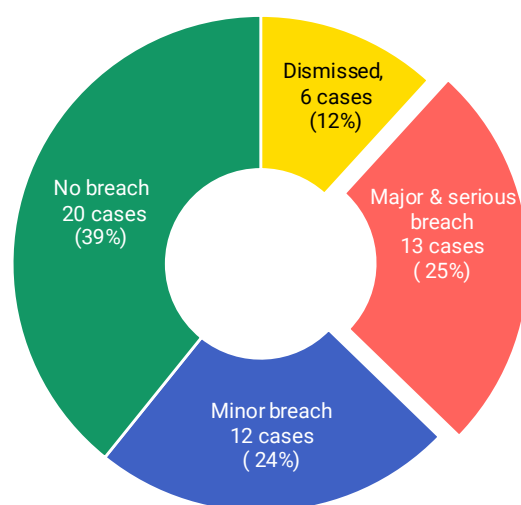
Case resolution

Of the 51 cases resolved, four were raised in 2024. These included two self-reports of breaches of approved ethics protocol and two were related cases: one involving a case of plagiarism by an HDR candidate; and another subsequently raised against their supervisor for research supervision related failures or shortcomings.

There were eight complaints that were raised in 2023 that are still being managed. Of these, three were posts on PubPeer raising concerns about the integrity of the research undertaken by UNSW researchers.

Six cases raised in 2023 remain under investigation. Of these, three are related and involve allegations of failure to obtain necessary ethics approval prior to undertaking research. The research forms a part of a PhD thesis.

Case Study

Conduct and Integrity supported the resolution of a complex authorship dispute arising from a deterioration of the relationship between a HDR candidate and their supervisor. The dispute centred on issues of research conception and design, and competing authorship claims over work conducted during the candidature. The relationship breakdown was so significant that the HDR candidate sought a cross-Faculty transfer of their candidature to a new research group. The prospective group required assurances that authorship issues – particularly those related to thesis content – had been resolved prior to proceeding. Thanks to the dedicated efforts of a Research Integrity Advisor, the matter was successfully mediated and resolved.

This case serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of early, open, and ongoing discussions between supervisors and candidates regarding research contributions and authorship expectations. Proactive communication and clear agreements at the outset of a candidature can help prevent misunderstandings and protect the integrity of the research process.

Themes and issues

The conclusion of preliminary investigations into the 'PubPeer matters' in 2024 demanded significant institutional attention and resources over an extended period. These cases reinforced recurring themes identified in previous reports, including 'gift authorship' and unethical research practice driven by publication pressures.

Image manipulation in publications and research theses

In 2024, 21 researchers were identified across six separate complaints, primarily involving image duplication (91%) and data manipulation (10%). Notably, 95% of these concerns originated from PubPeer commentary, and 86% involved research conduct as part of a research thesis – comprising 17 PhD and one Honours research project. Seven of the researchers were conjoint staff. Additionally, the university closed 24 cases, which arose from three separate complaints, one of which raised concerns against 22 researchers. All these cases stemmed from PubPeer commentary raising concerns of image duplication, with almost all cases linked to a research thesis and were research projects funded by the NHMRC.

What UNSW is doing about this

The university will be conducting a pilot using two types of software alongside plagiarism detection software, iThenticate, to detect image integrity issues in Higher Degree Research theses before they are submitted for examination. This follows Conduct and Integrity's successful use of ImageTwin* in investigations to detect inappropriate manipulation and duplication of figures, such as western blots, microscopy images and light photography.

an image analysis Artificial Intelligence (AI) tool to detect image issues like duplication, manipulation.

Investigating historical research

Investigations into research integrity concerns can often be prolonged, in part because there is no time limit on when such concerns can be raised. This open-ended timeframe reflects the seriousness with which the university, and regulatory bodies, treats allegations of potential research misconduct, regardless of when the research was conducted or published.

The 'PubPeer matters' exemplify this challenge, as they relate to research publications dated between 2011 and 2021. In many cases, the underlying research would have been conducted even earlier. Investigating historical research of this nature presents significant difficulties, particularly when researchers have since moved institutions, retired, or are otherwise no longer available to provide context or clarification.

Moreover, the passage of time can result in the loss or unavailability of critical evidence, such as files, lab books or correspondence. These limitations can hinder the university's ability to fully assess the integrity of research in question, underscoring the importance of robust data management practices.

What UNSW is doing about this

In 2024, work commenced on the Research Data Experience (RDE) program under the leadership of the Pro-Vice Chancellor, Research Infrastructure. The RDE is a multi-year university-wide initiative to support researchers in ethically storing and effectively managing their research data throughout the research lifecycle. The benefits of this program of work will be particularly evident when researchers need to revisit or draw upon their data at a later stage – whether for publication, collaboration, or investigation. Reliable data management facilitates research transparency and reproducibility but also ensures critical research records remain accessible and intact over time, even as projects evolve.

The university has also commenced a major project to review and enhance current case management processes and practice. This initiative aims to streamline workflows, improve operational efficiency, and deliver a more consistent and supportive experience for all parties.

Academic and research integrity concerns related to Honours theses

Currently, the university does not require students undertaking an Honours program by research to complete formal research integrity training. This gap in training presents a potential risk, particularly given the increasing complexity of research environment and expectations placed on students to produce high-quality, ethically sound research work.

What UNSW is doing about this

Conduct and Integrity, in collaboration with the Schools of Biological, Earth and Environmental Sciences (**BEES**) and Biotechnology and Biomolecular Sciences (**BABS**) in the Faculty of Science, has been delivering *Research Integrity@UNSW* sessions to Honours students twice annually, in February and September. While these sessions represent a positive step towards fostering awareness, their limited coverage, frequency and reach are insufficient to address broader gaps and risks identified. A more comprehensive and consistent approach to research integrity education is needed to ensure Honours students are adequately prepared to meet ethical standards in their research practice.

In addition, Honours theses are not subject to the same scrutiny as other academic outputs. Unlike assessable work in undergraduate coursework programs, Honours theses are not routinely submitted through Turnitin for text-matching analysis. Furthermore, unlike PhD theses, the research outputs associated with Honours projects are not required to be reviewed using iThenticate to detect potential plagiarism. These differences highlight a need to review current practices to better support research integrity across all levels of research at the university.

Ongoing monitoring of issues and concerns in research integrity

PubPeer's open and post publication peer review model has played a critical role in enabling the university to identify research integrity issues, like image manipulation, that may not have been detected through traditional review channels. The platform has enabled the university to proactively detect emerging concerns and respond appropriately to uphold research standards. To this end, Conduct and Integrity team will continue to actively monitor alerts and posts on the platform, and through complaints and reports, as part of the university's ongoing commitment to upholding research quality and integrity.

2024 DEVELOPMENT, ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Information and awareness

- ✓ 10 x Research Integrity@UNSW sessions to:
  - o School of Biological, Earth and Environmental Sciences (BEES) for Honours program students (February and September)
  - o School of Biotechnology and Biomolecular Sciences (BABS) for Honours program students (February and September)
  - o Graduate School of Biomedical Engineering (September)
  - o Faculty of Arts, Design and Architecture (September)
  - o Faculty of Medicine and Health
  - o Faculty of Law and Justice
  - o UNSW Canberra

- ✓ Discipline-specific Graduate Research School (GRS) First-year HDR Candidate programs designed to provide first-year HDR candidates with the foundations of responsible research conduct with a UNSW context are now in place across all faculties. The program supplement mandatory on-line research integrity training modules for all researchers at the university. Topics include:
  - o Authorship
  - o Research ethics approval
  - o Avoiding fabricating/falsifying/misrepresenting data
  - o Data management
  - o Plagiarism
  - o Copyright.

- ✓ Launch of UNSW's SpeakUp campaign, which describes some of the behaviour expected by the university across six focus areas, including research integrity.

Engagement and education

- ✓ One-hour Research Integrity Q&A for the Faculty of Engineering (March)
- ✓ Paying for open, perverse incentives and problematic scholarship, Dr Shaun Khoo (former Senior Case Manager with Conduct and Integrity) and Jennifer Byrne (NSW Health Pathology) as part of the Statewide Biobank Seminar Series (June)
- ✓ Session on What is Research Integrity and why is it important? with a case study discussion, and What happens when something goes wrong? for HDR candidates in the Faculty of Science (October)

Systems and governance

- ✓ Launch of a new Code of Conduct and Values replacing the Student Code of Conduct, Research Code of Conduct and staff Code of Conduct.
- ✓ Launch of the university's new Complaints Management and Investigations Policy and Procedure in February 2024, which replaced the:
  - o Complaint Management Policy

- o Student Complaint Procedure
- o Student Misconduct Procedure
- o Research Misconduct Procedure
- o Staff Complaint Procedure
- o Complaint Management Procedure (External); and
- o Unreasonable Complainant Conduct Procedure.

✓ Launch of the university's new complaint and case management system for recording and managing student plagiarism, as well as all complaints and reports of misconduct.

Resources and support

✓ The Research Data Experience (RDE) program, a multi-year university-wide initiative to uplift UNSW's research data capability. The program comprises a petabyte-scale storage platform, integrated data management tools, a secure environment for handling sensitive data, and updated research data policies and training.

The RDE solution will support research integrity and compliance by ensuring data is securely stored, well-classified, findable, traceable, and aligned with government legislation and UNSW policies. Compliance will be built into the tools and workflows to make it easy for researchers to meet their obligations, while also simplifying auditing and oversight.

The program also enables smarter integration with systems such as ethics, allowing automated recognition of ethics requirements and helping researchers manage their data responsibly from the start. Furthermore, research impact will be able to be tracked from opportunity through to outcome, down to instruments and facilities, using persistent identifiers.

2024 achievements:
- o Established program governance, change, engagement and user groups
- o Scoped platform and analysed options
- o Scope data management, tools and reporting
- o Data discovery and design
- o Updated, developed and aligned policies with university policy reviews.

✓ The Division of Research [Mark Wainwright Analytical Centre (**MWAC**)], the GRS, Conduct and Integrity and Faculty of Medicine will continue its collaboration to pilot the use of ImageTwin alongside iThenticate on HDR research theses before they are submitted for examination.

✓ Research Ethics Compliance Support **(RECS)** and Conduct and Integrity held quarterly meetings with Research Integrity Advisors (**RIA**s) to discuss emerging trends, issues and best practice. In 2024, Professor Lyria Moses (Law and Justice) concluded her tenure as faculty RIA. The university welcomed Associate Professor Daniel Joyce in her place. Joining Associate Professor Joyce as new faculty RIAs were Professor Martin Holt (Arts, Design and Architecture), Professor Megan Lord (Engineering) and Professor David Simar (Medicine and Health). The MWAC also welcomed its first RIA, Associate Professor Renee Whan.

Prevention and deterrence

✓ Launch of Research Integrity Bites, a monthly feature article in Graduate Research News to promote responsible research, and spotlighting researcher tips and pitfalls.

✓ Plagiarism detection software, iThenticate, which is applied to all UNSW PhD theses, announced that it had incorporated AI detection capability into its service.

2025 UNSW ENTERPRISE RISKS AND CONTROLS

UNSW's enterprise risk register in 2025 identifies that unethical behaviour erodes UNSW's reputation and social license to operate and devalues degrees (Operational Risk #8) as one of the university's top operational risks. The table below sets out current and emerging risks identified by this report and sets out controls that are in place to mitigate and manage the risks.

Risk factor	Description	Controls
Researchers involved in research integrity matters	Poor awareness and understanding of research integrity leads to questionable research practices, which impacts researcher and university credibility and trust in research.	• The principles and responsibilities of the Australian Code and Guides supporting its application have been adopted by the university and forms part of the university's new Code of Conduct and Values. • Researcher training, including first-year HDR candidate program, Research Integrity training, supervisor training, and research data management training • Research Integrity Advisors in each Faculty to promote research integrity and advise researchers on relevant Codes, guidelines and procedures on the responsible conduct of research.
	Poor research supervision results in poor research practice, which impacts researcher and university credibility and trust in research	• Codes and procedures • Supervision training • Supervision register, including requirement for supervisors to have completed RI modules
	Unintended breach of ethics protocol results in poor research practice, which impacts researcher ability to publish results	• Codes and procedures • Ethics committees
	Gap in research integrity training for undergraduate researchers leads to poor awareness and understanding of research integrity and poor/unacceptable research practice.	• Research Integrity Advisors in each Faculty to promote research integrity and advise researchers on relevant Codes, guidelines and procedures on the responsible conduct of research. • Conduct and Integrity one-hour information session to Honours program students in BABS and BEES.
Increasing use of Generative AI in research	Unethical use of Generative AI in research leads to unreliable results and damage science and academic publishing.	• Guidance to researchers jointly issued by the Pro-Vice Chancellor, Research and Pro-Vice Chancellor, Research Training and Dean of Graduate Research, on AI, Large Language Models, and the Responsible Conduct of Research at UNSW. • Robust HDR examination processes, comprising written and oral components to assess a candidate's understanding of the work, and to authenticate their contribution to the thesis.

Risk factor	Description	Controls
Increasing pressure on researchers to succeed	Falsification and/or fabrication of research data/findings leads to unreliable results, which impacts research and university credibility and public trust in research	• Policies and procedures on data management, open access and peer review • Open and public scrutiny of published research through peer review platforms, such as PubPeer • Strong supervision and mentorship • Regular review of lab books • Peer review
	Increasing number of research articles in low-quality journals by UNSW affiliated researchers impacts the quality and reputation of research at UNSW	• Strong supervision and mentorship • Emphasis on quality research and publication in reputable journals at School/Centre, Faculty and university levels
	Technology advancements making detection of breaches of research integrity more difficult and complex	• Promoting good supervision and mentoring • Oral examination and regular and annual progress reviews of research theses • Open access, data sharing and peer review • Introduction of tools to detect unacceptable use of generative AI
	Contract cheating and plagiarism leads to work submitted not being the work and words of the researcher/s, which impacts researcher and university credibility and trust in research.	• Promoting good supervision and mentoring • Warning issued to students about contract cheating • Requirement that all supervisors use iThenticate before theses are submitted
	Breakdown in researcher relationships/communications leads to authorship and publication disputes, which impacts on the dissemination of research.	• Code of conduct, policies and procedures • Onboarding, induction and training
Increasing pressure on resources	Under-reporting of breaches of research integrity results in poor research practice, which impacts the quality and reputation of research at UNSW	• Streamlined complaint and investigation process that maintains procedural fairness • New complaint and case management system to make it easier for case management ad reporting.
Increasing regulatory/stakeholder scrutiny of research integrity concerns	Pressure and expectations on UNSW handling and investigation of complaints increases, placing greater pressure and demand on already constrained resources and impacts on timeliness of case resolution.	• Regular updates on regulatory body expectations through the Go8 Research Ethics and Integrity Group meeting • Open and transparent sharing of information with regulatory body on complaint management and investigations.