



ANNUAL RESEARCH INTEGRITY POLICY STATEMENT 2020-21

PREAMBLE

This statement provides the University's response to the UK [*Concordat to support Research Integrity*](#) ('The Concordat') and is intended to inform UK Research and Innovation, Research England, the academic community, other funders of our research, and the public more broadly, how the University of Sussex addresses matters of Research Integrity and seeks to foster a culture of professional integrity.

The Concordat seeks to provide a comprehensive national framework for good research conduct and its governance. As signatories to, and supporters of, the *Concordat to support Research Integrity*, University of Sussex is committed to the following principles:

- **maintaining the highest standards of rigour and integrity in all aspects of research**
- **ensuring that research is conducted according to appropriate ethical, legal and professional frameworks, obligations and standards**
- **supporting a research environment that is underpinned by a culture of integrity and based on good governance, best practice and support for the development of researchers**
- **using transparent, robust and fair processes to deal with allegations of research misconduct should they arise**
- **working together to strengthen the integrity of research and to reviewing progress regularly and openly**

A message from Professor Adam Tickell

Throughout our history, academics and researchers at the University of Sussex have made transformational interventions in their fields and created new ones. Our research has enhanced understanding and improved lives. Great research depends upon the highest standards of integrity in its design, execution and governance. The University is fully committed to the UK Concordat for Research Integrity and our Research Integrity statement is an important codification of our values.

Professor Adam Tickell, Vice-Chancellor
University of Sussex

Overview of activities 2020-2021

The following activities and initiatives supported the University's commitment to research integrity in the 2020-21 academic year:

- Updates to the *Procedure for the Investigation of Allegations of Misconduct in Research*
- Significant changes and enhancements to the operation of the Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Body (AWERB)
- Updates to the terms of reference to ethics committees and supporting roles to align with recent standards on ethics review in universities
- The launch of a collaborative Pre-Sponsorship Review Panel (PSRP) bringing together universities and NHS trusts to strengthen research governance for health research
- The development of specialist guidance on mass data social media studies and the proposal to establish a Compliance Panel for legal and compliance issues
- The development of guidance for researchers wishing to access closed data sets under the Digital Economy Act 2017
- The delivery of a varied programme of research training and briefings for researchers and ethics committee members
- The setting up of a Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) Project Group and accompanying initiatives

Specific actions and initiatives evidencing commitment to the Concordat to Support Research Integrity

Commitment 1: Maintaining the highest standards of rigour and integrity in all aspects of research

The University has established and continues to articulate its key standards for research integrity in three main documents:

1. The [Code of Practice for Research](#)
2. The [Research Governance Standard Operating Procedures](#)
3. The [Procedure for the Investigation of Allegations of Misconduct in Research](#) ('the Procedure')

Initiatives and actions in the 2020-21 academic year

The University undertook a mapping exercise of current **terms of reference for its ethics committees** and supporting roles against UKRIO & ARMA 'Research Ethics Support and Review in Research Organisations'. In consequence, the Research Ethics and Integrity Committee has approved updated terms of reference that highlight the importance of upholding the principles of ethical research over an emphasis on 'compliance', stress the important principle of independence in ethics review and recognises the wider research integrity agenda as it relates to institutional research culture.

The **Procedure for the Investigation of Allegations of Misconduct in Research** was revised and updated following formal approval.

The alignment of **definitions of academic and research integrity** as expressed in the student regulations for taught programmes will be a priority for updates to the *Code of Practice for Research* in the 2021-22 academic year.

The University established its **Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) project** to reaffirm its commitment to the principles and to put in place processes to ensure DORA principles are embedded in all areas of university activity.

Stakeholder engagement included an exercise to get feedback from all Schools as well as regular updates at RaKE committee meetings for DRKEs to cascade to their Schools.

The University's commitment is outlined in this new web page: <https://www.sussex.ac.uk/research/about/strategy/declaration-on-research-assessment>

The DORA project group has a number of workstreams. One of these is Human Resources led and includes a comprehensive audit, review, and (where relevant) revision of all relevant research assessment systems, policies, and practices throughout the academic career journey, including: annual review and examination of doctoral researchers; recruitment and induction of new researchers; appraisal and mentoring processes; and formal procedures regarding probation, pay review, and promotion.

Another workstream is the expanded use of the University's Elements research profile system with appropriate capability-building and training for researchers, as well as a clear interface with systems and processes for research assessment and planning.

The University Library has created a new **Publication Metrics guide** for researchers which includes information about DORA and responsible metrics. Training is also provided, delivered via the Doctoral Training Programme and also offered to Academic Staff.

Commitment 2: Ensuring that research is conducted according to appropriate ethical, legal and professional frameworks, obligations and standards

Initiatives and actions in the 2020-21 academic year

The **Animal Welfare and Ethical Review** Body (AWERB) has instigated work to enhance the University's commitments to the three Rs (Refinement, Reduction and Replacement) and the *Concordat on Openness on Animal Research* (COAR). A 'Culture of Care' working group has been set up to further embed ethical principles into approaches to research design. To increase objectivity and impartiality in AWERB business, the University appointed a new Chair of the AWERB who is not the institutional licence holder. The new Chair has previously received funding from NC3Rs to refine models of neuropathic pain in rodents. Further enhancements were made to how research that does not fall under the Animal (Scientific Procedures) Act is reviewed to ensure that it meets suitable ethical standards. A COAR action plan was also reviewed and approved.

The **Research Governance Standard Operating Procedure** was reviewed in depth with significant restructuring of how it fits with the wider set of documents (SOPs in specialist areas of research, policies, guidance notes etc.) that underpin institutional Research Integrity and the committees through which the University sets standards for research.

As a consequence of initiatives developed by the University's Joint Clinical Research Office (JCRO), the **Pre-Sponsorship Review Panel (PSRP)** was launched to bring together representatives of the partner NHS trusts – University Hospitals Sussex, Sussex Partnership Trust and universities – Sussex and Brighton to review research seeking institutional Sponsorship prior to HRA and NHS REC ethics review. The panel, which meets monthly, recommends sponsorship to organisations and is comprised of researchers, professional services and Public and Patient Involvement (PPI) representatives. In bringing the partners together in this way, the panel shares good practice and supports more robust applications for regulatory review.

Work has continued in partnership with the Brighton and Sussex Clinical Trials Unit on the implementation and embedding of the of the **CTIMP Management Framework** to ensure that the University meets the expectations of oversight for clinical trials.

Significant work was undertaken to produce guidance on **mass data social media studies** and a proposal developed to establish a Compliance Panel to review any legal and compliance issues relating to higher risk mass data research projects as referred by the Research Ethics, Integrity and Governance Team or by a Cross-School Research Ethics Committee.

Guidance documentation was developed for researchers wishing to access closed data sets under the **Digital Economy Act 2017**, in collaboration with the Research Data Management Team.

The Research Ethics, Integrity and Governance team delivered **specific training to members of ethics committee and School Research Ethics Officers:**

- 'Ethics Reviewers Workshop: Researching in the Online World'
- 'Researcher wellbeing when working with difficult materials and subject areas and/or in problematic locations and the role of research supervisors'

Commitment 3: Supporting a research environment that is underpinned by a culture of integrity and based on good governance, best practice and support for the development of researchers

Initiatives and actions in the 2020-21 academic year

Members of the Research Ethics, Integrity and Governance team in Research and Enterprise Services have delivered and supported a variety of **training** sessions to support researchers across the University. Examples include:

- 'Introduction to research ethics and review processes' (MPharmacy students, Life Sciences)
- 'Getting Ethical Approval' (Doctoral School Researcher Development Programme)
- 'Approaches to Managing Research Data' (University Library Research Skills Development Programme)
- 'An Introduction to Applying for Ethical Approval' (BSMS doctoral students)
- 'An Introduction to Virtue based ethics and Integrity in Research' (based on material supporting from the Horizon2020 funded Virtue based ethics and Integrity of Research: Train-the-Trainer program) *Upholding the principles and practices of the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity* project
- A research seminar was organised for the academic community in May 2021 with speakers Prof Robin Banerjee and Dr Lizzie Gadd discussing responsible metrics and research assessment. The seminar recording is available here: <https://www.sussex.ac.uk/library/research/seminars-and-events>
- As part of the Library's Research Hive Seminar series Dr Catriona Firth and Prof Alis Oancea presented in June 2021 on 'Thank you, next: the future of research assessment' .

Work was undertaken across all the ethics committees and the AWERB to improve visibility and accessibility of key documents and information for researchers on University web pages. This will continue into 2021-22.

An annual animal welfare/ three Rs award scheme has been agreed following discussions at the AWERB and the support of Human Resources. The award will recognise researchers and animal technicians who demonstrate exemplary standards and commitment to the principles of the three Rs and welfare.

Commitment 4: Using transparent, robust and fair processes to deal with allegations of research misconduct should they arise**Initiatives and actions in the 2020-21 academic year**

Updates made to 'The Procedure' were reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics and Integrity Committee during the last academic year. The amendments and enhancements included:

- Greater clarity to key standards applied to investigations
- Improved signposting to related University processes
- Updates to referenced committees and structures with oversight functions
- Ensuring that essential notifications and consultation occurs when processes risk overlapping

A summary of investigations in allegations of misconduct in research undertaken in 2020-21 is provided below.

Lessons learned from investigations into allegations of misconduct in research

There were four completed investigations into allegations of misconduct in research at the census point for the 2020-21 academic year (1 September 2020). Further details are provided below.

Anonymised accounts of cases are regularly reviewed and considered by the Research Ethics and Integrity Committee.

Allegations of Misconduct in Research investigated in the 2020-21 academic year

The University first published a summary of research misconduct allegations in 2013. The aggregated record keeping of research misconduct allegations began in 2010. As required by UK Research and Innovation and Research England, *figures are provided for the past 3 completed academic years with year 1 representing the most recently completed year* (Year 1: 2020-21, Year 2: 2019-20, Year 3: 2018-19). 'Academic years' refers to the period 1 October to 31 September.

There were four completed investigations into allegations of research misconduct in the 2020-21 academic year. All investigations were conducted as per the *Procedure for the Investigation of Allegations of Misconduct in Research*.

Three were investigations in Sciences schools and one in Social Sciences.

Two of the four cases were partially upheld and the remaining two cases were dismissed as unfounded. None were referred to subsequent formal processes but where there was limited substance to the initial allegations these were dealt with by education and training or other non-disciplinary approach, such as mediation.

Where and when required, external funders were notified of the cases in line with the Procedure.

The following table shows instances of allegations of research misconduct in 2020-21:

Number of formal investigations completed (academic years*)	Number of allegations upheld (in whole or in part) (academic years)			Number of allegations upheld (in whole or in part) (academic years)		
	2018	2019	2020	2018	2019	2020
Fabrication	0	0	0	0	0	0
Falsification	0	0	0	0	0	0
Plagiarism	4	0	4	2	0	2
Misrepresentation	0	0	0	0	0	0
Breach of duty of care	1	0	0	0	0	0
Improper dealing with allegations of misconduct	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other (please specify)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	5	0	4	2	0	2

Table 1– Formal; investigations of research misconduct (all research- 2018-2020)

A copy of the Procedure can be found on the Research and Knowledge Exchange [web-pages](#)

Approved by Council, 26 November 2021

Please contact Antony Walsh (aw440@sussex.ac.uk) for any further Research Integrity queries