

UNIVERSITY OF YORK

COUNCIL

Annual Statement on Research Integrity 2019/2020

Background

In October 2019, Universities UK published the revised Concordat to Support Research Integrity, a comprehensive national framework for good research conduct and its governance. UKRI, NIHR and the Wellcome Trust are included among its signatories.

The Concordat requires in particular that the University should present a short annual statement to its governing body that:

- Provides a summary of actions and activities that have been undertaken to support and strengthen understanding and application of research integrity issues;
- Provides assurances that the processes they have in place for dealing with allegations of misconduct are transparent, robust and fair, and that they continue to be appropriate to the needs of the organisation;
- Provides a high level statement on any formal investigations of research misconduct that have been undertaken, and lessons learned from these;
- Provides detail as to how the institution creates and embeds a research environment in which all staff, researchers and students feel comfortable to report instances of misconduct.

To improve accountability, and provide assurances that measures being taken continue to support consistently high standards of research integrity, the statement must be made publicly available.

The University's Statements are published at:

<https://www.york.ac.uk/staff/research/governance/research-integrity-and-ethics/>.

Statement for 2019/20

1. During 2019/20, the University has undertaken the following actions and activities to support and strengthen understanding and application of research integrity issues:
 - (a) Work has taken place to ensure research is maintained and prioritised during the COVID-19 pandemic and resultant need to work from home. The Research Strategy and Policy Office has prepared [guidance on conducting research from home](#), which offers advice for researchers as to how integrity and ethical standards can be maintained whilst working online.
 - (b) The Ethics Framework Governance Committee (EFGC) held its inaugural meeting on 26 February and approved plans to develop a broad University Ethics and Corporate Social Responsibility Framework, which will involve revisiting and expanding the

University's current Code of Practice on ethics, broadening the focus beyond purely academic activity. This is to be taken forward by an operational working group with both academic and professional services representation, due to report on progress to EFGC at the end of July.

- (c) The work of the EFGC is complemented by the Academic Ethics and Compliance Committee (AECC), which is to act as a referral point for queries concerning academic ethics, and as an oversight body for subject-level ethics committees. The membership of this committee is under consideration, with names to be confirmed shortly. Quarterly meetings are to be arranged following the confirmation of membership. The Secretaries of the AECC and the EFGC are liaising to ensure good coverage and clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the new committees as they develop.
- (d) Two new members of staff have joined the Research Strategy and Policy Office to assist in strengthening our approach to ethics. Jen Mayne will act as Research Strategy and Policy Officer for Ethics and Compliance, responsible in part for servicing the AECC, and Phil Wiles has replaced Dr Alice Wakely as the Research Integrity and Compliance Manager.
- (e) The University continues to work towards a successful implementation of the revised Concordat to Support Research Integrity. The revised Concordat has been circulated to all Chairs of Departmental Research Committees and subject-level ethics committees, as well as to relevant professional services staff, such as the Research Excellence Training Team (RETT) and the IP & Legal team. In particular, work is ongoing with the HR department to ensure an effective implementation of requirements relating to independent members on formal examination boards, and specifications surrounding the use of NDAs.
- (f) York has continued to be actively involved in the Russell Group Research Integrity Forum (RGRIF). The Forum has prepared a template for integrity training, outlining proportionate, appropriate and flexible approaches to training at Universities, and York has fed in on the development of this template. We have also entered into collaboration with other regional institutions as part of the North East Ethics and Integrity Group, which will enable further good practice sharing and collaboration in developing resources in support of integrity.
- (g) Work continues in support of Open Research through the Open Research Strategy Group (ORSG) and Open Research Operations Group (OROG). The ORSG is responsible for developing policy and guidance, and for providing direction to the OROG, whilst the OROG is responsible for assisting and advising the ORSG. The University has launched its [Open Research statement](#) and an 'Open Research York' event is planned for the 25th of June 2020, which will bring together experts and

practitioners to discuss key issues for open research. This is supplemented by an Open Research Engagement and Awareness Survey, coordinated by the Library.

Further, the Research Support Team has published an [Open Research Practical Guide](#). This is a practical guide offering support and information on open research methods which can be applied at different stages of the research lifecycle. This guidance is intended for researchers of all levels, and across all academic disciplines.

- (h) The University Research Committee approved a [Statement on Safeguarding in Research](#) in March 2020, and this is now available on the University webpages. As part of this, relevant policies were reviewed to ensure requirements and expectations were met, and new reporting routes were identified. Examples of good practice were included so as to provide researchers with a clear idea of how safeguarding can be done effectively.
- (i) The Terms of Reference for the University Research Committee (URC) have been updated to highlight specifically the University commitment to research integrity. The Terms of Reference now explicitly note the responsibility of URC to “champion and promote research excellence and integrity, and to oversee the development and maintenance of the supporting policy framework, reporting annually to Senate and Council.”
- (j) Work continues on Guidance on the Use of Social Media Data in Research, as reported in the 2019 statement. In line with comments from academic colleagues across the University, the Guidance would be formatted as a high-level statement on principles, accompanied by a series of case studies examining specific areas in more detail.
- (k) Data protection questions have been fully incorporated into the ethics approval process and data protection impact assessments are completed for all 'privacy intrusive' research projects. In addition, detailed guidance is available online for researchers, including in relation to [working from home](#). Separately, the University is in the process of establishing a network of information champions to support data protection compliance within departments. These champions will receive detailed data protection training and will provide valuable first-line support for all staff, including the academic community.
- (l) Work regarding responsible innovation has been initiated, including a Responsible Innovation Roundtable Event, organised by Professor Arvind (Research Champion for Risk, Evidence and Decision Making), which took place on 20 May 2020 and facilitated discussion among staff regarding the next steps for responsible innovation at York.
- (m) The Research Strategy and Policy Office has engaged with the [Trusted Research guidance](#) recently made available by the Centre for the Protection of National

Infrastructure, and has undertaken a review of the recommendations to ensure the University meets or exceeds expectations in this regard. Both the guidance and information on how it can be followed at York are to be published on the University research policy webpages shortly.

- (n) A Vault storage service is in development, for the storage of large datasets beyond the research project. The vault for the storage of large datasets and the Library's Research Data York service can gather appropriate metadata through the PURE dataset record, can make the record discoverable and the dataset available via a direct download link (via the York Research Database), can provide a (reuse) licence and a persistent identifier. The system is live as of 26 May, and will be open to select staff members, which will include researchers storing 'cold' research data which is accessed infrequently.
- (o) Training and support additional to the University's core provision have been offered as follows:
 - i. A Research Integrity Forum on the topic of Controversial Research was held in November 2019, featuring a talk from Dr Mary Leng (Department of Philosophy) discussing how researchers can engage productively in potentially controversial or difficult areas.
 - ii. All staff are required to complete mandatory online data protection training and separate information security training. In addition, a number of face-to-face GDPR training sessions are available to research staff and postgraduate students.
 - iii. The Animal Welfare and Ethics Review Body (AWERB) is in the process of developing some informal guidelines for sub-committee meetings that consider Home Office Project Licences to assist sub-committee chairs without prior experience of such meetings.

2. Processes for dealing with misconduct:

- (a) Regular catch-ups have been scheduled between the RSPO and HR, which provide a forum in which to discuss areas of common concern. A particular focus will be mapping out reporting routes and ensuring process and procedure are aligned for all forms of misconduct, in particular, ethics and integrity issues in activity which do not fall under the Frascati definition of research.
- (b) In December, the University Research Committee formally approved a procedure through which the requirements of the Wellcome Trust Bullying & Harassment policy could be met. It was agreed that a confidential log would be created where pertinent details would be recorded, and that this would be shared with necessary individuals.

(c) The processes for dealing with misconduct at York will be reviewed in line with the revised Concordat to ensure alignment with good practice and industry recommendations.

3. Statement on formal investigations of research misconduct and lessons learnt:

(a) During 2019/20, there has been one formal allegation of research misconduct relating to research staff, in which an initial investigation found there was no case to be answered. A separate allegation was received via anonymous email, which related to a case at another institution; in this case it had already been made clear through investigation at the relevant institution that the person concerned was not involved.

(b) During 2019/20, there have been 3 formal investigations relating to research students. An allegation of plagiarism in a resubmitted PhD thesis in Law was investigated under the Academic Misconduct Policy for PGRs and was upheld, however the student successfully appealed on a procedural point (meaning that finding of plagiarism still stands) and the examiners have been asked to make an academic judgement.

An investigation was conducted in relation to the possible manipulation of results in a PhD awarded in Biology, and it was discovered that the student had cleaned up one figure to make the results seem more significant than they were. The data reported in the thesis had not been changed. It was concluded that this was not research misconduct but poor practice, and the thesis was withdrawn from the repository until the figure could be corrected.

Finally, an allegation of plagiarism in a 2017 PhD in Education was made by an external academic; the allegation was investigated under Ordinance 7 and the investigation is ongoing. The report will go to Senate once ready.

As a result of these investigations, the Academic Misconduct Policy for PGRs has been rewritten in order to clarify (1) where the academic judgement lies, (2) the relevance of mitigating circumstances, and (3) the levels of plagiarism and consequent sanctions. This will come into effect in the next academic year.

4. Statement on the fostering of a supportive research environment in which all staff, researchers and students feel comfortable to report instances of misconduct:

The University of York is committed to fostering a supportive research environment in which all staff, researchers and students feel comfortable to report instances of misconduct, and we work towards this in a number of ways.

Our [Code of Practice on Research Integrity](#) specifies that “each member of the University community has a responsibility to foster an environment which promotes intellectual honesty and integrity”, and that to support this, the University will “protect the interests of

those who draw attention to possible misconduct in good faith” (7.2). The Code of Practice also refers to the UKRIO [Guidance for Researchers on Retractions in Academic Journals](#) (2010), which states that “an admission of honest errors in research should in no way be construed as misconduct; on the contrary, the reporting of genuine mistakes is in accordance with good practice in research”. This no-detriment approach is key to the stance of York and is seen in other policies governing research, including our [Statement on Safeguarding in Research](#), and our [Research Misconduct Policy and Procedure](#). The latter also makes specific provision for the consideration of equality and diversity, to ensure such allegations are handled in a sensitive and fair manner, as well as specifying that no individual involved in the investigation will be sanctioned without an allegation being upheld.

We are dedicated to supporting a research culture which encourages and enables honest, in-depth discussions on research integrity. We hold regular Research Integrity Forums, at which researchers and professional services staff gather to discuss new or complex areas of research integrity and ethics. Some examples of these Forums, which have been reported in previous Statements on Research Integrity, are events focusing on the use of social media in research, incidental findings, and authorship. Such events are important in offering a venue in which researchers can raise and address areas of uncertainty, and help us develop an atmosphere in which integrity issues are prevented and discussed early on in the research process. Openness about mistakes and uncertainty is encouraged, and the University recognises that such transparency allows for more effective corrections and greater awareness.

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PRO-VICE-CHANCELLOR FOR RESEARCH

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