

University of Edinburgh
Annual Research Ethics and Integrity Report (2018-19)

Actions and activities undertaken to support and strengthen understanding and the application of research integrity issues

The examples given below illustrate the types of activities undertaken to support and strengthen understanding of research integrity issues at College and School level as well as topics brought to the attention of the University's Research Ethics and Integrity Review Group (REIRG) through the annual review process.

Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (AHSS)

The College has been heavily involved in the development of a Global Partnerships Toolkit, whose aim is to focus researchers' attention on the reality that ethical actions are essential at all points in the research journey. A series of networking events and workshops were held, involving a range of global stakeholders, and with the aim of informing the development of practical tools and a reference group to support sustainable ethical research practice. Looking forward, the aim is to foster this momentum and commitment to research ethics and integrity by building further capacity within College and Schools and enhancing the support for, and the profile of, colleagues working in this important role.

Medicine and Veterinary Medicine (MVM)

The Wellcome Trust Clinical Research Facility Edinburgh Education Programme runs a regular programme of local courses, covering a wide variety of topics. The following are examples of courses which promote awareness and understanding of the various forms of research misconduct, including fabrication and falsification of data, plagiarism and improper attribution, and/or the consequences of poor practice and misconduct: Good Clinical Practice, Understanding Randomised Controlled Trials, Applying for Research Approvals using the Integrated research Application System, Research Data and Confidentiality, Legal and Ethical Issues in Consent, Data Management, Thinking Like a Researcher. The unit is also exploring options for developing content for regular clinical research integrity training in collaboration with the British Medical Journal (BMJ).

Science and Engineering (S&E)

The School of Biological Sciences has modified its postgraduate student ethics curriculum over the past two years by consolidating the teaching of data ownership, authorship and credit and peer review into a single course offered to third year students. This new approach affords these topics a higher degree of prominence at a point when they are of greater relevance to researchers. Elsewhere, the School's mentoring and support programme for post-doctoral researchers entered its second year of operation with a renewed focus on providing a forum for discussions on ethics and integrity related issues.

In May 2018 the School of Engineering adopted a 'School of Engineering Policy on Publication Ethics' which contains advice for researchers on issues of authorship in research outcomes. The School is currently conducting a review of the resources and process required, and the training that staff and students receive.

Central University Support Services

Edinburgh Research Office recruited for the newly created position of Research Integrity Manager, a role which combines coordinating the formulation of policy responses to integrity related issues with stakeholders across the University, raising awareness of research integrity messages, support for compliance with export control legislation and representing the institution at external research integrity related forums. The creation of the post, with effect from May 2019, will enhance the University's ability to promote an agenda of good practice in research by bringing a dedicated focus and heightened visibility to the topic.

Moves also began to appoint an Academic Lead for Research Integrity and Improvement, with a remit to work across the University in recognising best practice, identifying areas for further improvement, and supporting improvement initiatives. An appointment was expected to be made and the successful candidate to be in place during the first half of academic year 2019/20.

University level

In May 2019, the University underlined its commitment to high quality research assessment by signing the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA), which provides a roadmap for global reform in research assessment open to universities, funding bodies and individual researchers. The University has also published a Statement on the Responsible Use of Research Metrics which aims to guide research assessment in its broadest sense across the institution. A working group will oversee the development and implementation of the Statement.

Outline of processes for ethical approval of research proposals, dealing with allegations of misconduct and review of these processes

Processes for ethical approval of research proposals and dealing with allegations of misconduct

Those wishing to see details of the ethics and integrity governance arrangements at University, College and School levels are referred to the report for 2014/15. An update report was provided for sessions 2015/6, 2016/17 and 2017/18, with a fresh, detailed report to be provided for session 2019/20. It is likely that the scope and content of the annual report that the University has to produce will change in order to comply with the new UUK Concordat to Support Research Integrity and increased scrutiny from Research Councils and other key funders such as the Wellcome Trust. REIRG anticipates having to revise the University Research Ethics and Integrity governance arrangements accordingly.

Review of processes

AHSS

March 2019 saw the launch and partial roll-out to volunteer Schools of the College's new Ethics and Integrity Review form. This form was created on Sharepoint, and provides a blueprint for the new Infonetica system. The form removes the option for researchers to self-assess the risks involved in their project and instead relies upon trigger questions, which indicate an element of risk and that some level of review is required. The form also provides for relevant information to be given within the system so that researchers are fully informed of legal and ethical requirements and know where to get further guidance and help. These innovations are expected to

enhance the quality of ethics applications, to allow the process to become, especially for students, a learning experience and ultimately, to allow for greater transparency of the ethics process and decision making.

MVM

Within Edinburgh Medical School, there is a recognition that postgraduate online MSc students who are outside the UK and whose projects involve research, may be conducting that research in their home location, which may or may not have local ethics review processes in place. Equally, PhD students working at a distance may be carrying out little if any of the work in Edinburgh. In both cases, a review of procedures is underway to ensure maximum clarity of process and oversight, as well as integration with local review procedures.

MVM has undertaken a review of ethics committee structures and governance and the College will implement the recommendations for the academic year 2020/21. This will provide a restructuring of research ethics committees in the College and Edinburgh Medical School. This will align with research activity, including global health, clinical trials and healthcare data driven innovation. This will also separate the functions of research governance in ACCORD from ethics review in the College.

S&E

In September 2018, the School of Biological Sciences extended the remit of its online ethics evaluation system from new research proposals to encompass research being conducted on pre-existing funding as well. The system begins with an online portal to answer a series of questions to determine whether ethical issues are relevant. If no issues are identified, then the project is automatically approved. In the event that an ethical issue is raised, but that ethical approval by a regulatory body such as the NHS or the Home Office has already been obtained, then the system allows the official approval numbers to be entered, also resulting in an automatic approval. If ethical issues are raised for which no pre-existing government approvals are in place, then the online system triggers a message to the applicant to submit the details on a paper form for evaluation by two members of the Ethics Committee.

University level.

In recognition of increasing governmental scrutiny and the growing internationalisation of its teaching and research, in February 2019 the University convened a short life working group on the topic of export control. The group included representatives of Edinburgh Research Office, Edinburgh Global, Edinburgh Innovations and the University's Legal Services and its remit was to identify ways to strengthen collective engagement and support for international partnerships across the University, as well as compliance with export control regulation. Outputs of the group included a suite of webpages hosted on the Edinburgh Research Office website providing information and guidance on export control matters, a new University policy and procedure on export control and sanctions and a training event held in May 2019 and targeting researchers, technology transfer colleagues and professional services staff.

By the end of academic year 2018/19, the University had procured a new online ethics management system for use across all Colleges and Schools. The system, to be provided by Infonetica Limited, will improve the consistency and transparency of

ethics management processes. Deployment of the new system is expected to begin during academic year 2019/20.

High level statement about allegations of research misconduct and any formal investigations

AHSS

No allegations of research misconduct have been reported as having formal investigations completed during academic year 2018/19. One formal investigation was ongoing.

MVM

No issues to report. The ACCORD office has investigated a number of cases in which there were departures from approved protocols or trial documents. Of these, on investigation, none were due to research misconduct. Each case was formally rectified by Corrective and Preventative Actions. In each case the necessary measures were promptly implemented.

S&E

Of the three allegations received and considered during academic year 2018/19, one was dismissed before proceeding to a screening panel and the other two each proceeded to a screening panel. In each of those cases, both of which concluded after the end of this period, the allegation was not upheld following the screening stage. Therefore, there have been no cases which proceeded to formal investigation.

University level

Partly in response to questions raised previously and noted in last year's report in connection with certain aspects of the operation of the UKRIO Procedure for the Investigation of Misconduct in Research in practice, the University instigated a review of Research Misconduct Policy and Procedures. At the end of the period covered by this report, an anticipated review by UKRIO of its Procedure was on hold pending publication of the updated Concordat for the Support of Research Integrity, however the University's internal review process remained ongoing.

Responding to the need identified by the College of Science and Engineering (and noted in last year's report) for support to be provided to staff and students who had worked in the same group as an individual who had been dismissed after an investigation, REIRG commissioned an internal paper to consider the issues and propose potential solutions. The paper is expected to be considered by REIRG during the early part of academic year 2019/20 with an action plan to follow shortly thereafter. As previously mentioned, a review of the University Research Misconduct Policy and Procedures remained ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report.

The Concordat to Support Research Integrity: Assurance Statements

Transparency, timeliness robustness, fairness and continued appropriateness of processes for dealing with allegations of misconduct

In light of the perception identified and noted in last year's report that the application of the UK Research Integrity Office Procedure for the Investigation of Misconduct in Research makes for a process that can be slower than is desirable, the University instigated a review of Research Misconduct Policy and Procedures. As stated in this report, an anticipated review by UKRIO of its Procedure remained on hold at the end of the period covered by this report pending publication of the updated Concordat to Support of Research Integrity. The University's internal review process remained ongoing, however.

Learnings from formal investigations of research misconduct

No formal investigations of research misconduct concluded during the period covered by this report.

Creating and embedding a research environment in which all staff, researchers and students feel comfortable to report instances of research misconduct

As stated in this report, the University's Research Ethics and Integrity Review Group (REIRG) commissioned a paper to consider the issues around the support that can be offered to those affected by research misconduct and to propose potential solutions. An important aspect of those considerations relates to steps that can be taken to create and embed an environment in which staff, researchers and students feel comfortable in reporting instances of research misconduct. The paper is expected to be considered by REIRG during the early part of academic year 2019/20 with an action plan to follow shortly thereafter.

Report annex

UNIVERSITY WEBSITES

[University Research Integrity homepage](#)

Links to the REIRG website; External online training resources; University policies relevant to Research ethics and Integrity; Research Funders' policies on Research ethics and Integrity.

[University Export Control webpages](#)

Information and guidance on the topic and links to the University's Export Control and Sanctions Policy and Compliance Procedure, the UK Government's Export Control Joint Unit and the UK Government's SPIRE online export licensing system.

College Research Ethics and Integrity websites

[College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences](#)

[College of Science and Engineering](#)

[College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine](#)

Academic and Clinical Office for Research and Development ([ACCORD](#))

Covers clinical research-led involving human participants, tissues or data. This includes research falling within the scope of NHS Research Ethics Committee Review and all clinical trials covered by the Medicines for Human Use (Clinical trial regulations). Proposals put to these groups that is considered outside their remit is assessed by relevant University Research Ethics Committees.

Regulation of research involving animals

[Maintaining high standards of Animal ethics and welfare](#)

[Commitment to replace, reduce and refine the use of animals in research](#)

EXTERNAL WEBSITES

Universities UK

[The Concordat to Support Research Integrity](#)

The five commitments set out in the UUK concordat

- *We are committed to maintaining the highest standards of rigour and integrity in all aspects of research*
- *We are committed to ensuring that research is conducted according to appropriate ethical, legal and professional frameworks, obligations and standards*
- *We are committed to supporting a research environment that is underpinned by a culture integrity and based on good governance, best practice and support for the development of researchers*
- *We are committed to using transparent, timely, robust and fair processes to deal with allegations of research misconduct when they arise*
- *We are committed to working together to strengthen the integrity of research and to reviewing progress regularly and openly.*

UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO) (hardcopy of documents available from Edinburgh Research Office)

- [Code of practice for Research – Promoting good practice and preventing misconduct](#)
- [Procedure for the Investigation of Misconduct in Research](#)

UK Research and Innovation (Umbrella body for UK Research Councils)

- [Policies and Guidelines on Governance of Good Research Conduct \(pdf\)](#)

Note: This is described by UKRI as a legacy document and is valid until updated