Annual Statement on Research Integrity

2023

The Open University

Contents

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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)](#)[1]. It covers relevant activity in the period October 2021 to September 2022.

Activities to Support the Understanding and Application of Research Integrity Principles

Strategic Commitment

2   The University's new [Learn and Live Strategy (2022-2027)](#), contains an explicit commitment to research integrity: 'We are committed to providing a research environment that is supportive, inclusive and equitable, facilitates

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[1] https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/topics/research-and-innovation/concordat-research-integrity

good research practice based on principles of research integrity, and enables communities of researchers to undertake their best work.' (p7).[2] This commitment is mirrored in our [Research Plan (2022-2027)](#) (p8)[3]. Four of our five academic units have included statements about supporting a research environment based on good research practice and research integrity principles in their unit plans for 2022/23, and the other plans to incorporate this commitment into their local research plan.

Institutional Research Environment

3   Following gap analyses and consultation with stakeholder groups, an action plan for full alignment with the [Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers (2019)](#)[4] and an action plan to set out how the University will fulfil its commitment to the [San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA)](#)[5] were published and are being implemented. These are significant commitments aimed at enhancing the institutional research environment by improving research training provision and taking a holistic approach to assessing research quality in recruitment, retention, reward,

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[2] https://www.open.ac.uk/about/main/sites/www.open.ac.uk.about.main/files/files/learn-and-live-ou-strategy-2022-2027.pdf

[3] https://www.open.ac.uk/research/governance/plan

[4] https://www.open.ac.uk/research/support/concordat

[5] https://www.open.ac.uk/research/support-researchers/open-university-statement-responsible-use-research-metrics/open-university-dora

promotion and training. The intention is to mitigate systemic pressures that potentially disincentivise good research conduct and practice.

4   The University reviewed Faculty governance structures with the aim of strengthening Faculty oversight of local research environments and research integrity support arrangements.

Research Ethics

5   The Human Research Ethics Committee and the Animal Welfare Ethical Review Body continue to review research projects involving humans and non-human animals and provide advice to researchers on conducting research according to the highest ethical standards. In response to a recommendation from Internal Audit and the Research Integrity Action Plan, the University procured a new IT system to support human research ethics review.

6   The University established procedures to support the operation of the Ethical Research Review Body[6], which was approved in October 2021. This new Body oversees research projects and related activities as set out in the Ethical Research Statement, which could potentially pose ethical, legal or reputational risks for the University that go beyond the ethics of human participant research and research with non-human animals.

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[6] https://www.open.ac.uk/research/governance/ethics

7   The University is currently reviewing processes for managing ethics review of undergraduate and taught postgraduate student projects.

Accessibility and currency of information

8   The University continued to ensure that information about the University's research integrity/research policy framework was available to its research community and external stakeholders on [The Open University research website](#)[7].

9   The Open Access Policy was updated, and the Research Data Management policies streamlined and updated to reflect the adoption of [FAIR data principles](#)[8].

10   The University published [revised guidance and processes](#) to support researchers conducting human research in the context of COVID-19, to ensure ongoing duty of care to researchers and research participants and proportionate risk mitigation[9].

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[7] https://www.open.ac.uk/research/governance
[8] https://www.go-fair.org/fair-principles/
[9] https://www.open.ac.uk/research/governance/ethics/human/review-process/conducting-human-research-during-covid-19

Training

11   The University expects all new academic and research staff, research support staff and postgraduate research students to receive a briefing about research integrity at induction. Induction is devolved to Academic Units to implement and to monitor, and Units confirm annually that this is the case. As reported in the last annual statement, the Research, Enterprise and Scholarship Unit is investigating the introduction of mandatory, on-line research integrity and ethics training module to enhance reach, consistency of messaging, and monitoring.

12   [Supervisors are responsible](#) for ensuring that postgraduate research students (PGRs) are made aware of the research integrity and ethics expectations[10]. This responsibility is reinforced in supervisor training. Research integrity and ethics briefings, and avoidance of plagiarism training are delivered to PGRs through the Graduate School's core training programme, with the expectation that PGRs complete this training prior to upgrade. On-line training modules on Professional Conduct (including ethics, plagiarism avoidance, diversity), are available through the [Graduate School Network](#)[11].

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[10]Code of Practice for supervisors and research students (Research Degree regulations appendix 2) https://help.open.ac.uk/documents/policies/research-degree-regulations/files/7/research-degree-regulations.pdf)

[11] http://www.open.ac.uk/students/research/activities/lists/professional-conduct?page=1

13   Training on the principles of research integrity, and research ethics workshops are delivered to staff as part of the University's Research Career Development Programme. The Library provides [training and support](#) with open access research, research data management and copyright[12]. Research and Enterprise [provides training](#) (internal link only) in intellectual property and other relevant topics[13]. Training in discipline specific good research practice is the responsibility of Faculties and Faculties have provided evidence of local research training available to staff and PGRs in their annual research integrity reports.

Academic Unit Activity to promote research integrity

14   Academic Units report annually to Research Committee on measures they are taking to nurture a research environment that promotes good research practice and is based on the principles of research integrity. This enhances transparency and promotes sharing of good practice between units. Academic Unit websites all contain statements supporting the early reporting of research conduct concerns, and direct colleagues to Unit staff with whom concerns can

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[12] http://www.open.ac.uk/library-research-support/
[13] https://openuniv.sharepoint.com/sites/intranet-research-academic-strategy/Pages/research-and-enterprise-events.aspx (internal only)

be raised. This year all Academic Unit websites have named individuals who can provide support with good research practice. Units are providing evidence that research and research conduct are embedded into Career Development and Staff Appraisal processes and in mentoring programmes. Where there are no formal mentoring programmes, some Academic Units are planning to introduce them over the forthcoming period. Units have reported on training events and meetings to promote good research practice, and to share information about the University's research integrity framework.

Procedures for Dealing with Allegations of Research Malpractice

15   The University's 'Procedure for Dealing with Allegations of Research Malpractice or Misconduct'[14] 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). The 'Postgraduate Research Student Plagiarism and Research Misconduct Policy' sets out definitions, training expectations, investigation procedures and proportionate academic penalties

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[14] https://www.open.ac.uk/research/governance/policies

tailored for such researchers. The University plans to update the 'Procedure for Dealing with Allegations of Research Malpractice or Misconduct' as soon as the UK Research Integrity Office publishes the long-anticipated revision of its guidance in this area.

Formal Investigations of Allegations of Misconduct – 2021-22

16   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.

17   In the academic year 2021-22, one allegation of research misconduct was formally notified to the Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Research, Enterprise and Scholarship. The first stage of the formal investigation procedure was conducted, and concluded that the allegation was unfounded.

Formal Investigations of Allegations of Misconduct – Lessons Learned

18   The organisational and procedural recommendations arising from the formal investigation were as follows:

- With post-pandemic ways of working, the University should pay attention to building collaborative research environments within research groups and schools, whether online, in person or mixed mode.

- Supervisors, Third Party Monitors, Postgraduate Tutors should be available for in-person meetings with postgraduate research students (PGRs).

- Supervisor training should remind supervisors that new research students will need support to become familiar with the normal academic and research processes in the UK, and of the need to be mindful of different cultural norms and expectations when integrating research students into the research community.

19   The University is developing post-pandemic ways of working. In this context, the PGR Futures programme (part of the new OU Research Plan 2022-27) is investigating how to establish vibrant research environments that are both supportive and enable the PGR student population to thrive, being mindful of the need to provide in person provision on campus for international students, and the longer-term impacts of isolation on wellbeing, mental health and learning.

20   PGR Supervisor training is under review, along with the associated guidelines. In addition to the points above, the Graduate School will be working with Academic Services to include mental health awareness training for supervisors.

Commitment to the Concordat to Support Research Integrity

21   As demonstrated by the evidence provided in the above statement, The Open University is committed to the principles of research integrity contained in the 2019 Concordat. It 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. Academic Units are providing evidence of ways they are enhancing that messaging. The University continues to seek ways to further enhance and embed a research culture supportive of research integrity principles by annual review of progress against its Research Integrity Action Plan, and triennial review of University's research integrity framework against the Concordat to Support Research Integrity.

Approved by Council on 7 March 2023