

# University of Edinburgh

## Annual Research Ethics and Integrity Report (2016-17) University of Edinburgh's Risk Management Committee

**Submitted by:** Research Policy Group

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### Executive Summary and outline of relevant Parliamentary developments

The University of Edinburgh is a signatory to the Universities UK Concordat to Support Research Integrity<sup>1</sup>. The University expects all its staff – both academic and support - as well as students and academic visitors using University research facilities to carry out high quality research that is in line with the Concordat.

One of the Concordat's recommendations is that all UK Institutions that are employers of researchers produce a short annual statement that is presented to University's governing body and made publicly available thereafter. This report is intended to serve that purpose and covers the 2016-17 session. The report highlights examples of the practical measures undertaken across University to foster a research environment that promotes good practice as well as having clear processes in place for investigating allegations of research misconduct.

The process that underpins the generation of this report is intended to drive internal review and promote good practice. The scope of the report covers all research irrespective of funding source. Members of the Research Ethics and Integrity Review Group (REIRG) considered the report at its meeting on 28 May 2018. Feedback from REIRG has been incorporated before the report was submitted to members of the Research Policy Group (RPG) for electronic consideration. The report presented to the University Risk Management Committee and the Audit and Risk has been revised to address feedback from RPG. It has been deemed suitable for publication.

Members of REIRG have decided that the template used by Schools for their Research Ethics and Integrity reports should be revised. This action will take place in parallel with the introduction of software for the online ethical assessment of research proposals. The software that is procured for use will also make it easier for Schools to report the number of proposals and the nature of the ethical issues therein. This change will be a welcome development as it will mean that School reports will become an opportunity for self-review of activity to identify areas where improvement is necessary as well as illustrating examples of best practices with cross University relevance.

Representatives of REIRG have studied ethics and integrity websites of other Russell Group members in order to adopt best practice from other large research intensive universities. The aim is to overhaul the University's Ethics and Integrity pages so that they are focussed on the needs of staff, students and academic visitors as well as providing guidance on relevant University policies.

Since the publication of the University's second annual report, the House of Commons' Science and Technology Committee has restarted its inquiry into Research Integrity. The Chair of that inquiry asked all UK Universities to show how they were meeting the expectations set out in the UUK Concordat. The University's response is available from the University's Research Ethics and Integrity webpages<sup>1</sup>. The response to the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee shows that the University is committed to promoting a positive culture of research integrity. The House of Commons' report was published before the Westminster Parliament rose for Summer Recess. REIRG is studying the report as well as the initial response from UK Research and Innovation.

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<sup>1</sup>Links to all relevant internal and external Research Ethics and Integrity websites are given at the end.

## **Actions and activities undertaken to support and strengthen understanding of research integrity issues**

### ***University level***

REIRG approved a recommendation from the Institute of Academic Development (IAD) that, on behalf of the University, IAD purchase a licence to use an online Research Ethics and Integrity training module that has been developed by the Universities of Dundee and Aberdeen. The module provides general ethics training and illustrates examples of good practice, which is reinforced by School level events and more discipline specific material.

The examples given below illustrate the types of activities undertaken to support and strengthen understanding of research issues at College and School level as well as topics brought to the attention of REIRG through the annual review process.

### **Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (AHSS)**

AHSS held a Research Ethics Away day in May 2017, which included sessions on ethical principles, processes and training as well as more focussed presentations. The presentation topics included research data and research ethics and research with children and young people. The Away Day feedback was very positive.

A number of AHSS schools have suggested that some knowledge exchange and other impact generation activities may also require ethical approval. REIRG has started to consider how best to ensure that, if necessary, there is ethical approval of impact activities that derive from a research project as well as the original research project itself.

### **Medicine and Veterinary Medicine (MVM)**

The Edinburgh Clinical Research Facility runs a regular programme of local courses covering a wide range of topics. The programme of courses includes those intending to raise awareness of research misconduct and promote best practices. In 2016/7 the programme titles included: 'Good Clinical Practice'; Applying for Research Approval in Lothian – Using the Integrated Research Approvals System' and 'Legal and Ethical Issues in Consent'.

### **Science and Engineering (S&E)**

S&E has worked closely with IAD to adapt the online Research Ethics and Integrity module so that it can be rolled out to University staff and students.

The School of Mathematics reported that researchers within the Statistics and Mathematical Education research groups, who have the greatest exposure to issues addressed by the UoE ethics guidelines, receive targeted briefings to directly address the matters most closely related to their work.

### **Central University Support Services**

The University's Research Ethics and Integrity webpages, which are hosted by Governance and Strategic Planning (GASP), are regularly checked to ensure they are up to date.

In late 2016/17, the REIRG agreed that the website, though fit for purpose, could be improved by identifying and adopting examples of best practice from equivalent webpages of other large Research Intensive Universities. The Research Support Office (RSO) will host the new Research Ethics and Integrity webpages. The plan is that the new webpages will include material in the following areas: supporting interdisciplinary research; collaborations with other Universities; and ethics and integrity issues that may arise from public engagement. Governance material will remain on the GaSP web pages.

## **Outline of processes for ethical approval of research proposals, dealing with allegations of misconduct and review of these processes**

### ***Processes for ethical approval of research proposals and dealing with allegations of misconduct***

Those wishing to see details of the ethics and integrity governance arrangements at University, College and School levels are referred to the report for 2014/15. An update report was provided for session 2015/16 and further update reports will be provided for sessions 2017/18, 2018/19 and 2018/19. For the session 2019/20, a fuller report will be provided. The fuller report will describe the ethics and integrity governance arrangements at School, College and University levels. Court Services recommended that using a combination of update reports and a fuller report every five years would mean that attention can be focussed on new developments and issues highlighted in the annual review process rather than duplicating text about governance structures in each report. Several other members of the Russell Group have adopted a similar approach.

### ***Review of processes***

#### AHSS

On appointment in August 2016, the AHSS Associate Dean for Research Ethics and Integrity reviewed the structure, terms of reference and remit of the College Research Ethics Committee.

The establishment of a full-time AHSS post in 2015/16, which is embedded within the Academic and Clinical Centre for Research and Development (ACCORD) and the MVM Research Governance Office, has amply proved its worth. AHSS has not only seen an increase in applications for ethical approval but the quality of applications has improved such that the number of applications requiring further work before they can be approved has diminished.

In its annual report the Business School's Research Ethics Committee reported that it had recognised that some research projects may merit reconsideration because of a change in direction or scope. Other AHSS schools also acknowledge the need to be dynamic and to reconsider projects. REIRG will give fuller consideration to this point made by the Business School which is of University wide relevance.

#### MVM

The College has established Deanery level Ethics and Integrity committees, with a tiered system, broadly similar to those used elsewhere in the University. The purpose of these committees is not to duplicate the formal ethical approval processes for experiments that come within the auspices of the CMVM Research Governance office and ACCORD or the Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Body but to recognise the need for ethical review of non-interventionist research.

A report from Usher Research Ethics Group (UREG) is included in the MVM report for the first time. REIRG welcome this development and the issues of university wide relevance that UREG has been brought to its attention. These are:

- Encouraging researchers to reflect on their research practice from previous projects and use those insights when planning their next projects;
- Supporting PG students undertaking online programmes or studying part-time so that their research proposals are of a high standard and can be given ethical approval without revision

#### S&E

The College Office is working with Edinburgh Parallel Computing Centre (EPCC) to review the ethical approval process for its research activities, reflecting the fact that EPCC is now a College managed, cross-School centre. Whilst this is taking place, EPCC's applications for ethical approval are put through the Science and Engineering School identified to be most appropriate for the project in question.

### University level.

The Research Ethics and Integrity Review group revised its Terms of Reference in 2016/17. It has also extended its membership to include a senior representative from IAD and Central Biological Services.

In April 2017, Research Councils UK (now UKRI) informed Universities and other grant receiving bodies that it expected them to have procedures in place to report informal as well as formal allegations of research misconduct. RSO, GaSP, University Human Resources and IAD worked with the Colleges to update the University's existing Research Misconduct policy. By June 2018, the revised policy completed its passage through the University's governance structures.

The University's online system for creating, approving and submitted research grant applications, WORKTRIBE, incorporates some questions relating to research ethics and integrity but it became clear by June 2017 that the functionality was not sufficient for the diversity of research carried out. RSO agreed to investigate other software packages available that would:

- enable a researcher to carry out an online ethical assessment of a research proposal,
- retain a record of that online assessment for review
- enable research administrators to more easily collate and report the number and ethical intensity level of research proposals at all stages of development

### **High level statement about allegations of research misconduct and any formal investigations**

One formal investigation of research misconduct was completed in 2016/17. The outcome of the allegation was that relevant Research Council that had sponsored the research project was informed and the employment of the researcher in question was brought to an end. At a University level, the lessons learnt from this investigation have informed both the revision of the University's Research Misconduct policy and the plans to disseminate the new policy across the University and the policy roll out.

Concerning clinical research, three issues brought to the attention of the ACCORD Office have, been considered to be protocol violations rather than serious breaches of Good Clinical Practice after investigation by the Serious Breach Committee. Appropriate corrective and preventative measures have been adopted.

## Report annex

### A University websites

- [University Research Integrity homepage](#)

*Hosted and maintained by Governance and Strategic Planning*

*Links include: External online training resources; University policies relevant to Research ethics and Integrity; Research Funders' policies on Research ethics and Integrity; Annual reports*

- [Research Ethics and Integrity - an Introduction](#)

*Hosted by IAD, a LEARN online training module and available to all students and staff.*

*Covers: ethical approval; plagiarism; authorship; collaboration; and publication ethics*

### College Research Ethics and Integrity websites

- [College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences](#)
- [College of Science and Engineering](#)
- [College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine](#)

### Academic and Clinical Office for Research and Development

- [ACCORD](#)

*Covers all research within the scope of NHS Research Ethics Committee Review and all clinical trials covered by the Medicines for Human Use (Clinical trial regulations)*

### Regulation of University of Edinburgh research involving animals

- [Maintaining high standards of Animal ethics and welfare](#)
- [Our Commitment to replace, reduce and refine the use of animals in research](#)

### B External websites

#### Universities UK

- [UUK concordat on Research Integrity](#)
- [UUK Concordat progress report](#) November 2016)

#### The five commitments set out in the UUK concordat

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

#### UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO)

- [Code of practice for Research – Promoting good practice and preventing misconduct](#)
- [Self-Assessment tool for the Concordat to Support Research Integrity](#)

Hard copy available from University's Research Support Office, University of Edinburgh is a subscriber)

#### UK Research and Innovation (succeeded Research Councils UK on 1 April 2018)

- [Policies and Guidelines on Governance of good Research Contact](#) (pdf)
- [FAQs on Policy and Guidelines on Governance of Good Research Contact](#) (pdf)

These are described by UKRI as legacy documents and are valid until updated

#### House of Commons Science and Technology Committee

- [Website for the HoC Research Integrity inquiry](#) (includes the report and links to evidence)
- [UKRI response to the HoC Science and Technology Inquiry](#) (pdf)