

## **Research Integrity Report to Governors 1 August 2019 to 31 July 2020**

### **1. Summary of actions and activities that have been undertaken to support and strengthen understanding and the application of research integrity issues.**

#### **Context**

- i. In January 2014 the University established a dedicated Research Governance Team within Research, Business & Innovation. This is a dedicated resource for the University to promote good research practice, and ensure that the standards set out in the Concordat are being met. The team comprises a .8 FTE Research Governance Manager and a 1 FTE Research Governance Officer post. In addition, the University has a 1.85 FTE Research Ethics Team.
- ii. A UWE Code of Good Research Conduct was developed in response to the Universities UK 2012 Concordat to Support Research Integrity, and came into force in January 2015. This represents the 'blueprint' for good research conduct at the University. The Concordat was revised in 2019 and an initial gap analysis has been carried out.<sup>1</sup>
- iii. Research Integrity is supported by the following Sub-Committees of the University Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee:
  - UWE Research Ethics Sub-Committee (RESC), and reporting to it four Faculty Research Ethics Committees (FRECs);
  - UWE Human Tissue Sub-Committee (HTSC), and
  - UWE Animal Welfare and Ethics Sub-Committee (AWEC).

#### **Key activities during the report period**

**Research ethics:** During the year the RESC oversaw the work of the four FRECs which together dealt with 362 applications from UWE staff and students - all on a new electronic application form. During this period 19 applications were received and reviewed by RESC, of these 11 were approved after conditions addressed, 4 had a conditional approval, still to be concluded, 3 needed the decision of an external (other HEI) ethics committee ratified by UWE RESC, and 1 was a retrospective approval.

The Committee approved a revised version of its Retrospective Approval Policy and Procedures. An online ethics training module was developed and launched in November 2019, designed to ensure researchers understand the importance of research ethics, responsibility for ethics in a research project, the types of research that need ethical approval and how that approval can be obtained. It is mandatory for all academic staff engaged in research or supervising student research (at all levels, undergraduate, masters and doctoral. By 31 July 2020 the module had been completed by 1,043 members of staff. Regular monitoring of engagement is undertaken

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Pages/the-concordat-for-research-integrity.aspx>

by Associate Deans (Research) in the Faculties, and the Graduate School and the RBI hub. We are currently in the process of recruiting for the role of Chair of the University Research Ethics Sub-Committee (RESC). During this reporting period the incumbent Chair, after periods of absence, left the university the Deputy acted as Chair in the interim.

**Human Tissue:** the Human Tissue Sub- Committee of URKE continues to operate, and its operations include an annual audit of human tissue stored at UWE. The fourth audit was due to take place during the report period, but was unable to go ahead as laboratories were closed due to COVID-19 The Committee has continued to meet virtually since the lockdown in March.

**Animal Welfare:** the University strongly supports research that meets the highest ethical standards, including that which involves animals. The University is committed to the three 'R's of reduction, replacement and refinement in relation to animal research, and ethical scrutiny always considers this issue. The University does not hold a Home Office Licence, and has no plans to apply for one. Work involving live animals which would require such a licence does not take place at UWE Bristol, but research involving live animals, such as conservation research, is subject to rigorous scrutiny by the University's Animal Welfare Sub-Committee. The Committee holds four meetings a year, and protects the University against breach of a range of animal related legislation. A further Safe System of Work (SSoW – SSOW's streamline approvals where possible) has been developed, and another is being drafted currently. The Committee adopted a new Policy and Procedure for retrospective review. Plans are being developed for audit but these have had to be paused since the lockdown. During the reporting period 18 Applications were processed of which 3 were SSoW applications (not needing full processing and formal approval). 8 were approved outright, 6 were approved with conditions, 1 was Revise and Resubmit (not yet resubmitted, affected by COVID). Only 1 application was not processed within the six weeks target, 12 of the 15 full applications (around 80 %) were processed within four weeks. The Committee has continued to meet virtually during the lockdown period.

**Covid-19:** a significant amount of work has been necessary as a result of COVID-19, to support researchers, and promote and assure research integrity since lockdown. The Research Governance and Ethics teams in RBI have continued to operate a full service remotely.

- Guidance was issued in relation to research at the beginning of the lockdown period, including the requirement for face to face research to be paused, or moved to remote methods.
- The HTSC conducted a review of human tissue on UWE premises, to evaluate whether the end dates of HRA approvals might mean that any tissue would end up being stored unlawfully, as there was no laboratory access to finish research, or destroy samples (this proved not to be the case, and the review provided assurance of that).
- The AWESC conducted a review of live research, to establish the current position of all projects, to provide guidance to researchers.
- The HTSC and AWESC Chairs and the Research Governance Manager worked with the Chair of the Biological Safety Committee to produce a BSC statement in relation to the safe use of human and animal biological materials, which was discussed at full Committee meetings of HTSC and AWESC.
- AWESC produced, and updated, guidance in relation to working with live animals and animal by-products. The 'meat' SSoW was suspended, and several other SSoWs were amended to be COVID-secure.

— *The Research Governance and Ethics Teams* have provided guidance and support to individual researchers and managers.

**2. Statement to provide assurance that the processes the institution has in place for dealing with allegations of misconduct are transparent, timely, robust and fair, and that they continue to be appropriate to the needs of the organisation**

The University's Procedure for Investigating Allegations of Research Misconduct is in place. This is based on the UKRIO Model, and will be reviewed in the context of the anticipated revised UKRIO Model, and anticipated guidance from UKRI following the new Concordat to Support Research Integrity.

**3. Formal Investigations of research misconduct**

See **Annex** to this report. There have been two cases of Research Misconduct involving staff during the period. One was a case of plagiarism, one was a case of failure to meet ethical, legal and professional obligations. Sufficient evidence emerged at Screening Stage that the allegations should be upheld that it was unnecessary to, and would have been inappropriate to, proceed to full investigation stage. Both cases were therefore concluded at that point and appropriate action taken.

**4. Statement on what the institution has learned from any formal investigations of research misconduct that have been undertaken, including what lessons have been learned to prevent the same type of incident re-occurring**

From one of the cases, there was organisational learning in relation to how procedures for recording and assuring ethical approval in relation to Postgraduate Research might be amended. Whilst it was clear that the fault lay with the researcher rather than the University, nevertheless, we took the opportunity to further strengthen procedures to minimise the risk of recurrence.

**5. Statement on how the institution creates and embeds a research environment in which all staff, researchers and students feel comfortable to report instances of misconduct**

The University has strong policies and procedures in place to support research integrity, including a detailed Research Misconduct Procedure, with a clear route for referral. All formal allegations made via the Procedure are taken forward appropriately. It is therefore clear to staff that allegations will be taken seriously. There is also a very high level of confidentiality built in to the procedure, to encourage staff to engage with process.

**Formal investigations of research misconduct undertaken in the Reporting period (1 August 2019 to 31 July 2020)**

	<b>Number of formal investigations completed</b>		<i>Number of allegations upheld (in whole or in part)</i>	
	Staff	Research Students	Staff	Research students
<b>Fabrication</b>				
<b>Falsification</b>				
<b>Plagiarism</b>	1		1	
<b>Misrepresentation</b>				
<b>Breach of duty of care</b>				
<b>Improper dealing with allegations of misconduct</b>				
<b>Failure to meet ethical, legal and professional obligations</b>	1		1	
<b>Mismanagement or inadequate preservation of data and/or primary materials</b>				
<b>Improper dealing with allegations of research misconduct</b>				