Annual Research Integrity Report 2019/20

Summary

This statement is produced annually for the University Research Executive to consider and is presented thereafter to the University’s Senate and Council to approve. To meet the requirements of the Universities UK *Concordat to Support Research Integrity (2019)*, the report provides:

- a summary of actions and activities that have been undertaken to support and strengthen understanding and the application of research integrity issues in the period 1st August 2019 to 31st July 2020;
- a statement on the processes the University has in place for dealing with allegations of misconduct in research;
- a high-level statement on any allegations of research misconduct in the reporting period, and
- will be made available to the public on the University’s Research Integrity webpages once approved.

As this Summary has been written as a stand-alone document, it contains text which is repeated from the previous year where it covers the University’s Research Integrity Statement, governance structure and procedures.

The University is fully committed to ensuring that all research undertaken by staff and students is carried out to the highest professional standards of research integrity, and that all researchers uphold the principles set out in the Universities UK *Concordat to Support Research Integrity (2019)*. The term ‘Research Integrity’ has been adopted internationally to describe “the core principles and responsibilities that should be common to all good research”.¹

Responsibility for maintaining the highest standards of research integrity at the University rests with the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research and Innovation (PVC R&I). The PVC R&I may be contacted using the email address fiona.lettice@uea.ac.uk. The University’s Research and Innovation Services (RIN) support the PVC R&I and have a Research Integrity Manager who manages RIN’s responsibilities in this area including promoting the culture of research integrity within the University. RIN is also the first point of contact for any queries on the relevant policies or processes to follow and can be contacted using the email address researchintegrity@uea.ac.uk. RIN also has formal nominated representatives who act as legal representatives (under the Health Research Authority’s (HRA) Sponsor requirements) for all NHS-related studies in accordance with the HRA’s *UK Policy Framework for Health and Social Care Research* (HRA Framework). RIN further advises on ethical, legal and regulatory requirements, and on behalf of the University submits annually an Insurance

¹ *Universities UK, The Concordat to Support Research Integrity (2019)*. Available at: https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2019/the-concordat-to-support-research-integrity.pdf
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Assurance and Annual Report to the Office of Research Integrity (ORI) to renew its research misconduct assurance. In doing so, the University remains eligible to apply for or receive PHS research funds.

The University has an overarching committee, the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC), to define the University's Research Ethics Policy and operational principles. It also has oversight of the University’s Research Ethics Subcommittees (S-RECs). UREC is led by a Chair appointed by the PVC R&I, and is constituted from the S-REC Chairs, an external ('lay') member and co-opted experts. UREC is a joint Committee of the University’s Senate and Council.

The S-RECs provide ethics reviews of student and staff research projects and teaching modules. They also undertake ethics reviews of internally-funded impact activities in support of the University’s stance that ethics issues should be considered throughout the lifecycle of a project. Occasionally, ethics reviews are undertaken by the S-RECs for academics in the Norwich Biosciences Institutes to facilitate efficient operations across the Norwich Research Park. During the reporting period, a total of 1059 proposals were submitted for review by the University’s S-RECs of which 973 were given ethics clearance. The S-RECs dealt with 28 ethics amendment requests in relation to Covid-19. In addition, UREC reviewed 92 proposals for market research/research for internal evaluations submitted by the University’s Central Services and the Students’ Union; 83 of these proposals were approved.

To ensure that the University maintains its high ethical standards, the University is implementing an online system to support the ethical review of projects (including research, impact activities, and market research/research for internal evaluations) undertaken at the University.

Alongside UREC, the University with the Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital (NNUH) Trust operate a Joint Research Governance Committee and Joint Research Governance Operations Group overseeing healthcare research within the NNUH Trust and the UEA, under the HRA Framework.

The University has an established set of research integrity policies, procedures and guidelines, which provide a framework for the highest standards of personal conduct in research for all UEA staff and students. These are available on the University’s Research Integrity webpages:

- Guidelines on Good Practice in Research
- Research Ethics Policy (supplemented with Ethics Guidance Notes covering a range of topics)
- Ethics Review Appeal Procedures
- Policy for Approving the Integrity of UEA Research and Innovation Related Activities and Funding
- Procedures for Dealing with Allegations of Misconduct in Research
- Joint NNUH/UEA Standard Operating Procedures (for healthcare research)
- Open Access Policy
- Research Data Management Policy
- Research Data Management Procedures and Guidance
- Intellectual Property Regulations
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- **Public Interest (Whistleblowing) Policy**

The University is also required to comply with UK legislation relating to research, as well as Concordats and codes of practice issued by funding bodies and collaborating organisations. The University has a longstanding subscription to the UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO).

The University has a rolling programme of reviews for its research integrity policies, procedures and guidelines to ensure that they remain fit for purpose. During 2019/20, scheduled reviews of the following documents were undertaken:

- Procedures for Dealing with Allegations of Misconduct in Research
- Policy for Approving the Integrity of UEA Research and Innovation Related Activities and Funding

The University’s Procedures for Dealing with Allegations of Misconduct in Research, outline the timely and robust actions undertaken when any allegation of research misconduct is brought against any present or past member of staff of the University in respect of research undertaken while employed by the University and/or while registered as a student at the University. Any allegations of misconduct in research against a present or past student while registered by the University are handled using the Procedures for Investigating Allegations of Research Misconduct Made Against Students. These Procedures are intended to provide reassurance that all allegations of research misconduct are treated seriously and fairly, and their merit investigated with integrity and with sensitivity.

Researchers are encouraged to try to resolve the potential research misconduct matter they are concerned about informally before beginning formal Procedures. In the first instance, an informal approach to the person concerned is encouraged and advice of the relevant Head of School or other equivalent senior office holder in non-School units sought. If an informal resolution cannot be achieved, any formal allegation is made following the University’s Procedures above. In all of the University’s enquiries following receipt by the relevant Head of School or equivalent of an allegation of research misconduct and actions taken as a result of their outcome, due regard is given to the need to:

- protect the position and reputation of those who make allegations of misconduct in research in good faith, ie. with the honest belief that research misconduct research may have occurred,
- as well as protecting the position and reputation of those alleged to have engaged in research misconduct when such allegations are not confirmed.

All enquiries are conducted on the basis of confidentiality to the strictest extent possible without compromising health and safety, or any issue related to the safety of the participants in any research, or the appropriate and thorough investigation of the allegation of research misconduct. The University throughout takes all reasonable measures to preserve the anonymity of the person making the allegation.
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During 2019/20, there were no allegations of research misconduct received concerning a member of staff and one allegation received against a postgraduate research student in respect of research undertaken while registered with the University. This related to alleged plagiarism in the submitted thesis. The allegation was considered through the Procedures for Investigating Allegations of Research Misconduct Made Against Students and the outcome of the Initial Assessment (Stage 3) was that the Head of School determined that there was no case for further consideration. The case was not therefore referred to the Formal Investigation Stage (Stage 4).

Further to UEA’s response to the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee’s inquiry into research integrity, the University provided comments to Universities UK on the draft revised Concordat to Support Research Integrity, which was originally published in 2012. The Concordat has been revised to meet the recommendations of the Committee following the inquiry in 2018. The revised Concordat was published on 25th October 2019 and the University has subsequently been addressing the requirements of the updated and strengthened Concordat.

As part of the University’s ongoing commitment to support open research, the RIN Open Access team organised a programme of events to mark International Open Access Week from 21st to 27th October 2019. In addition, the Library and RIN delivered an interactive workshop on ‘Publishing in an Increasingly Open World’ aimed at Senior Research Assistants in their first year at UEA. The event was led by the Research Integrity team at Wiley in conjunction with the UK Reproducibility Network (UKRN).

Professor Fiona Lettice
Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research and Innovation
14th October 2020