

## **Research Integrity Report to Governors 1 August 2020 to 31 July 2021**

### **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 actions have been taken, as appropriate, in relation to an initial gap analysis.<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 four Faculty Research Ethics Committees (FRECs) which report to Faculty Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee;
  - UWE Human Tissue Sub-Committee (HTSC), and,
  - UWE Animal Welfare and Ethics Sub-Committee (AWESC).

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

**Research Governance Review:** The Review was undertaken as part of the internal audit plan. The Objective was to review the design and operating effectiveness of key controls in place relating to the research governance process. The review focused on the governance structure, training requirements and research data management for research projects. The review concluded that the University has a well-defined governance arrangement to support research projects. The University has also formally set out defined procedures to manage the research governance and key processes. Reviewers note that in interviews with academics, it was clear they feel supported in most areas and they are well aware of the ethical approval process. It was also concluded that overall the University's research governance process is consistent with other institutions in the HE sector. The review highlighted a number of issues of implementation, and these have been/are being appropriately taken forward.

**Research ethics:** Professor David Evans was appointed Chair of the RESC with effect from 1 November 2020.

During the year the RESC oversaw the work of the four FRECs which together dealt with 311 applications from UWE staff (174) and students (137) over the FREC reporting year, April 2020 to March 2021. The RESC received and reviewed seven applications. (This was significantly fewer than in previous years, in part due to the decision in 2019-20 for applications which survey UWE students across the University to be reviewed within the home faculty of the PI rather than by RESC). Three applications were approved after conditions were addressed, one needed the decision of an external (other HEI) ethics committee to be ratified by UWE RESC, and one was approved after being revised and resubmitted. In addition, two applications were received from undergraduate students on the BSc Forensic Computing and Security and BSc Cyber Security and Digital Forensics programmes. Their proposed work focussed on content in the public domain and considered by their supervisors to be low risk, but was required by UWE guidance to be assessed as high risk and therefore requiring full ethical scrutiny. Prompted by his review of the applications, the RESC Chair reviewed and consequently revised the guidance on Security Sensitive Research, noting that the guidance did not previously address low risk UG and PGT secondary literature reviews, and this was approved by RESC and the University RKE Committee.

Following Professor Evans' appointment as RESC Chair, the Committee began the process of reviewing all research ethics guidance which is due to be completed in 2021-22. An early priority was revising the guidance on Security Sensitive Research as noted above. Given the COVID-19 pandemic and the switch from primarily in-person to online research, new guidance was drafted and agreed on obtaining, recording and transporting consent and data. Wider guidance was also provided and updated to researchers on the implications for ethics of COVID. Other newly emerging research ethics issues including the use of drones in research were considered and addressed. The audit of student research ethics reviews from 2017-18 was completed and issues relevant to learning and teaching raised with LTSEC to jointly address.

A working group, comprising colleagues in the Safeguarding and Research Governance teams and the LDC, was set up to create training resources for researchers on safeguarding and working with vulnerable participants.

A series of webinars covering topical ethics themes (consent, researching with vulnerable participants, creative practice research) was initiated to provide research ethics training; and staff continue to complete the online training module as required (1,177 members of staff by July 2021). The module will be reviewed and updated over the coming months.

The RESC Chair prepared a policy statement on not accepting tobacco industry funding for research. This was discussed and recommended by RESC at its 26 May meeting, discussed and endorsed by the Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee on 16 June and approved by Academic Board on 7 July. The policy states that the University will not knowingly accept any monies from sources funded by the tobacco industry.

**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 which had been due to take place during the last report period, but was unable to go ahead as laboratories were closed due to COVID-19, was conducted during the current report period, and practice in the specific area audited this time (materials used for teaching purposes) was found to be good. The Committee has continued to successfully meet virtually since the lockdown in March 2020.

**Animal Welfare and Ethics:** 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 and Ethics Sub-Committee. The Committee holds four meetings a year, and protects the University against breach of a range of animal related legislation and regulation. A further two new Safe Systems of Work (SSoW – SSOW's streamline approvals where possible) have been developed, including one on unmanned aerial vehicles (drones), in collaboration with the UWE UAV Operations Manager. Plans are being developed for AWESC audit activities, but these have had to be paused since the lockdown, and will be commenced again over the next reporting year, COVID conditions permitting.

During the reporting period 29 applications were processed of which 2 were SSoW applications (not needing full processing and formal approval); 1 was a Retrospective Application. Out of the 26 applications that went through the full scrutiny process, 4 applications were approved outright, 21 were approved with conditions, 1 was Revise and Resubmit. Out of the 26 applications that went out for full scrutiny, 100% received a decision within the 6 weeks target time, of which 19 % received a decision within 6 weeks, and 81% received a decision within four weeks (15% of applications took 4 weeks, 35% took 3 weeks, and 31% of applications received a decision within just two weeks).

The Committee has continued to successfully meet virtually during the lockdown period.

**Covid-19:** a significant amount of work has continued to be necessary as a result of COVID-19, to support researchers, and promote and assure research integrity in the context of the changing National and global COVID situation. The Research Governance and Ethics teams in RBI have continued to operate a full service remotely. Guidance that 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, and guidance in relation to contact with animals, and work with human tissue, was reviewed and amended throughout the year, in line with Government guidance and changing circumstances and evidence, working closely with the Biological Safety Committee.

RBI has worked with Faculties throughout the various stages of lockdown to ensure research activities received appropriate Senior Management approval within Faculty before proceeding. Working with Faculty managers, and colleagues in professional services including Health and Safety, ITS and the Contracts team, support has been offered to researchers, helping them to be able to conduct activities wherever possible, safely and legally. This has included being responsive to issues which have arisen from researchers, for example the need for new software and guidance (for both staff and student researchers) to enable qualitative research to take place remotely, in line with data protection and research data security requirements, and working with academic colleagues to produce protocols for overseas activities conducted by contractors to ensure all activities were COVID-safe for contractor staff and participants alike, mitigating risks both to individuals, and to UWE.

### **Graduate School Research Governance Highlights**

The Graduate School, working with other colleagues in RBI, and from the Library and Faculties, has continued to run development workshops for students, including, this year: Research Integrity and Data Management; Guide to Searching and Organising the Literatures, and, IP and Copyright. These were all delivered online, ran three times, and there was record attendance compared to previous years. Research governance awareness is also embedded into other relevant skills development workshops such as: PGR supervisor training; Welcome and other PGR milestones, and, Research Methods. Research governance information was also made available via the Blackboard PGR Skills Development Resource Library. The Research Governance Manager also contributed to the Graduate School's *Flexible Researcher* skills development workshop series, which addressed the practical, epistemic, methodological and wellbeing issues arising for PGRs as they adapted their research to pandemic conditions. In addition, the Graduate School Sub-Committee worked closely with the Library during 2020/21 to develop new academic regulatory requirements to ensure that Directors of Studies work with their PGRs to develop a research data management plan for doctoral projects as part of compliance with research governance and open access to research requirements. This will be mandatory for all PGRs registering from 1 October 2021 onwards.

### **Faculty Research Governance Committees**

The HAS Research Governance Management Group has continued to successfully meet remotely during the year. The ACE Research Management Group was established during the year, and its members have been working with ACE researchers to promote continued good research practice.

## **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**

There have been no formal investigations of research misconduct during the period. Whilst this is unusual, and the University would normally be concerned that this could there was under-reporting of research misconduct, in the context of the significant impacts of COVID-19 on the volume of research activity, and the increased controls we have set in place over the period as a result of COVID-19, it is in some ways to be expected, and therefore not a matter of significant concern.

### **4. 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.