Annual statement on research integrity

If you have any questions about this template, please contact: RIsecretariat@universitiesuk.ac.uk.

Section 1: Key contact information

Question	Response
1A. Name of organisation	The Open University
1B. Type of organisation: **higher education institution/industry/independent research performing organisation/other (please state)**	Higher Education Institution
1C. Date statement approved by governing body (DD/MM/YY)	This statement covers the period 1 October 2022 to 30 September 2023. It was approved by The Open University Council on 05/03/2024.
1D. Web address of organisation's research integrity page (if applicable)	https://research.open.ac.uk/governance/integrity
1E. Named senior member of staff to oversee research integrity	Professor Kevin Shakesheff
	research-integrity@open.ac.uk

1F. Named member of staff who will act as a first point of contact for anyone wanting more information on matters of research integrity	Ms Helen Castley
	research-integrity@open.ac.uk

Section 2: Promoting high standards of research integrity and positive research culture. Description of actions and activities undertaken

2A. Description of current systems and culture

Please describe how the organisation maintains high standards of research integrity and promotes positive research culture. It should include information on the support provided to researchers to understand standards, values and behaviours, such as training, support and guidance for researchers at different career stages/ disciplines. You may find it helpful to consider the following broad headings:

- Policies and systems

- Communications and engagement

- Culture, development and leadership

- Monitoring and reporting

Policies and systems

Aligned with the Concordat to Support Research Integrity, the OU Research Code of Practice sets out the OU's research integrity framework, the standards that govern research and the responsibilities of both the University and researchers. It is supported by a suite of research policies, processes and guidance. Research policies are reviewed triennially or more often if necessary.

The Human Research Ethics Committee and the Animal Welfare Ethical Review Body review research projects involving humans and non-human animals and advise on conducting research according to the highest ethical standards. The Ethical Research Review Body oversees research and Knowledge Exchange activity which could pose ethical risks beyond those of human participant and animal research.

Processes for Data Protection approval, health and safety risk assessments for laboratory, fieldwork and travel, and support for data management for all research projects are in place. The Awards Management System provides

framework for funded project approval and compliance.

Communications and engagement

The OU research integrity framework, research integrity contacts, research policies, guidance, governance, induction, training information are publicised to the OU research community and external stakeholders on the OU research website. The UK Research Integrity Office and its resources are clearly signposted. Aligned Faculty research integrity web pages provide local information.

Academic, research, research support staff and postgraduate research students (PGRs) receive regular notification of UK Research Integrity Office resources, information and training opportunities, as well as bulletins from the OU Research Committee and the Research Degrees Committee advising on internal policy and governance matters. Significant policy launches and changes, support structure and system changes are publicised on the 'News' section of the OU staff homepage. Graduate School channels (email cascade, social media, webpages) share relevant updates with PGRs and supervisors.

The OU expects all aforementioned internal stakeholders to receive a briefing about research integrity at induction.

Supervisors are responsible for ensuring that PGRs are made aware of the research integrity and ethics expectations, documented, and 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. On-line training modules on Professional Conduct (including ethics, plagiarism avoidance, diversity), are available through the Graduate School Network.

Training on research integrity principles, and research ethics workshops are delivered to staff through the Research Career Development Programme, and ad-hoc training delivered to groups, upon request as resources allow. The Library provides training and support with open access publication, research data management and copyright. Research and Enterprise provides training in intellectual property and other relevant topics. Academic units provide evidence of local generic and discipline specific research training annually to Research Committee.

Faculties host research events and training featuring research good practice and research integrity.

Culture, development and leadership

The OU's Learn and Live Strategy (2022-2027), contains an explicit commitment to research integrity (p7), mirrored in the Research Plan (2022-2027) (p8). The Research Plan also sets out a commitment to leadership in Open Research, and to developing the next generation of researchers equitably, which will enhance the broader research culture. All faculties have included an explicit commitment to research integrity principles in their unit

plans for 2023/24 and/or their local research plans.

The OU is committed to the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers (2019) and is a signatory of the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA), and is implementing published action plans towards alignment. These significant commitments are 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, promotion and training. The intention is to mitigate systemic pressures that potentially disincentivise good research conduct and practice.

Monitoring and reporting

Research Committee monitors progress against the Research Integrity action plan, the DORA action plan and the Researcher Career Development Concordat action plan, and progress towards implementation of the Research Plan. It oversees the OU's research integrity framework and research policy development.

Research Committee receives annual research integrity reports from Faculties in which they confirm research integrity induction has taken place for all new staff, the research integrity information available on faculty websites, faculty mechanisms for overseeing research integrity, local actions and events to support a research culture based on research integrity and information about the number of basic or minor research integrity concerns reported and resolved in the Faculty. As well as a monitoring exercise, this presents an opportunity for Faculties to share good practice.

2B. Changes and developments during the period under review

Please provide an update on any changes made during the period, such as new initiatives, training, developments, also ongoing changes that are still underway. Drawing on Commitment 3 of the Concordat, please note any new or revised policies, practices and procedures to support researchers; training on research ethics and research integrity; training and mentoring opportunities to support the development of researchers' skills throughout their careers.

Following a research governance review, new Faculty Research Committees (Internal link only) have been established, reporting to Research Committee and Research Degrees Committee.

Faculties have implemented new processes for management and oversight of ethics review for taught student projects. The OU has launched a new IT system

to support human research ethics review.

The OU retained the Human Resources Excellence in Research award, which provides external recognition of progress against actions supporting the principles of the Researcher Career Development Concordat. Dedicated resource to more swiftly progress implementation of the DORA action plan has been realised through the appointment of an academic lead.

The OU launched a Statement on Open and Engaging Research and appointed an academic lead and a working group to translate the statement into a time bound action plan. The Library has simultaneously launched an online Open Research Community, a forum for researchers and support staff to share news, tools, queries and good working practices to embed a culture of open research.

Export Control guidance has been reviewed and updated.

2C. Reflections on progress and plans for future developments

This should include a reflection on the previous year's activity including a review of progress and impact of initiatives if known relating to activities referenced in the previous year's statement. Note any issues that have hindered progress, e.g. resourcing or other issues.

Significant progress has been made over the reporting period to improve OU frameworks to support the management and oversight of research, in a context of commitment to providing a research environment that is supportive, inclusive and equitable, facilitates good research practice based on principles of research integrity.

The establishment of new Faculty Research Committees strengthens local ownership and oversight of the Faculty research environment, with benefits for the research community over time at local level and central level. Their operation will continue to embed and develop with review at the end of this academic year and annually thereafter.

Enhanced processes for the management and oversight of ethics review of human participant projects undertaken as part of taught courses supports students to conduct their projects safely and mitigates risk.

The new IT system to support human research ethics review streamlines a previously manual process, significantly enhancing the user experience for applicants, reviewers and ethics support staff.

Over the next period, approval processes for use of student data in research are

being reviewed. Plans are underway to develop an online generic research integrity training module for PGRs, with a view to extending to staff in due course.

The Research Code of Practice will be updated to provide further guidance on Trusted Research, sustainability in research, acceptable use of generative Artificial Intelligence. The Research Intellectual Property Policy and the Consultancy Policy (Research) will be updated and the PGR Plagiarism and Research Misconduct Policy reviewed. The Terrorism and Extremism-related research policy will adapted and extended to accommodate taught postgraduate student research projects.

In due course, the information, tools and guidance to support Trusted Research will be brought together on a series of linked webpages to facilitate accessibility for researchers.

2D. Case study on good practice (optional)

Please describe an anonymised brief, exemplar case study that can be shared as good practice with other organisations. A wide range of case studies are valuable, including small, local implementations. Case studies may also include the impact of implementations or lessons learned.

None

Section 3: Addressing research misconduct

3A. Statement on processes that the organisation has in place for dealing with allegations of misconduct

Please provide:

- a brief summary of relevant organisation policies/ processes (e.g. research misconduct procedure, whistle-blowing policy, bullying/harassment policy; appointment of a third party to act as confidential liaison for persons wishing to raise concerns) and brief information on the periodic review of research misconduct processes (e.g. date of last review; any major changes during the period under review; date when processes will next be reviewed).

- information on how the organisation creates and embeds a research environment in which all staff, researchers and students feel comfortable to report instances of misconduct (e.g. code of practice for research, whistle-blowing, research misconduct procedure, informal liaison process, website signposting for reporting systems, training, mentoring, reflection and evaluation of policies, practices and procedures).

- anonymised key lessons learned from any investigations into allegations of misconduct which either identified opportunities for improvements in the organisation's investigation procedure and/or related policies / processes/ culture or which showed that they were working well.

Description of OU framework for dealing with research misconduct allegations

When breaches of the OU Research Code of Practice are alleged against staff and other researchers undertaking research on behalf of the OU, the Procedure for dealing with allegations of research misconduct or malpractice applies. An updated Procedure for the Investigation of Research Misconduct Allegations, closely aligned with the new UK Research Integrity Office procedure (March 2023), will be brought forward for approval in Autumn 2023. Once approved, this procedure will be reviewed triennially. The Postgraduate Research Student Plagiarism and Research Misconduct Policy sets out definitions, training expectations, investigation procedures and proportionate academic penalties tailored for such researchers and is due for review in 2023/24.

The Whistle-blowing policy provides an alternative route for raising concerns, and names third-parties as confidential liaison points. The Research Code of Practice and the staff and student research misconduct procedures cross

reference to the Bullying and Harassment Policy (internal link only).

Creating a culture where stakeholders feel comfortable to report

The OU Research Code of Practice and the Procedure for the Investigation of Research Misconduct Allegations clearly state that those raising concerns will not be penalised provided the allegation is made in good faith, and provision is made to support initiators of allegations within the Procedure. These policies underpin research integrity induction and training, where such messages are reinforced. One academic unit reports such messages being included in annual Career Development and Staff Appraisal meetings, another at research integrity workshops held during the year. Two academic units have strengthened local processes for reporting and oversight of research integrity concerns this period, one plans to over the forthcoming period.

The OU research integrity web pages provide contact details for central advice and support. Faculty web pages all contain contact details of those in the faculty who can be contacted for advice about good research practice, and to raise concerns about research conduct. Three informal enquiries have been made to central research integrity support this year. Academic units report no concerns raised over the period.

Key lessons learned

The OU is considering reviewing doctoral theses using Turnitin.

3B. Information on investigations of research misconduct that have been undertaken

Please complete the table on the number of **formal investigations completed during the period under review** (including investigations which completed during this period but started in a previous academic year). Information from ongoing investigations should not be submitted.

An organisation's procedure may include an initial, preliminary, or screening stage to determine whether a formal investigation needs to be completed. These allegations should be included in the first column but only those that proceeded past this stage, to formal investigations, should be included in the second column.

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

*If you listed any allegations under the 'Other' category, please give a brief, high-level summary of their type here. Do not give any identifying or confidential information when responding.
During the period there was one case of alleged plagiarism investigated under the PGR Plagiarism and Research Misconduct Policy. The allegation was upheld in part and action taken to redress the matter.