

ANNUAL STATEMENT ON RESEARCH INTEGRITY 2021

INTRODUCTION

- 1 This annual statement is provided in order to reassure the Council that the University continues its commitment to embedding a transparent and supportive research environment according to the principles enshrined in the Concordat to Support Research Integrity (2019).

COMPLIANCE WITH THE 2019 CONCORDAT TO SUPPORT RESEARCH INTEGRITY

- 2 In November 2020 the Research Committee considered a report of the activity undertaken by central research support units to support research integrity from 1 August 2019 – 31 July 2020, and the outcome of the annual Faculty research integrity survey. In addition it considered a document mapping the University's current research integrity framework and practice against the revised Concordat to Support Research Integrity. It concluded that the University is largely compliant with the principles within the Concordat, however noted that there were some areas where provision might be enhanced. An action plan with timescales has been agreed to address these over the course of the 2020-21 academic year.
- 3 The University's Procedure for Dealing with Allegations of Research Malpractice or Misconduct complies with the requirements of the Concordat and is compatible with the UK Research Integrity Office 'Procedure for the Investigation of Misconduct in Research' (2008). In 2020, the University introduced a Postgraduate Research Student Plagiarism and Research Misconduct Policy which sets out definitions and investigation procedure tailored for such researchers.

ACTIVITIES TO SUPPORT THE UNDERSTANDING AND APPLICATION OF RESEARCH INTEGRITY PRINCIPLES

- 4 During the 2019-20 academic year, the University continued to publish the contact details of named officers for overseeing research integrity and whistleblowing, the annual statement on research integrity, its Code of Practice for Research, the Procedure for dealing with Allegations of Research Malpractice or Misconduct, and a suite of supporting policies on its external research website. The University's Intellectual Property due diligence procedures have been revised.
- 5 The Human Research Ethics Committee and the Animal Welfare Ethical Review Body continue to review research projects involving human and non-human animals and provide advice to researchers on conducting research according to the highest ethical standards. Short videos explaining the research ethics review process were developed. Ethics review forms were updated and streamlined for improved efficiency and effectiveness. New guidance and processes have been developed to support researchers conducting human research in the context of Covid-19.
- 6 Briefings on research integrity and ethics at the OU are provided for research / academic staff and postgraduate research students at induction. A generic Faculty research integrity induction checklist was uploaded to the research website to support this activity in Faculties. Further face to face and remote research integrity and ethics training for these stakeholder groups is provided alongside training and support with open access research, research data management, intellectual property and other relevant topics. In addition, Faculties host their own research integrity and ethics events.

- 7 The research governance, ethics and integrity webpages on the research website were comprehensively rewritten and restructured to provide enhanced clarity and guidance for internal and external stakeholders.

FORMAL INVESTIGATIONS OF ALLEGATIONS OF MISCONDUCT 1 AUGUST 2019 – 31 JULY 2020

- 8 Allegations of research misconduct or malpractice are a fairly uncommon occurrence at the Open University. Where they do arise, it is sometimes the case that they are a result of misunderstanding and poor communications, which can be resolved without recourse to the formal process, to the satisfaction of all parties concerned.
- 9 In the academic year 2019/20, no new allegations of research misconduct were formally notified to the Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Research, Enterprise and Scholarship, however an investigation into an allegation first raised in 2017/18 was concluded.
- 10 The case progressed to Stage 3 of the formal investigation process. The investigation concluded that there was some substance to the allegation and actions to correct the research record have been completed. Organisational and procedural recommendations for the University have been identified and actions to address them are underway. These involve:
- a) clarifying the University's legal requirements for postgraduate research students undertaking fieldwork in conjunction with third party collaborators and the representation of this in relevant policy documents.
 - b) enhancing plagiarism avoidance policy, procedures and training for postgraduate research students and supervisors.
 - c) reviewing data archiving procedures in the relevant area.
 - d) reviewing internal processes for due diligence in respect of intellectual property.

COMMITMENT TO THE CONCORDAT TO SUPPORT RESEARCH INTEGRITY

- 11 The University is committed to the principles of research integrity contained in the 2019 Concordat and promotes an open and supportive research culture in which staff, researchers and students feel comfortable to seek assistance, and to report instances of suspected misconduct. It continues to seek ways to further enhance and embed a research culture supportive of research integrity principles.

Approved by Council on 23 February 2021