Annual statement on research integrity

Name of organisation	Ulster University
Type of organisation: **higher education institution/industry/independent research performing organisation/other (please state)**	Higher Education Institution
Date statement approved by governing body (DD/MM/YY)	26/06/2024
Web address of organisation's research integrity page (if applicable)	https://www.ulster.ac.uk/research/our-research/research-integrity
Named senior member of staff to oversee research integrity	Name: Prof Liam Maguire
Named senior member of staff to oversee research integrity	Email address: lp.maguire@ulster.ac.uk
Named member of staff who will act as a first point of contact for anyone wanting more information on matters of research integrity	Name: Dr Julie McCarroll
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Promoting high standards of research integrity and positive research culture.

Policies and systems

The Concordat to Support Research Integrity requires the University to have clear policies, procedures and practices relating to research integrity. Ulster University's _Code of Practice for Professional Integrity in the Conduct of Research_ (reviewed 2021) is the central document which details the standards to which all university staff and students involved in the research process are expected to work. This document addresses the required precepts and commitments of the Concordat to Support Research Integrity, clearly referencing other policies, procedures and guidance in place to support researchers and to underpin the good conduct of research. The Code of Practice for Professional Integrity in the Conduct of Research includes the University's definition of misconduct in research and details the procedures which will apply in the event of a suspected misconduct in research. Other related policies, which are the responsibility of multiple directorates, are detailed at Appendix A, but include policies regulating the areas of human tissue, animal research and human participants.

PURE is used to managed research outputs, outcomes and impacts, facilitating transparency around the University's research activities and collaborations. Where required to do so by funders, researchers also report impacts and outputs of funded research via ResearchFish. 100% compliance with ResearchFish reporting was achieved during the reporting period.

Leadership

The Research Governance Steering Committee (RGSC) has responsibility for developing, keeping under review and revising policies and guidance in relation to research governance, integrity and ethics. Groups and committees specifically dedicated to the management of individual regulatory areas (animal welfare, use of radiation, human tissue) and human research ethics report to the RGSC. The RGSC reports and makes recommendations on national and local legislation, policy and practice as appropriate to the Research & Innovation Committee (RIC), which is chaired by the Pro Vice Chancellor for Research. RIC reports directly to the university's Senate and has responsibility for providing leadership and approving policies, including those which promote research integrity.

This reporting structure ensures that issues or developments requiring a strategic response or input are considered at the appropriate level. The University Senate and Council are ultimately responsible for oversight and policy-setting. Policies are reviewed in line with a University schedule and are subject to consultation across the institution, including with staff, students and the unions.

Communication and engagement

Communication is managed via the University's outward-facing web pages and via internal content and training, either face-to-face or online. This content is kept up to date through regular review and is subject to in-depth scrutiny and revision on a cyclical basis. For example, references, web links and similar content are reviewed in conjunction with a Marketing and Communications Business Partner and updated as required; overall content, presentation and other significant changes are timetabled by Research Governance in collaboration with Marketing and Communications to ensure that resource is available to carry the changes through to a successful conclusion.

Culture

In a survey of research culture carried out during the 20/21 academic year, responses indicated that 72% of staff were of the opinion that their school/unit of assessment supported a culture of research integrity, and 74-82% were comfortable seeking support from colleagues, understood the requirements of good authorship and knew where to find information relating to research integrity.

These are illustrations of a positive attitude towards research integrity and the foundations that support it. The survey responses also indicated that further provision was required in a range of areas, and this is currently being addressed as part of the development of the University's updated research and innovation strategy which will go live later in 2023.

Training and Development

All research-active staff and students are required to complete the University's own Research Integrity course. Based on the *Code of Practice* referred to above, this course supports researchers from all disciplines in understanding the key issues that need to be considered when planning, conducting and reporting research. Completion by all PhD researchers is required within 100 days of first registration and prior to the first formal review of their progress; academic staff and contract researchers are required to complete within a reasonable timeframe.

An online introductory course on research ethics and governance is provided by the Doctoral College within the Research Development Programme. Staff may join these events and seminars where capacity allows.

There is also provision for online training on research and consent under the Human Tissue Act (HTA) (2004) and this is mandatory for staff and students on HTA-regulated studies.

Monitoring and Reporting

Ulster University has robust governance and reporting structures in place to ensure that research integrity is maintained at the highest levels. Audits are undertaken, for example, in the area of compliance with Human Tissue Act regulations. All audit findings and any other significant updates are reported through the appropriate governance structures.

Course completion rates for the Research Integrity training course is monitored by the Research Governance team, and is a standing item on the Research Governance Steering

Committee agenda. All researchers involved in an application to the university research ethics committees must have completed the Research Integrity training course for favourable ethical opinion to be granted. Any study which requires NHS research ethics or NHS R&D approval requires 100% completion of the research integrity course by institutional team members before study Sponsorship will be granted.

Changes and developments during the period under review

Ulster University's Research & Impact Strategy 2017-2022 delivered unprecedented growth in research and innovation performance, with an 85% increase in research grants awarded and a 20% increase in staff submitted to REF2021. In preparation for the launch of a **new research strategy**, conference events were held at multiple sites across Northern Ireland during the course of 2022. These events facilitated presentation of plans and incorporation of stakeholder feedback on the draft strategy, culminating in recommendation of the strategy to Senate for approval in June 2023. The strategy was approved by Senate in September 2023 and is planned for launch in October 2023.

In January 2023, approval was secured for funding of a **Deputy Director of Research**. This role will provide strategic support for the Director of Research and Innovation in the delivery of the forthcoming new research strategy, and provide oversight of the development and management of research conducted by the University's research community.

Reflections on progress and plans for future developments

Completion rates for the **Research Integrity training** remained high during the reporting period, driven primarily by its status as a compulsory requirement for new academic staff and students involved in research.

95% of all staff with Significant Responsibility for Research (SRR), defined as staff with explicit time and resources in their role to engage actively in independent research, had completed the Research Integrity training course at the end of the reporting period. Completion rates varied across Units of Assessment and remedial actions were taken to address compliance rates in under-performing areas.

The internal systems and processes create challenges with monitoring research integrity course completion rates in so much as significant manual monitoring is required. Options for improvement in course delivery mechanisms and monitoring of completion rates will be

considered in the context of the forthcoming launch of the UK Research and Integrity Office's (UKRIO) training course during the next reporting period.

Ulster University's new **research strategy** will be launched in late 2023 and will focus on fostering an open, diverse, supportive and sustainable research culture for the delivery of relevant and transformative research.

A **Deputy Director of Research** will be appointed early in 2024.

A funding commitment has been agreed via internal processes for the appointment of a **Research Culture Lead** within the Research and Innovation Team.

Addressing research misconduct

Statement on processes that the organisation has in place for dealing with allegations of misconduct

The University has a specific process for addressing allegations of research misconduct. This has been in place for more than a decade was reviewed in 2021. The contact point for advice is the Head of Research Governance, and the contact point for those wishing to make a formal allegation is a senior officer of the University (Deputy Vice Chancellor) who sits outside the research management structure.

The appointment of a senior officer out with the research management structure is to ensure that those making allegations have an independent point of contact and someone with sufficient seniority to drive the process forward when necessary.

The University's procedures in this and associated areas (whistleblowing, public interest etc) are intended to ensure that those who make allegations can do so in the knowledge that their reports will be taken seriously and handled fairly. However, it is clearly a significant and uncomfortable undertaking for a researcher or academic (particularly one in a relatively junior position) to take such a step, and we must recognise that reality. The University continues to take steps to update its strategies, policies, procedures and guidance to place emphasis on integrity and the responsibilities around best practice, and to focus on people and their place in the organisation rather than on the importance of the organisation itself, with a view to promoting improvements in the research culture.

Information on investigations of research misconduct that have been undertaken				
Type of allegation	**Number of allegations**			
	Number of allegations reported to the organisation	**Number of formal investigations**	**Number upheld in part after formal investigation**	**Number upheld in full after formal investigation**
Fabrication	0			
Falsification	0			
Plagiarism	0			
Failure to meet legal, ethical and professional obligations	0			
Misrepresentation (e.g. data; involvement; interests; qualification; and/or publication history)	0			
Improper dealing with allegations of misconduct	0			
Multiple areas of concern (when received in a single allegation)	0			
Other	0			
Total:	**0**			

APPENDIX A

Policies related to research integrity

- Policy for the Governance of research involving Human Participants
- Policy on research involving Human Tissue
- Guidelines on Acceptable sources of external funding for research
- Research Study Volunteer Complaints Procedure
- Procedures for the Investigation of Allegations of Research Misconduct
- Policies relating to GDPR and the use of personal data including Data Protection Policy
- Intellectual Property Policy and Procedures
- Research Data Management Policy
- Intellectual Property Policy and Procedures
- Provisional Open Research Position Statement
- Open Access and PURE Policy
- Raising Concerns (Whistleblowing) Policy
- Equality Scheme
- Bullying & Harassment (Dignity at Work and Study) Policy