



# **Research Integrity Annual Statement 2021 – 2022**

## **University Research Integrity Committee**

### **I. 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.

### **II. Introduction**

The University Research Integrity Committee met three times in the academic year 2021/22: 5 October 2020, 18 January 2022 and 26 April 2022.

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. Until January 2022, the University Research Integrity Committee also managed a cross-university ethical approval process for ethics applications submitted across the University, or where researchers involved are from two or more schools. This process is now managed by Schools in Worktribe.



### **III. Allegations of Research Misconduct**

There were no cases of alleged research misconduct in 2021/22.

### **IV. Major Initiatives and Developments**

In the academic year 2021/22, the following initiatives were addressed:

#### **A. Policy and Guidance Review & Updates**

The University Research Integrity is currently engaging in a process of bringing older policies up to date with current sector guidance and creating new policies or guidance documents as necessary. This has seen ongoing revisions to the Code of Practice for Research Integrity and the Misconduct Policy, as well as new guidance in the form of an Adverse Events Policy and Social Media Guidance.

##### **1. Code of Practice for Research Integrity**

The University's Code of Practice was last amended in 2018, and revisions to this document began in the 2020/21 year in order to maintain consistent procedure across the university and to keep Edinburgh Napier's policy up to date. The committee had previously approved two changes regarding external requests for participation in research and approved survey software, and further approved amendments have included: guidance regarding safeguarding, updated URLs, a new section on the payment of participants, and updated information on training and internet research. Work on the Code of Practice is ongoing, with plans to conclude in early 2022/23. The new version is also undergoing work to improve its accessibility as a digital document.

##### **2. Misconduct Policy**

The University's Misconduct Policy had last been updated in 2015, and major revisions were undertaken and approved by the committee in 2020/21. These received final approval from HR and trade unions, and the final document will be communicated out to the University research community by the end of the 2021/22 year. The new version has also undergone work to improve its accessibility as a digital document.



### **3. Adverse Events Policy**

In light of several adverse events, the Committee and Research Governance recognized the need to amend the Adverse Events Policy to provide clarification for researchers not already familiar with the policy. Updates were also needed to make the policy easier to understand and to replace information which was out-of-date, especially contact information and methods of reporting an adverse event. This updated policy was approved at the January meeting.

### **4. Social Media Guidance**

In response to issues arising through the ethics review process, Committee discussion highlighted the lack of any formal University policy regarding the use of social media in research. It was determined that the variety of platforms and usages, as well as the constantly changing landscape of technology and internet culture were not conducive to the implementation of a formal, authoritative policy. The Convenor drafted a guidance document for researchers regarding the ethical issues which can potentially arise from social media research. The key point of this document is that even passive research may give rise to ethical issues which need to be considered. The document is intended to serve as a starting point for researchers with direction to further readings should they require more information. This document is currently undergoing revision in response to the Committee's feedback, and it is intended that this will be approved and launched early in 2022/23 with an associated training suite for researchers.

## **B. Response to the UKRIO Self-Assessment Tool**

In 2021/22 UKRIO circulated a Self-Assessment rubric with which research integrity committees could review their practice and identify areas of improvement. Following review, it was determined that the primary areas of attention for Edinburgh Napier's University Research Integrity Committee were auditing ethics review and offering ethics training.

### **1. Auditing Ethics Review**

It was determined that both the ethics review process and projects which had received ethical approval need to be audited in a constructive way to determine:

1. that the process is being carried out consistently across all Schools and by all reviewers and



2. that projects which receive ethical approval are meeting the requirements of that initial approval for the duration of the project.

These currently receive informal review via School reports, but there is no formal process in place for either. Developing auditing processes will ultimately improve the standards of ethical approval at the University through focused feedback, identification of wider areas of concern, and the enabling of targeted training to address any gaps. It was agreed by the Committee that two processes would receive a soft roll-out to trial the following proposed methods with one or two School committees, to be selected:

1. the University committee will consider the process, feedback, and comments of at least one application per committee, selected randomly, and
2. researchers from a randomly selected project will be asked to submit a follow-up form detailing any changes that occurred to their project since ethical approval was received along with any relevant documents to their School committee for review and discussion.

## **2. Ethics Training**

Ethics training has thus far been offered by both the Committee and Researcher Development infrequently, and the Committee acknowledged that more consistent, targeted training is necessary to fulfill the needs of researchers at Edinburgh Napier and the best practice stipulated by UKRIO, and to supplement the self-directed learning available on the Research Integrity Moodle sites. Consultation with postgraduate researchers has led to the development of relevant sessions. Social media ethical guidance was also identified as a key area of need for staff. These training programmes will be launched by the Committee in the 2022/23 academic year.

## **C. COVID-19 and Research Integrity**

The ongoing pandemic remained a focus of the committee throughout the academic year, though the easing of restrictions in Summer 2021 meant that researchers could return to face-to-face data collection within the UK as they saw fit for the 2021/22 year. The end to Scotland's legal requirements for face coverings indoors and lateral flow testing programme in April 2022 have meant that researchers are now encouraged by their research integrity committees to carry out their data collection with respect for participants' comfort levels and in accordance with government guidance. The potential for research to be conducted outside the UK continues to be assessed on a case-by-case basis.



#### **D. Education Research Integrity Committee**

The 2021/22 year saw the foundation of a new School-level committee, the Education Research Integrity Committee. The University Committee had previously identified that the majority of ethics review applications presented for cross-university ethics review were pedagogical and largely from researchers in the Department of Learning & Teaching, which did not fall under a School committee. As part of streamlining the cross-university review process (see also below, **Worktribe Ethics Modules**), it was agreed that a new committee would be set up to oversee ethics review specifically for pedagogical projects. This committee was in place by the January 2022 meeting, and the ERIC convenor is a member of the University Committee.

#### **E. Worktribe Ethics Module**

The 2021/22 academic year saw all remaining School ethics review processes migrated to Worktribe, including the new Education Research Integrity Committee. The cross-university ethics review process, previously managed manually by the Clerk, was also incorporated into School Worktribe modules to increase transparency and improve response time. Where an application involves researchers from more than one School, this will be submitted to a 'lead' School and reviewers from other Schools can be added to complete the review with interdisciplinary feedback. The University's Research Governance team is in continued dialogue with Worktribe to resolve any reported issues and feedback the needs of researchers to improve user experience.

#### **F. External Committee Membership**

Following discussion of Research Integrity Committee practices at School level and in external organizations in 2020/21, the University committee agreed to include an external member on the committee to provide outside perspectives and bring our practice further in line with UKRIO guidance. The position was advertised through various online channels in January, and the Convenor and Clerk conducted informal interviews. The first external member was selected and began attending meetings in April 2022.

**Janel Fontaine, Clerk to the University Research Integrity Committee, July 2022**