

Research Integrity Annual Statement 2019 – 2020

University Research Integrity Committee

Background

The revised Concordat to Support Research Integrity was published in October 2019 and is a comprehensive national framework for good research conduct and governance. The Concordat's fifth commitment requires a Research Integrity Annual Statement that:

1. Provides a summary of actions and activities that have been undertaken to support and strengthen understanding and application of research integrity issues;
2. Provides assurances that the processes they have in place for dealing allegations of misconduct are transparent, robust and fair, and that they continue to be appropriate to the needs of the organisation;
3. Provides a high level statement on any formal investigations of research misconduct that have been undertaken.

Introduction

The University Research Integrity Committee met three times in the academic year 2019/20: 8th October 2019, 21st January 2020 and 28th April 2020.

The University Research Integrity Committee reports to the University Research and Innovation Committee and helps develop university-wide practices and policies.

Each school has its own Research Integrity Committee and Convenor to deal with research ethics at local level, primarily the approval of ethics applications. The work of each school committee is reported to the University Research Integrity Committee, including information on the number of applications submitted in total, as well as numbers approved, rejected or referred. The University Research Integrity Committee also manages a cross-university ethical approval process for ethics applications submitted across the University, or where researchers involved are from two or more schools.

Allegations of Research Misconduct

There were two cases of alleged research misconduct in 2019/20. All cases were investigated in accordance with the University's Misconduct policy and RCUK Policy, the Code of Conduct on the Governance of Good Research Conduct and the UKRIO Procedure for the Investigation of Misconduct in Research.

The first case concerned misuse of licenced research tools, but did not relate to research activity at Edinburgh Napier. It was concluded as there being no case to answer. No further action has been taken.



The second case related to research misconduct via plagiarism. It was concluded that the allegation had sufficient substance to justify a formal investigation and was referred via our Student Academic misconduct processes. The matter was considered in accordance with the university's student conduct policies and disciplinary action was subsequently taken.

As a result of this case, communications reminding researchers of training resources on research integrity, plagiarism and good research practices have been increased, as well as integrating more information on research integrity into student induction activities.

Major Initiatives and Developments

In the academic year 2019/20, the following initiatives were addressed:

1. GDPR legislation and research data

Following consultation with the University Information Governance Manager on how guidance and policy for researchers could be amended to respond to GDPR in 2018/19, new documentation was completed for researchers and externally audited, with the suggestion that the University needed to promote the need for privacy impact assessments for all research projects involving participant data.

It was confirmed that students were now considered to be processing data for their own use, whereas PGR Students and Staff remained under the auspices of University. This means that Students can use any software (they are responsible for advising participants and checking suitability/security/privacy compliance of non-University provided/approved software), but staff and PGR students are required to use University approved software/systems. Use of other 3rd party software/systems will require a Privacy Impact Assessment and Data Processing Agreements. It remains that Student supervisors must make Students aware of their responsibilities with regards to personal data.

WebEx remains the preferred tool for remote teaching and meetings, with IS and Governance Services starting work on the use and governance of Microsoft Teams. It was confirmed that updates would follow beyond 2019/20.

2. Public Engagement Governance

The establishment in 2018/19 for a process in principle regarding ethical oversight of public engagement activity resulted in the following amendments to procedure: the invitation for applicants to consider ethical implications of their project as part of the Public Engagement funding competition, the development of a toolkit for researchers with resources for addressing ethical concerns of public engagement (available from Autumn 2019), and a checklist for recipients of University Public Engagement funding to ensure they have considered any ethical concerns in advance. Researchers seeking further support are now directed to School Public Engagement leads and, as appropriate, School Research Integrity leads.

3. NOVI Survey

Following discussion in 2018/19 regarding the use of NOVI Survey as the university's approved online survey software, working groups identified issues with NOVI's functionality. The committee agreed to



draft a business case to replace NOVI with Qualtrics. Intermediate efforts to resolve the issues arising from the working group were delayed by COVID-19 circumstances and were to resume at a later date.

4. Health and Safety

Online travel risk assessment documentation has been updated to ease the application process, but also to allow the Health and Safety team to report on numbers of staff at risk abroad. Training sessions regarding laboratory research were run across the University, and information on handling dangerous chemicals was been distributed to Deans.

Health and Safety approval must be sought for researchers coming into laboratories during lockdown.

5. Worktribe Ethics Module

An ethics module was added to Worktribe, our Research Data Management system (RDMS) which allows researchers to record the post-award ethics approval process on that platform and which provides greater transparency by enabling convenors to oversee ethics activity within their Schools. The software was designed to mirror existing processes within each school.

The module was to be piloted and implemented over Summer 2020, with access rolled out by School. Training will also be made available to researchers during the roll-out to ensure researchers were supported in adapting to the new ethical approval processes.

6. Nagoya Protocol

The committee was involved in reviewing our processes supporting the implementation of the Nagoya Protocol, which concerns the international movement of non-human biological matter for the purposes of research, in preparation for an external audit of our processes. School Research Integrity leads worked with RIO to identify relevant research taking place within their schools and to prepare for the audit.

While currently we have very few research projects that could follow under the Nagoya protocol, the audit highlighted that we have appropriate processes in place to deal with any research in future that falls under the protocol. Our processes have been communicated to Heads of Research via reporting to the Research and Innovation Committee after the findings of the external auditing process.

7. Impacts of COVID-19 on Research Integrity

Much of the remaining work of the Research Integrity Committee focused on the developing Covid-19 pandemic as it emerged in spring 2020, and how researchers could be supported during the pandemic.

All Schools paused face-to-face research, and ongoing projects transitioned to remote data collection in a relatively smooth process following lockdown in March 2020. In response to uncertainty regarding the duration of lockdown, the committee resolved that for the time being all applications should consider remote data collection only and that new advice would be issued following updates on the COVID-19 situation from the Government and the University Leadership. Researchers unable to collect data remotely were encouraged to adapt their project or delay their ethics application as necessary.

Any ongoing research in laboratories during lockdown required Health and Safety approval, and covid-19 protocols were developed for access to campus on a School by School basis.

The committee also confirmed that students were allowed to collect data using personal electronic devices and software provided they follow procedures outlined in the University's data management policy.

The committee developed examples of remote data collection methods that could allow researchers to continue with their research along with considerations for continued participation of research participants, and this was communicated via School Research Integrity Leads. A focus on appropriate remote data collection methods was also included in Research Integrity training sessions during the pandemic.

Concerns regarding the implications of a phased exit from lockdown (e.g. the continued self-isolation of vulnerable groups) led the committee to determine that procedural changes would be assessed on an ad hoc basis in response to advice from the Government and University Leadership.

Janel Fontaine, Clerk to the University Research Integrity Committee, March 2021