# University of Edinburgh: Annual Research Integrity Statement 2023-2024

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| Web address of organisations research integrity page | https://research-office.ed.ac.uk/research-integrity |
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This statement has been prepared by the University of Edinburgh in alignment with The Concordat to Support Research Integrity 2019. It has been approved by the University Risk Management Committee and will be made publicly available on the University website. This statement covers the academic year 2023-2024.

The University of Edinburgh is firmly committed to ensuring that all research is conducted in accordance with the five commitments outlined in the Concordat. This commitment is supported by the UK Research Integrity Office's Code of Practice for Research and the UKRI Policy on the Governance of Good Research Practice, which together serve as essential resources to guide researchers and institutions in upholding the highest standards of research quality and integrity.

Responsibility for safeguarding the integrity of research is shared across the University. The Edinburgh Research Office oversees key policies, including the Ethics Policy and the Research Misconduct Policy. The Research Governance, Compliance & Risk team (RGC&RT), within the Edinburgh Research Office, ensures that these policies are being revised to align with the Concordat, and adhere to guidance from the UK Research Integrity Office. Additionally, the RGC&RT liaises nationally and internationally on integrity and ethics issues that impact the University's research activities.

The University's colleges are responsible for the research carried out by their staff and students, each maintaining governance and oversight structures to ensure appropriate standards are upheld. Every college has dedicated Research Ethics and Integrity webpages, along with frameworks for managing ethical reviews for staff and students. Named Persons within each college handle allegations of research misconduct, overseeing and managing investigations at the college level.

In adherence to the Concordat, this annual statement provides:

- a summary of actions and initiatives undertaken to enhance understanding and the application of research integrity principles;
- an assurance that the University has transparent, timely, robust, and fair processes for addressing allegations of research misconduct, ensuring these remain fit for purpose;
- a high-level overview of any formal investigations into research misconduct, including data on the number of cases;
- an outline of how the University fosters a research culture where staff, researchers, and students feel supported in reporting concerns about research misconduct.

Importantly, this report highlights the ongoing efforts to develop and embed a positive research culture, including new initiatives and future plans designed to strengthen research integrity. These efforts include training programs, enhanced support mechanisms for researchers, and forums that engage the University's research community in sharing and promoting best practices.

This annual report represents a snapshot of the dedication and hard work of colleagues across the University to put our institutional commitment to research integrity into practice. As a university community, we aim to ensure that the leadership in good practice demonstrated throughout the year is recognised and celebrated.

Links to previous Annual Research Integrity Reports can be found on the Edinburgh Research Office's Research Integrity webpages. All resources referenced in this report are included in Annex A.

# Contents

# 1. Updates from 2022/23 report

## 1.1 Changes and developments on policies, processes and procedures

### University Level

As noted in the previous year's report, the University has established a new team to enhance its commitment to best practices and foster a positive research culture. This year, the **Research Governance, Compliance and Risk team** has been formally created, with the following key milestones:

- **Team Leadership:**
  The **Head of Research Governance, Compliance and Risk** assumed the role at the start of the reporting period, setting the foundation for the team's strategic direction.
- **Research Integrity Leadership:**
  In line with the team's focus on research integrity:
  - A new **Research Integrity Manager** was appointed to lead the integrity and ethics strand of the team, providing oversight and strategic leadership in these areas.
  - A new **Research Integrity and Ethics Officer** was also appointed to further support these efforts.
- **Trusted Research:**
  - The University expanded its Trusted Research resources with the establishment of the Research Governance, Compliance, and Risk team in October 2023. Key appointments included:
  - Export Control Specialist, has joined the Research Security and Compliance Manager, bringing the total dedicated FTE (Full-time equivalent) in Research Integrity and Trusted Research to three.

- **Timeline for Posts:**
  - The **Research Integrity Manager** is set to take up their post in **January 2025**.
  - The **Research Integrity and Ethics Officer** will begin their role in **November 2024**.

This development represents a strengthened institutional approach to research governance, with dedicated resources and expertise to ensure the promotion of ethical standards and research integrity across the University.

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### CAHSS

**College-Level Updates/Changes:**

- **Turnover in Key Roles:** Many Schools reported changes in Research Ethics Committee (REC) membership and turnover in key College roles, posing challenges

such as delays in maintaining self-imposed review timelines during certain periods. Clear communication with staff has helped manage expectations in these situations.

- **Policy and Training Enhancements:**
  - Schools revised or developed new policies, guidance, and training sessions to streamline and contextualise the ethical approval process, particularly for higher-risk research.
  - The College supported training initiatives for School Ethics Leads, focusing on areas highlighted under section 2 of this report, these include but are not exclusive to EDI and ethics reviewing, Data protection for ethics reviewers and discussion meetings from the Ethical Pressures on Thinking group.
  - Both the College and Schools actively contributed to the development and testing of the **Ethics RM** online system to improve the efficiency of ethics management processes. Further information on this process is set out in section 2.

## School-Level Updates/Changes:

- **Ethical Guidance for Emerging Research Topics:** Schools have developed new guidance to address ethical challenges associated with current research topics, such as digital research and social media.
- **Inclusive Ethics Procedures:** The School of Philosophy, Psychology, and Language Sciences (PPLS) revised its ethics submission process to promote inclusivity. Researchers are now required to propose alternative study designs for participants under 18 if their primary study poses potential risks to this group.
- **Specialised Ethics Subcommittee:** The Moray House School of Education and Sport (MHSES) established the **Childlight Research Ethics Subcommittee** to manage ethically complex research in this area.

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## CMVM

### Edinburgh Medical School Research Ethics Committee (EMREC)

- **Reviewer Recruitment and Training Enhancements:**
  EMREC has revised its recruitment and training procedures to ensure:
  - Reviewers adhere to **best practices**.
  - Applications are matched with reviewers who have the appropriate **expertise**.
  - Reviewers receive additional support, particularly in identifying issues related to **data protection concerns**, improving the rigour of the review process.

### Human Ethical Review Committee (HERC)

- **Clarified Review Processes:**
  The review process for applicants has been made more transparent, with clearly defined routes for different types of applications.
- **New Templates and Guidelines:**
  Additional templates and guidelines were developed to ensure applicants provide consistent and complete information for the committee's consideration.

### Veterinary Ethics Review Committee (VERC)

- **Leadership Change:**

- o A new Co-Chair of VERC was appointed.
- **Fast-Track Review Process:**
  A **short application form** and **fast-track review process** for retrospective analysis of existing clinical data from the University's veterinary hospitals was launched in **November 2023**. Approximately **25% of applications** are now submitted via this route, streamlining the process for both researchers and reviewers.

## Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Body (AWERB)

- **Overseas Animal Work:**
  Discussions around animal work performed overseas (not covered by UK legislation) led to:
  - o A complete rebuild of the relevant webpage.
  - o The introduction of a **new form** for researchers planning overseas animal work.
- **Redesigned Licence Review Form:**
  The main **AWERB project licence review form** was redesigned in early **2024**, making the review process clearer and easier for reviewers.

## Medical Education Unit Research Ethics Committee (MEU REC)

- **Streamlined Collaboration Processes:**
  The MEU REC refined procedures for working with external groups, such as **ACCORD**, to improve collaboration and efficiency.
- **Focus on Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (ED&I):**
  The committee placed an increased emphasis on ED&I principles within its ethical review processes.
- **Membership Expansion:**
  Due to a rise in applications, the MEU REC is actively expanding its membership to accommodate the increased workload.

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# CSE

**College-Level Updates/Changes:**

In January 2024, the College Dean of Research Culture and REF (DoRCR), replaced the CSE Dean of Research as the "Named Person" for the College. The named person has undertaken a comprehensive review of the College's ethics and integrity processes, aiming to raise awareness and engagement. Key actions include:

- Revitalising the **College Research and Integrity Committee** and updating its terms of reference.

**School-Level Updates/Changes:**

- **School of Engineering, School of Mathematics, School of Geosciences, and School of Chemistry:** The systems for ethical self-assessment of research project proposals and policies for misconduct investigations remained unchanged in 2023/24.
- **School of Biological Sciences:**
  - o A new process for **Trusted Research** was established. **Trusted Research Procedures:** SBS has introduced new procedures for identifying and managing Trusted Research issues. All staff submitting research grant

applications must complete an expression of interest form, which will include questions related to Trusted Research. This form will help identify potential issues early in the process, allowing mitigation plans to be put in place when necessary.

- o Continued delivery of **annual ethics training** for first-year PhD students.
- **School of Informatics:**
  - o Researchers submitting funding proposals are now required to submit an ethics application for Level 2 or higher research. For Level 1 research, approval must be obtained before the work begins but can wait until funding is secured and the work is defined.
  - o Undergraduate and Master's projects require supervisors to assess whether ethical approval is necessary.
  - o Members of the School Ethics Panel authored a **whitepaper** on building large language model projects ethically, set to be published at the International Conference on Computational Linguistics in early 2025 and available via **Arxiv**.
- **School of Physics and Astronomy:** Ethics and integrity resources have been moved online, hosted on a dedicated **wiki site** to improve accessibility.

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## 1.2 Updates on initiatives and future plans from the 2022/23 year

### University Level

Building on the success of the first event in 2022, the University hosted its **second Good Research Practice Week** in **November 2023**, as part of its ongoing commitment to fostering a healthy research culture and promoting best practices.

**Highlights from 2023:**
- **Sessions Delivered:**
  A total of **13 sessions** were held, covering a wide array of topics aimed at enhancing research practices.
- **Co-Creation for Improvement:**
  Four of the sessions focused specifically on **co-creation** for research improvement, encouraging collaboration and active participation from attendees.
- **Good Research Practice Awards:**
  To celebrate and recognise exemplary practices within the University, nominations were invited for the **Good Research Practice Awards**, which included the following categories:
  - o **Good Research Citizenship**
  - o **Responsible Research**
  - o **Open Research**
  - o **Positive Disruptor**

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### CAHSS

**College-Level Updates/Changes:**

- **Cross-School Learning:**
  - Supported Schools in addressing common challenges (e.g., complex ethics issues) through expert presenters at the College Research Ethics Committee (CREC).
  - Efforts to enhance communication around the piloting and proposed rollout of Ethics RM, ensuring clarity and accessibility for all stakeholders. For more information of the implementation for Ethics RM, see 'Ethics RM' under section 2 of this report.

Other initiatives raised in the 2023-2024 report have been addressed and updated elsewhere in this report.

**School-Level Updates/Changes:**

- **Clarified Ethics Guidance:** Schools provided enhanced clarity on ethics-related topics, including secondary data use, research misconduct, and REIG applications. Guidance was updated across all levels and made more accessible.
  - Notable example: The School of Literatures, Languages, and Cultures (LLC) translated Participant Information Sheets (PIS) and Participant Consent Forms (PCF) into six languages, reducing the workload for individual researchers and teams.
- **Training Initiatives:** The School of Health in Social Science (HiSS) increased awareness of and promoted the implementation of best practices by delivering staff and postgraduate researcher (PGR) training sessions. These sessions were co-produced by doctoral researchers and featured invited speakers covering topics such as data management, working with vulnerable groups, international research, and NHS ethics processes.

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## CMVM

**Edinburgh Medical School Research Ethics Committee (EMREC)**

- **Guidance on Public Engagement with Research:**
  Following the efforts of the previous ethics co-directors, a working group developed tools for public engagement with research. This resulted in the publication of a paper, now available to a wider audience: https://doi.org/10.1186/s40900-024-00617-8.
- **Improved Reviewer Training:**
  - Online training sessions for new reviewers, introduced last year, have continued to evolve and receive positive feedback.
  - In response to the growing number of **global health applications**, training materials now include examples highlighting unique challenges faced in this area.
- **Training Videos:**
  Videos created for postgraduate and undergraduate students, as well as their supervisors, are available on the **EMREC SharePoint**. These videos have been viewed more than **60 times** since their launch.

**Human Ethical Review Committee (HERC)**

- **SharePoint Resources:**
  - The **HERC SharePoint** was launched in **September 2023**, providing resources and guidance for ethical review processes.

- o The **Research Methods and Statistics SharePoint**, also launched in September 2023, links to both HERC and VERC sites, enhancing accessibility for R(D)SVS staff and students.

## Medical Education Unit Research Ethics Committee (MEU REC)

- **Streamlined Processes for Student Research:**
  MEU REC has refined processes for student research projects, including:
    - o Clearer guidance on the use of **independent contacts** for research participants.
    - o Support for identifying and addressing problems that arise during research projects.

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## [CSE](#)

### College-Level Updates/Changes:

- **Integrity Officer Role:**
    - o Schools were tasked with establishing an **Integrity Officer** role by December 2024, complementing the existing Ethics Officer role.
    - o Integrity Officers will serve as the first point of contact for informal queries about research misconduct and promote awareness of research integrity within their Schools.
    - o Names of Integrity Officers will be displayed on College webpages, and they will also be responsible for encouraging the uptake of training.
- **Website and SharePoint Updates:**
    - o A review of the College Research Ethics and Integrity website and SharePoint site was conducted, with further updates planned for the upcoming academic year.
    - o A new SharePoint page is under development to direct Ethics Officers, Integrity Officers, and School Ethics Committee members to UKRIO training materials and resources.
- **Ethics and Integrity Events:**
    - o The College plans to host ethics and integrity-related events to promote awareness and share best practices among researchers in the next academic year.

### School-Level Updates/Changes:

- **School of Mathematics:**
    - o PhD students enrolled in the Maxwell Institute Graduate School in Modelling, Analysis and Computation (MAC-MIGS) Centre for Doctoral Training (CDT) receive training in **Responsible Research and Innovation**, covering topics such as intellectual property, data ethics, social research contexts, equity and diversity, stakeholder analysis, and institutional compliance.
- **Edinburgh Parallel Computing Centre:**
    - o Introduced a seminar on **research ethics** for master's students as part of their research methods course, focusing on the practical application of ethics in academic and professional contexts.
    - o Plans are underway to revise ethical procedures in the 2024/25 academic year, including the introduction of a dedicated ethics committee.

     o   Revised the student dissertation project ethics workflow to simplify the process, resulting in improved clarity, visibility, and a significant increase in MSc ethics applications.

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# 2. New initiatives, training and developments to support a culture of research integrity for 2023/24

<u>University Level</u>

**Communications**
In 2023/24, the Edinburgh Research Office (ERO) enhanced its digital platforms to strengthen engagement with the University's research support services. A key initiative was the launch of the **HUBsite**, a centralised platform designed to streamline access to expertise, guidance, and resources. The HUBsite caters to researchers at all career stages and research support colleagues, offering user-focused, intuitive content tailored to their needs.

The HUBsite also introduced a news function to disseminate important updates, share key resources, and provide University-wide announcements. This feature has become an invaluable tool for keeping the research community informed of relevant developments.

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**Academic Development**
In 2023/24, a comprehensive review of training offerings related to Research Ethics and Integrity was conducted, incorporating feedback from users. Based on this review:

- Minor updates were made to the **Introduction to Research Integrity** and **Introduction to Research Ethics** modules.

- The third module **Good Conduct in authorship and publication practice**, previously a comprehensive open-access PDF, is being converted into a RISE Articulate course to align with the format of the first two modules. The new course will be hosted on the university internal learning sites. **People & Money** for staff and **LEARN** for students.

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**Engagement and Impact**
The Research Engagement and Impact team spearheaded several key initiatives:

- **Participatory Research Network Launch:** Introduced in June 2024, the network gathered 40 participants, with 150 colleagues now engaged via the network's site. An advisory group on ethics in participatory research will be formed in collaboration with the Research Governance and Integrity Team to address inconsistencies in ethics approvals.

- **Participatory Research Resources Repository:** Developed by Library Services and peer-reviewed by the network, this repository curate's essential guidance, papers, and resources (Participatory Research Resources).

- **Impact Prizes and Festival:** A new set of **Impact Prizes** was inaugurated, recognising excellence in five categories, including Partnership, Responsible Engagement and Innovation, and Team Culture. This event was part of the **Impact Festival**, which featured 25 sessions showcasing good practices and experiences in engaged research.

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**Library Research Support**

In 2023/24, the Library Research Support Team made significant contributions to promoting good research practices:

- Provided ongoing support for **UK Reproducibility Network** activities, including promoting webinars for early-career researchers and participating in cross-institutional projects.

- Delivered dynamic **Research Data Management** and **Open Research** training sessions, embedding ethics and integrity as core components of good research practice.

Organised the annual **Edinburgh Open Research Conference**, focusing on University staff and students while welcoming international participants. Topics frequently explored include research ethics within the context of open research.

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**Ethics Research Manager (Ethics RM)**

It was identified in 2019/20 that the University did not have a consistent way to process, review and store research ethics applications. Therefore, it was decided by Edinburgh Research Office and a consortium of Senior Leaders to create a consistent approach across the University, which would act to bring about consistency, reduce risks and improve reporting efficiency, locally and University-wide. Ethics RM was the new university wide, online ethics application software system (provided by Infonetica) that was procured to meet this need.

Ethics RM is an off-the-shelf system fully adaptable and tailored to the University's requirements. In February 2024, the project was brought into the scope of the Growing Research Together Programme as it entered the final development and testing stage, prior to transition into business as usual.

The new Ethics RM system will replace many different manual and online ethics application form processes, which also have widely varying question sets. The system standardises the questions being asked for similar research projects and will streamline the review process, reducing workload. It will act as a repository for research applications, amendments and associated documentation with full audit trail of decision-making. It will allow for standardised and tailored reporting at all levels of the University. The system build was completed in early 2024 and system testing has been ongoing over the summer.

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## CAHSS

**College-Level Updates/Changes:**

- **College Research Ethics Committee** (**CREC) Initiatives:**

- o The "Bring a Thorny Issue" segment continued to be a central feature of CREC meetings, providing a platform for School Ethics Leads to present complex cases and process questions for Committee guidance and reflection.
  - o This segment also serves as an informal training opportunity, fostering a shared understanding and consistent approach to resolving complex ethical issues.
- **SharePoint Enhancements:** A comprehensive update to the College's SharePoint resources in 2023-24 improved accessibility to policies, guidance, and resources for staff and students.
- **Sponsorship Review Process:** The Research Governance Office collaborated with college staff to enhance the sponsorship review process, including the creation of standardised templates and detailed instructions to promote transparency and dialogue.
- **Guest Speaker Training:** Across the academic year, guest speakers delivered sessions on the following topics:
  - o AI's ethical implications for research.
  - o Ethical challenges associated with social media use in research.
  - o GDPR compliance in research practices.
  - o Researcher safety, including fieldwork considerations.
  - o Ethical sensitivities when conducting research in China.
  - o Copyright and publishing ethics.
- **Edinburgh Futures Institute (EFI) Knowledge Integration and Project Planning (KIPP):** All EFI students completed the KIPP lecture series, designed to support the development of robust, creative, and interdisciplinary research projects.

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**School-Level Updates/Changes:**

- **Emerging Ethics Policies:** Schools are developing new policies to address emerging ethics issues, including challenges posed by generative AI (GENAI) and social media in research.
- **Researcher Safety and Duty of Care:** Workshops were held to address further support the limitations related to researcher safety, with a particular focus on fieldwork and duty of care responsibilities.
- **New Resources and Training Initiatives:**
  - o **EDI and Ethics Reviewing:** Training resources developed to enhance equity, diversity, and inclusion in ethics review processes.
  - o **Data Protection for Ethics Reviewers:** New training provided to ensure compliance with data protection laws during ethics reviews.
  - o **CPD for Reviewers:** The Childlight focus series provided continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities for ethics reviewers.
  - o **Researcher Development Series on Ethics:** Delivered by MHSES as an online webinar series addressing a range of ethical issues and open to the entire School.
  - o **Collaborative Initiatives:** HiSS partnered with PGRs under the InspireD program to deliver a co-production series, while HiSS also hosted the "Let's Get Ethical" series.
  - o **Mentorship Programs:** Economics introduced mentors for early-career academics to guide them through ethical research practices.
  - o **Specialised Webinars:** Topics included ethical pressures, hosted by the Ethical Pressures on Thinking group and the UK Research Integrity Office (LLC).

- **SharePoint Enhancements:** Schools continued updating SharePoint sites to disseminate information, resources, and procedures effectively.

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[CMVM](#)

**College-Level Updates/Changes:**

- **Research Culture Catalogue:**
  The CMVM **Research Culture Catalogue** continues to be updated, serving as a key resource for identifying and showcasing evidence of good practices in research culture.
- **Early Career Researcher (ECR) Initiatives:**
  - ECRs were invited to observe panels for **short-listing and demand-managing funding call applications**, such as FLF panels and MRC/BBSRC equipment calls, to provide insight into assessment processes.
  - An **internal funding call for ECR bridging funding** was trialled using anonymised applications to reduce bias, removing identifiers like names, genders, and listing publications as DOIs only.
- **Postdoctoral Symposium:**
  CMVM is organising its inaugural **postdoctoral symposium** for the 2024/25 academic year, featuring:
  - Career panels showcasing diverse professional paths available to researchers.

**Edinburgh Medical School Research Ethics Committee (EMREC):**

- **New Applicant Guidance:**
  EMREC developed guidance on emerging ethical considerations, including:
  - **AI usage in research**
  - Research involving **deleted social media content**
  - Common challenges in ethics applications
- **Expanded Reviewer Pool:**
  Additional reviewers were recruited to ensure diversity in perspectives and expertise. The new pool includes:
  - Individuals with **lived experiences**
  - Professionals from various job families (e.g., academic, clinical, technical, and professional services)
  - Experts from different subject areas
- **Enhanced Reviewer Training:**
  Training processes were updated to include diverse topics and a **mock review exercise**, with co-chairs providing feedback for improvement.

**Human Ethical Review Committee (HERC):**

- **Training Sessions:**
  - Regular training supported **postgraduate researchers and staff** in completing HERC applications, with 8 sessions attended by 71 participants in 2023/24.

- o Additional embedded training was provided for **Vet (BVM&S)** and MSc programs, alongside **1:1 advisory meetings** for complex projects or legal queries.
- **Supervisor Training:**
  New training sessions for **UG Vet Supervisors** were launched, held biannually, with 16 attendees in the 2023/24 period.
- **Committee Member Training:**
  Training sessions for HERC members ensured confidence in reviewing submissions and facilitated discussions on complex ethics cases.
- **New Guidelines and Templates:**
  - o Guidelines on advertising research opportunities via press/social media
  - o Templates for participant information sheets, post-interview debriefs, and online interviews
  - o **Research and AI guidelines**
- **Research Publication:**
  A new publication addressed challenges related to fraudulent AI bots in online research:**"Voucher now please: AI bots and fraudulent and mischievous responders in online research."** (2024) Zonodo, DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.13356360

## Veterinary Ethics Review Committee (VERC):

- **Improved Visibility and Accessibility:**
  - o The **VERC SharePoint**, launched with assistance from the HERC Convenor, enhances visibility and accessibility for Easter Bush researchers.
  - o A presentation on VERC's work was delivered at the **Open School Meeting**, and Co-Chairs regularly meet with researchers one-on-one to provide advice.
- **Clarification of Ethical Review Routes:**
  Discussions between **Roslin AWERB** and VERC led to the creation of a **memorandum of understanding** clarifying the appropriate review routes for studies that could involve both committees.
- **Drop-In Sessions:**
  Drop-in sessions for undergraduate veterinary students conducting Student Research Component projects requiring VERC review were introduced. While attendance has been low, feedback from attendees has been positive, and further promotion is planned.
- **Alignment with UK Veterinary Ethics Committees:**
  VERC maintains membership in the **UK Association of Veterinary Ethics Committees**, ensuring alignment with national best practices.

## Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Body (AWERB):

- **Committee Training Away Day:**
  An away day in November 2023 provided training on reviewing licenses involving **severe protocols**. Attendees reported gaining valuable tools for reviewing such protocols.
- **NACWO Training:**
  Named Animal Care and Welfare Officers (NACWOs) attended a **May 2024 training event** on AWERB reviews, enhancing their ability to contribute effectively to ethical reviews.

## Medical Education Unit Research Ethics Committee (MEU REC):

- **Revised Guidance and Training Resources:**
  MEU REC updated its guidance and expanded training resources for applicants. Special emphasis has been placed on supporting undergraduates, often conducting research for the first time, to improve research integrity at the earliest stages of their careers.

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## CSE

**College-Level Updates/Changes:**

- **Ethics and Integrity in PGR/Centre for Doctoral Training Inductions:**
  CSE will provide all CDT and Graduate School Directors with slides on ethics and integrity to incorporate into their PGR/CDT induction sessions at the start of the academic year.
- **Promoting Integrity Training:**
  CSE encouraged all CDT PhD students to participate in UKRIO's pilot research integrity training module. The College also continues to promote the uptake of IAD's "Introduction to Research Ethics and Integrity" online course.
- **Awareness Campaign:**
  The College Dean of Research Culture and REF (DoRCR) has reinvigorated the College Research Ethics and Integrity Committee and plans a College-wide ethics and integrity awareness campaign in September 2024 to coincide with PGR/CDT inductions.
- **Trusted Research Compliance:**
  DoRCR aims to implement a more rigorous approach to ensure compliance with Trusted Research requirements across the College.

**School-Level Updates/Changes:**

- **School of Engineering:**
  - **Fellowship Development Panel (FDP):**
    The FDP, established in April 2024, supports internal and external fellowship applicants through mentorship and feedback. The panel will now meet biannually, aligning with external deadlines. Academic Advisors assist candidates with all aspects of their applications, including good research practices.
  - **European Funding Support:**
    To re-engage staff with European funding, the School hosted a **Horizon Europe Training Day** in May 2024. Sessions included presentations on proposal strategies and workshops on writing proposals for Horizon Europe Pillar II and ERC funding.
  - **Ethics Self-Assessment Monitoring:**
    A research funding application tracker was introduced to monitor ethical self-assessments by PIs, reinforcing ethical compliance during research planning.
  - **Ethics Resources:**
    The School's Ethics website provides updated resources, and the School actively shares information to foster awareness.
- **School of Chemistry:**
  The School prioritises disciplinary and professional training for PhD students and PDRAs, encouraging engagement in research communities to uphold high standards

of integrity. Activities include Facilitating discussions on best practices through the Graduate School and Research Committee.

- **School of Biological Sciences:**
Resumed its **Postgraduate Ethics Day Training** as a full-day, in-person event, reversing the shorter online format adopted during COVID-19.
- **School of Geosciences:**
    - Continues to offer tailored ethics training for undergraduate, MSc, and PhD students.
- **Edinburgh Parallel Computing Centre (EPCC):**
    - Staff receive ethics and integrity training through biannual seminars and internal wiki resources, with reminders sent annually.
    - Induction materials include links to research ethics information, and additional guidance is provided to research staff.
    - A research strategy encompassing culture and leadership is overseen by a Research Committee chaired by the Director of Research.
    - MSc students receive ethics and integrity information via lectures and online sessions in Semester 1.
- **School of Informatics:**
Delivered an **Introduction to Research Ethics** session during a May 2024 induction for new academic staff, supporting early engagement with ethical practices.

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# 3. Future plans and developments for the 2024/25 year

<u>University Level</u>

**Communications**
The Edinburgh Research Office (ERO) will focus on enhancing its digital platforms to better support the research community:

- **HUBsite Expansion:** Key features and content will be added to the HUBsite, ensuring it continues to serve as a dynamic and indispensable resource for researchers and research support professionals.

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**Academic Development**
The Academic Development team will expand its Research Ethics and Integrity training offerings:

- **Third Training Module on 'Good conduct in authorship and publication practice' Completion:** A comprehensive research ethics guidance module will be finalised and launched.
- **New AI-Focused Module:** A fourth training module, "Introduction to Research Ethics & Integrity and Artificial Intelligence (AI)," will be developed and reviewed by senior academics and the Research Ethics and Integrity Review Group (REIRG) before its release to staff and students by summer 2025.
- **Support for Supervisors and Research Leaders:** New initiatives, including spotlight sessions and workshops, will focus on equipping Principal Investigators (PIs) and supervisors to foster a culture of ethics and integrity within their teams.

**Engagement and Impact**

The Research Engagement and Impact team spearheaded several key initiatives:

- **Participatory Research Network:** An advisory group on ethics in participatory research will be formed in collaboration with the Research Governance and Integrity Team to address inconsistencies in ethics approvals.

**Trusted Research**

Key developments planned for Trusted Research include:

- **Foreign Influence Registration Scheme:** Preparations will be made to ensure compliance and raise awareness about the scheme.
- **Trusted Research Implementation Group:** The first meeting will convene, marking a significant step in strengthening research governance practices across the University.

**Library Research Support Team**

The Library Research Support Team will undertake several initiatives to promote ethical and effective research practices:

- **Generative AI Guidance:** Developing guidelines for researchers on the use of generative AI in publications and research outputs.
- **Participatory Research and Citizen Science:** Providing resources to ensure ethical collaborations with the public in these research methodologies.
- **Open Research Tools:** Continuing to subscribe to and promote tools like RSpace to facilitate the adoption of good research practices across all disciplines and career stages.

**Ethics Research Manager (Ethics RM)**

Pilot testing of Ethics RM, with volunteer RECs, will begin in late 2024. Feedback from the testing will be gathered in early 2025 to inform and develop the implementation plan across the University. This is likely to be a gradual implementation due to the size and complexity of the current review systems and also the capacity/resource within Schools to adopt and roll out a new system. The pilot testing and roll out of the system will allow the University to have greater oversight of high-level ethics data and will also allow Schools and Colleges to report more efficiently and with greater detail.

**CAHSS**

**College-Level Initiatives:**

- **Incorporation of EFI (Edinburgh Futures Institute) into College Research Ethics Committee (CREC):** The College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (CAHSS) has integrated the Edinburgh Futures Institute (EFI) within the College Research Ethics Committee (CREC). EFI has shared its current staff ethics support structures and best practice documentation with CREC.
- **CREC Annual Agenda-Setting:** At the start of each academic year, CAHSS holds an agenda-setting meeting within CREC to highlight key areas for reflection and discussion. Several issues from 2023-24 (e.g., AI ethics, researcher safety) will continue to be areas of focus for development.
- **Research Cultures Associate Dean Role:** CAHSS recognised the need for a dedicated Research Cultures Associate Dean role, which has been established starting in the 2024-25 academic year.
- **EFI Ethics Advisory Panel:** The establishment of the EFI Ethics Advisory Panel will provide supplementary support for EFI's ethics processes (both research-related and beyond), complementing the existing School Research Ethics protocols and practices.

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**School-Level Initiatives:**

- **AI Adoption in Research:** Schools such as UEBS, Law, and PPLS are implementing plans to integrate AI into research processes. This includes the adoption of ethical AI-based tools, such as transcription technology, alongside ongoing discussions around the ethical implications of AI. Efforts will focus on developing new policies to address the growing significance of generative AI (GenAI) in research methodologies.
- **Research Misconduct and Healthy Research Culture:** Schools will continue their efforts to increase staff awareness of research misconduct, promote good research practices, and support the development of a healthy and sustainable research culture.
- **Training and Development:** Schools will continue delivering a wide array of training programs on topics such as data management, co-production, research misconduct, sponsorship, and NHS ethics, ensuring that staff and students are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge.

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## CMVM

**College-Level Initiatives:**

- **Formation of a Research Culture Collaboration Group:**
  A new group, comprising 4–5 representatives from different job families within each school, will develop local plans to enhance research culture. This group will also address elements of the **Research Culture Action Plan (RCAP)** delegated to the colleges.
- **Guidance Documents for Misconduct Prevention:**
  The College is preparing guidance documents on frequently queried topics, including:
  - **Authorship** practices
  - **Image processing/manipulation** standards
  - Use of **generative AI** in research

- **New Research Integrity Resources:**
  CMVM will launch a **dedicated webpage/SharePoint site** for research integrity. This platform will provide:
    - Examples of good practices
    - Guidance on identifying and reporting misconduct
- **CMVM Postdoctoral Symposium:**
  A symposium for postdoctoral researchers is being planned, offering opportunities for professional development and networking.

## Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Body (AWERB):

- **Improved Visibility:**
  AWERB is enhancing transparency by including details of its members on a public-facing website.
- **Streamlined Application Processes:**
  Updates to the **Potential Overseas Project application form** will align it more closely with the VERC (Veterinary Ethics Review Committee) form. This aims to improve collaboration between the committees and simplify the process for applicants.
- **Updated Terms of Reference:**
  AWERB is revising its **Terms of Reference** to align with best practices and maintain effectiveness.

## Edinburgh Medical School Research Ethics Committee (EMREC):

- **Enhanced SharePoint Resources:**
  The EMREC SharePoint site will undergo updates to provide clearer guidance for applicants, including:
    - Ethical review requirements
    - Access to training resources
    - Links to relevant external webpages

## Human Ethical Review Committee (HERC):

- **Continual SharePoint Updates:**
  Ongoing reviews of the **HERC** and **Research Methods and Statistics** SharePoint sites will ensure accessibility for all R(D)SVS staff and students.
- **Major Application Form Update:**
  The HERC application form will undergo a significant update in 2024/25, incorporating feedback and emerging best practices.
- **Additional Guidelines for Researchers:**
  HERC will provide new guidance on:
    - **Secondary data use** in research
    - Addressing **AI disruptions** in online surveys
    - Linking researchers to the **UoE AI Adoption Hub** and the **Research AI Risk Assessment document**
- **AI Ethics Publication:**
  HERC plans to publish **"Guidance for Research Ethics Committees and Researchers on Designing Research in the Age of AI"** in January 2025. This

publication will be presented at the **Edinburgh Research Conference** and shared on University AI-related webpages.

**Veterinary Ethics Review Committee (VERC):**
- **Enhanced Visibility and Researcher Engagement:**
  VERC aims to expand its visibility and engagement with researchers by implementing new strategies to increase awareness and accessibility.

**Medical Education Unit Research Ethics Committee (MEU REC):**
- **Transition to New Ethics System:**
  MEU REC plans to adopt the **new ethics system** and use this transition as an opportunity to:
  - **Re-align the REC structure** to better fit with the new school structure.
  - **Expand visibility** across the school, ensuring researchers are more aware of the committee's role and support.
- **Advice Service for Researchers:**
  Beyond formal application reviews, MEU REC intends to introduce an **advice service** to provide researchers with guidance on ethical considerations during the planning stages of their projects.

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## CSE

**College-Level Initiatives:**
- **College Conversation Series:** CSE will host a 'College Conversation' series aimed at raising awareness about the ethos of ethics and integrity. This initiative will focus on highlighting the revised Concordat to Support Research Integrity, increasing awareness of Integrity Officers and their role, and explaining the processes surrounding research misconduct.
- **Redacted Case Studies and Ethics Scenarios:** CSE plans to collate a bank of redacted case studies, ethics applications, and scenarios (both real and synthetic, covering various topics and levels of severity). These resources will be shared with School Research Ethics Committees and used during College Ethics and Integrity training days.

**School Research Ethics Committees:**
CSE plans to trial a new induction/training event for members of School Research Ethics Committees, aiming to foster a community of practice and enhance networking between members.

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**School-Level Initiatives:**

- **School of Engineering:**
  - **Narrative CV Workshop:** The School's PDRA Champion, in collaboration with the Institute for Academic Development (IAD), will develop a workshop on narrative CV writing. Initially aimed at PDRAs and PGRs, it will later be extended to the broader academic community.

- o **Edinburgh Research Partnership in Engineering (ERPE):** The School will continue to strengthen its commitment to ERPE through initiatives like a relaunch event for early career researchers to showcase their work, network, and foster collaborative relationships. This event will be part of a broader strategy that includes a joint PhD programme and seed funding opportunities.
  - o **Research Ethics Committee:** The School is planning to establish a dedicated Research Ethics Committee that will be responsible for reviewing ethics self-assessments and liaising with colleagues across the College when necessary.
- **School of Mathematics:**
  - o **Review of Ethics Self-Assessment Form:** The School plans to review the questions asked on their ethics self-assessment form. A new section will be added to address working with companies, assisting with due diligence checks performed by the Business Development Team.
- **School of Chemistry:**
  - o **Strengthening Research Integrity for CDT Bids:** The School is focusing on integrating research integrity and responsible research innovation into future CDT bids. This will involve working with potential leaders to ensure that these principles are a core part of the process.
- **Edinburgh Parallel Computing Centre (EPCC):**
  - o **New Ethics Committee and Role Separation:** EPCC plans to introduce a new ethics committee and separate the roles of the Research Ethics Officer and Research Integrity Officer. The current Research Ethics and Integrity Officer will transition to the role of Research Integrity Officer, while a new Deputy Research Ethics and Integrity Officer will take over as Research Ethics Officer.
  - o **Pilot of New Research Ethics Platform:** EPCC will pilot the new research ethics platform, revising their ethics workflow based on the platform's functionality. This revision will start with UKRI and other publicly funded research projects, with plans to expand to industry-funded and student projects in early 2025.
- **School of Geosciences:**
  - o **Compulsory Ethics Training:** The School is planning to introduce compulsory ethics training for all staff whose roles involve research. This training will be aligned with the introduction of the University-wide ethics system (Ethics RM).
  - o Plans to update online guidance and regularly shares reminders about good practices and relevant events.

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# 4. Notable case studies on good practice

The Data for Children Collaborative – a specialist unit in Edinburgh Futures Institute that run a portfolio of challenge-led, data-driven research projects won an award for Best Ethical Data Initiative at the 2024 DataIQ Awards.

The Data for Children Collaborative has been continuously developing and refining their Responsible Innovation framework to support challenge-led, multi-sectoral collaborative data projects that aim to improve children's lives. The framework is a suite of tools and approaches

that are used across end-to-end data project delivery, surfacing and mitigating socio-ethical, legal, and regulatory considerations.  The framework prioritises ethics in all aspects of their work through a suite of tools and methods that ensure representative and meaningful participation, and reflective discussions about projects' impact on communities implicated, ethical considerations arising from data methods and analysis, and communications of the outputs. Foundations for each project are set through a series of structured workshops and ethics journaling, facilitated by their team. This ensures ethical deliberation across a series of crafted questions on people, data, and communications through an online platform. Beyond that ethics is a standing item in monthly sprint meetings with collaborative teams, to understand if any new ethical risks or issues have arisen and need to be considered and addressed.

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# 5. External Engagement

**Trusted Research:**

- **Trusted Research Evaluation Framework (January 2024):** In response to the UK Government's National Protective Security Authority's release of the Trusted Research Evaluation Framework, the University is aligning its practices with the framework's metrics. These metrics assess 'Trusted Research Maturity' across seven thematic areas: senior management support, training, communications, institutional risk, collaboration, and data and device management. Maturity is evaluated through three standards: Foundation, Intermediate, and Developed.

- **University's Response and Priorities:** The University has reviewed the framework and set priorities for continuous development in this area. A **Trusted Research Implementation Group** will be established to evaluate institutional legislation and best practices related to Trusted Research. This group will navigate the rapidly changing geopolitical and security environment, ensuring the University remains responsive to evolving security challenges.

- **Engagement with Government and Sector Peers:**

  - **Russell Group Trusted Research Forum (March 2024):** The Edinburgh Research Office hosted a meeting of the Russell Group Trusted Research Forum in the Playfair Library at Old College. Over 30 delegates from Edinburgh and across the Russell Group attended, marking a successful event with a keynote address from the National Protective Security Authority, which focused on the new Trusted Research Evaluation Framework.

  - **Association of Research Managers and Administrators (May 2024):** Alan Campbell, the University's Research Security and Compliance Manager, presented to the **Association of Research Managers and Administrators' Special Interest Group on EU and International**, discussing the University's Trusted Research support mechanisms. Additionally, the **Research Governance Compliance and Risk team** presented two insight sessions on various aspects of their work to Edinburgh Research Office colleagues.

- **National Security and Investment Act Mitigation Clause:** In the Spring of 2024, a working group was formed, including representatives from the Edinburgh Research

Office's Research Contracts, Research Governance, Compliance and Risk teams, as well as the Central Legal team and Edinburgh Innovations and Roslin Institute contracts teams. This group collaborated to create a **National Security and Investment Act mitigation clause** and user guide, ensuring consistent implementation across all University legal and contract teams.

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**Academic Development**

- The Institute for Academic Development made the first two modules of their three module Research Ethics & Integrity training (Introduction to Research Integrity & Introduction to Research Ethics) available in open access PDF format and shared these with academic developers at universities across Scotland. Module three (Good conduct in authorship and publication practice) already existed in an open access PDF format and had been formally shared with networks of academic developers across Scotland.

# 6. Research Misconduct

Information on research misconduct, including the University's definition and Research Misconduct Policy and procedure is available on the University's Research Office website, alongside the University's Whistleblowing Policy. Information relating to college specific procedures, including reporting forms, are available on college specific webpages

The Policy was last updated in 2018, and as mentioned in the previous years' report, a draft of a revised Policy and Procedure was completed and under review by the Research Misconduct Policy Review Group. Due to conflicting priorities, the review and completion of the approval process for the drafts had previously been put on hold. The review of the policy and procedure is now scheduled to recommence at the end of 2024, with the anticipated completion date of summer 2025.

## 6.1 Changes during 2023/24

As previously noted, each School in **CSE** has been asked to appoint an Integrity Officer role (in addition to the Ethics Officer role), who will be named on college webpages, and who would be the first contact for informal queries about research misconduct. They will also have local responsibility for raising awareness about research integrity and encouraging the take-up of training.

In CMVM Changes during 23/24 included an increase in e-mails regarding research misconduct. From none previously, to a small number. This, we assume, is due to the publicised reporting structure and visibility of the process, which means that people have a route to confidentially discuss the situation with the Deputy Dean of Research Integrity. The new website planned for 2024/25 will also highlight reporting systems and processes.

## 6.2 Statement on formal investigations

| 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 | *1* | | | |
| Falsification | *4* | | | |
| Plagiarism | *1^* | *1^* | | |
| Failure to meet legal, ethical and professional obligations | | | | |
| Misrepresentation (eg data; involvement; interests; qualification; and/or publication history) | *2* | | | |
| Improper dealing with allegations of misconduct | | | | |
| Multiple areas of concern (when received in a single allegation) | *1* | | | |
| *Other** | *1** | | | |
| **Total:** | **10** | **1** | **0** | **0** |

*^This case spanned across two academic years; having been satisfied by a Screening Panel but then undergoing an appeals stage in 24-25*

*\*This involved a query regarding alleged improper research design*

*Of the 10 misconduct allegations received, all were carefully reviewed and assessed by screening panels as per the UKRIO research misconduct framework, with only one case meeting the threshold for a formal investigation based on the severity and credibility of the concerns raised.*

## 6.3 Key lessons learned

To further strengthen our commitment to responsible research practices, we have introduced several enhancements to existing processes. These improvements proactively address potential challenges and ensure a more robust and supportive research environment. The following key lessons learned have been derived from experiences and practices within individual colleges and schools across the institution, rather than from centrally implemented changes. These insights highlight proactive measures taken locally to enhance research integrity and ethical practice.

- **Enhancing Ethical Oversight in Taught Courses**
  A more structured approach has been introduced to provide oversight on research-related coursework, ensuring that ethical complexities are addressed before students begin their projects. Going forward, courses undergoing review will consult with research ethics leads where relevant. This development stems from recognizing the need to provide clearer guidance on the ethical boundaries of coursework-based research activities.
- **Advancing AI Awareness in Research**
  Given the evolving role of AI in research, new resources and expert-led discussions have been incorporated into research ethics training to equip researchers with the knowledge to navigate ethical considerations effectively. This enhancement follows proactive discussions on the responsible use of AI in research and the importance of ensuring ethical data handling.
- **Strengthening Communication and Decision-Making in Research Group**
  Research groups have been encouraged to adopt clearer communication practices regarding authorship and decision-making, particularly when team members transition out of projects. This shift reinforces the importance of transparency and mutual understanding in collaborative research. The initiative was informed by experiences where clearer communication could have streamlined discussions around authorship.
- **Proactive Guidance on Authorship and Dispute Resolution**
  Early intervention strategies have been strengthened to provide research teams with tailored guidance on authorship discussions, helping to prevent misunderstandings before they escalate. This includes additional training on constructive communication, ensuring that all parties are equipped with strategies to navigate complex authorship decisions. By fostering a proactive and supportive approach, researchers can engage in positive resolution pathways.
- **Expanding Ethical Review Accessibility and Support**
  Ethics review processes have been refined to provide greater clarity and accessibility for researchers at all stages. This includes the introduction of dedicated support mechanisms, training opportunities, and simplified guidance to assist with navigating ethical considerations efficiently. These improvements align with ongoing efforts to ensure ethical review processes are as transparent and researcher-friendly as possible.

**Report Annex**

## UNIVERSITY WEBSITES

### University Research Integrity homepage
Links to the REIRG website, external online training resources, College level Research Ethics and Integrity contacts and resources, University policies relevant to Research Ethics and Integrity, Research Misconduct Policy and Procedure, Whistleblowing Policy, Research Funders' policies on Research Ethics and Integrity.

### University Responsible Research webpage
Links to internal and external resources on the theme of responsible and secure international research. Includes links to UK government Trusted Research Guidance for Academia, Edinburgh Global's Partnerships Toolkit, Edinburgh Research Office's webpages on Export Control and the National Security and Investment Act 2021, the University Information Security Team's webpages on working and travelling and a route for access to advice from the Research Collaboration Advice Team (RCAT).

### Technician Commitment
Information on the commitment and the University's Action Plan.

### College Research Ethics and Integrity Websites
College of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences
College of Medicine & Veterinary Medicine
College of Science & Engineering

### Academic & Clinical Central Office for Research and Development (ACCORD)
Covers clinical research-led involving human participants, tissues or data. This includes research falling within the scope of NHS Research Ethics Committee Review and all clinical trials covered by the Medicines for Human Use (Clinical trial regulations). Proposals put to these groups that is considered outside their remit is assessed by relevant University Research Ethics Committees.

### Regulation of research involving animals
Maintaining high standards of Animal ethics and welfare
Commitment to replace, reduce and refine the use of animals in research

## EXTERNAL WEBSITES

### Universities UK
The Concordat to Support Research Integrity

### UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO)
UKRIO Code of Practice for Research
UKRIO Procedure for the Investigation of Misconduct in Research

### UK Research and Innovation (umbrella body for UK Research Councils)
UKRI Policy on the Governance of Good Research Practice