

To: Professor Nishan Canagarajah
Pro Vice-Chancellor, Research
University of Bristol

Tuesday 26 June 2018

Dear Professor Canagarajah

I am writing to raise several concerns on behalf of the panel that you appointed to carry out a confidential investigation into allegations of research misconduct against Dr Abderrahmane Kaidi in the School of Cellular and Molecular Medicine, Faculty of Biomedical Sciences. Our formal report on the investigation has been sent to you separately.

Our first concern was about the length of time taken between the reporting of the allegations by the Dean on 9 February 2018 and the final confirmation of the panel on 21 March. This in turn led to further delay in setting up the preliminary meeting of the panel, due to staff absences over the Easter break. Other unavoidable delays have subsequently intervened. As a result, the entire process has taken far too long, exacerbating the impact on those involved in terms of stress and anxiety. We feel strongly that investigations of this kind should be given the highest priority in terms of swift action to address the issues raised. We understand that the Research Misconduct Regulations are due to be reviewed shortly and would like to see this expectation built in to any revision of the Regulations.

During the investigation we interviewed three members of Dr Kaidi's research group and these interviews raised several other concerns, relating primarily to how this matter was dealt with within the School and Faculty both before and after the formal involvement of the Dean in the research misconduct allegations. This letter sets out those concerns in the hope that lessons will be learnt from this case and that some of the unusual and possibly inappropriate decisions and actions that appear to have been taken are not repeated in the future.

Before listing our various concerns, we wish to acknowledge that this was a particularly difficult set of circumstances and that the School and Faculty may have felt constrained by the fact that although members of Dr Kaidi's research group reported a range of problems and difficulties over a period of several months, they did not initially wish any formal action to be taken. Nevertheless, we felt that some of these problems were so serious that the School and Faculty should have taken advice, perhaps from the University's legal services, rather than trying to deal with the issues informally and without professional support. It also appears that some incorrect information was given to members of the research group about how the matter would be handled once reported formally, which again might have been avoided if advice had been sought. We also acknowledge that we have only heard one side of the story and that it was not always clear who was responsible for the decisions that were made.

Most of our concerns relate to the impact on members of the research group. It was clear from our meeting with them that they had been under considerable stress over a long period. Two of them were close to tears during the meeting. One of them had been put in the position of having to lie to the collaborator about the reason for her inability to order materials for experiments, which was in fact due to her lack of access to funding. She also had to continue with experiments and to meet with the collaborator, all the time fearing that the false data might be published. One member of the group referred to 'not sleeping' and feeling 'near to breakdown'. Another member in the final year of her PhD said she intended to leave Science because of the experience she had gone through. The third member of the research group was concerned about the impact on his young family if his contract was suddenly ended. Although many of the practical concerns have now been addressed, we felt it unacceptable that junior career academics should be left in this situation for so long with so little support.

We are aware that a formal complaint has already been raised about Dr Kaidi's behaviour within the research group, unrelated to the allegations of research misconduct. We heard from the group of the following examples:

- a) One member of the research group referred to an incident when she was working overnight to complete experiments in the lab. Dr Kaidi had 'screamed at her for freezing down cells'. He took the cells out and destroyed the work and stood in front of the door blocking her exit. It appears she could not leave the lab for five hours (from 3am onwards). This sounds like a potentially serious incident.
- b) When this incident was reported, at least two members of the research group were issued with rape alarms – by whom and in what circumstances is not clear but again a potential area of concern. This seems an inadequate response on behalf of the University.
- c) One member of the research group was told she had to see Dr Kaidi to tell him in person that she did not want to continue in his laboratory, when she was unwilling to do so because of concerns over how he might react. A postgraduate student was asked to stand outside the office when she spoke to Dr Kaidi. Again, this seems an inadequate response. We feel that the student should have been given staff support in this situation.

Although we understand these matters are now being dealt with through an HR process, there appears to have been a period when the group did not wish formal action to be taken. During this period, we believe that the School and Faculty simply did not do enough to support them.

Even after the allegations of research misconduct were formally brought to the Dean's attention, members of the research group reported that they were told (it is not clear by whom) that they would not know when Dr Kaidi was going to be informed of the allegations. Their anxiety about his likely reaction was compounded by the length of time it took for the enquiry to take place – they described going into work every day for months, 'terrified today would be the day'. Sue Paterson, our clerk, confirmed that the research group was immediately told when Dr Kaidi was informed of the allegations and that if she had been asked, she would have made it clear that that would be the case. This knowledge would have significantly reduced the anxiety of the research group.

One member of the research group told us that she sent an email to you expressing concern that the false data might be published. She said she had not received a reply, and we understand that you have no record of having received her email. We were pleased to hear that you have now informed the collaborator about the data fabrication so that this risk has been removed.

We appreciate that the Dean gave his full support when asked and referred on the allegations to be dealt with. The role of others in the School and Faculty is less clear. Two members of the research group stated that when they wanted to leave the laboratory they did not find much support for the move ('no one seemed to want to know') and they had to find bench space themselves but with no access to funding. Funding had been promised but had not materialised by the date of the interviews. Subsequently we have been told it is now in place.

The panel hopes that the University will look into these concerns and apologise to the research group members for any shortcomings that are identified. The panel would also be pleased if some form of compensation could be considered in these circumstances.

I would be happy to meet with you to discuss these issues but anticipate that you may wish to make enquiries first and to share this letter with the Dean and Head of School.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Hamlin', written in a cursive style.

Dr Moira Hamlin
Vice-Chair of the Board of Trustees

