University of Edinburgh

Annual Research Ethics & Integrity Report (2021-22)

1. Introduction

The University of Edinburgh is committed to ensuring that all of its research is conducted in accordance with the five commitments of the Universities UK Concordat to Support Research Integrity (2019). The UUK Concordat is underpinned by both the UK Research Integrity Office's Code of Practice for Research and the UKRI Policy and Guidance on the Governance of Good Research Practice. Together, they represent an essential reference resource to support researchers and research organisations in the conduct of research of the highest quality and standards.

The UUK Concordat requires that a short annual statement should be presented to the University's governing body and made publicly available shortly thereafter. This Annual Research Ethics and Integrity Report is intended to serve that purpose.

This year's report marks a departure from our usual format. Members of the University's Research Ethics and Integrity Review Group have told us in previous years that they see a clear benefit in learning about the work of colleagues elsewhere in the University as a way of sharing good practice. They also express the wish that colleagues should have the opportunity to showcase and celebrate what's going well, to reflect on what isn't going so well and to share those experiences with the broader university community. Responding to those sentiments, this year's Annual Report devotes more space to sharing experiences from around the University. There are three full sections on actions and initiatives designed to support and strengthen understanding and the application of research ethics and integrity issues (Section 2), on actions and initiatives designed to build a positive research culture (Section 3) and on colleagues' reflections on the challenges they have faced in promoting excellence in research practice, ethics and good research culture (Section 4).

The statements demonstrating the particular actions we are taking to meet our obligations under Commitment 5 of the UUK Concordat can be found at Sections 2 (Actions and initiatives designed to support and strengthen understanding and the application of research integrity issues) and 5 (Addressing Research Misconduct and Assurance Statements).

Essential Information:-

- Date of approval of this Report by the University's Risk Management Committee: 17th August, 2023.
- Date of Publication: 15th September, 2023

- Links to previous Annual Research Ethics and Integrity Reports can be found by visiting the dedicated section of Edinburgh Research Office's Research Integrity webpages.

2. Supporting and strengthening understanding and the application of Research Ethics and Integrity issues

Responsibility for safeguarding the integrity of research at the university is shared between the three Colleges on the one hand and central university bodies on the other. The Colleges have responsibility for the research carried out by their staff and students, and each maintains its own governance and oversight structures to ensure that the appropriate standards are maintained. At a central university level, **Edinburgh Research Office** plays a policy, representative and oversight role. Partly, this involves ensuring that our policies and procedures remain compliant with our guiding documents in this area, the Universities UK Concordat to Support Research Integrity and the UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO) Code of Practice for Research. Edinburgh Research Office also shares experience and best practice through engagement with fellow universities and with sectoral bodies including **UKRIO**, **Universities UK**, the **Russell Group**, the **League of European Research Universities** and the **Scottish Research Integrity Network**.

The **Research Ethics and Integrity Review Group (REIRG)** exists to ensure that research integrity and governance maintain a strong profile at the University and to ensure compliance with the UUK Concordat and funders' terms and conditions. Other functions include identifying gaps in policy and procedure and recommending specific actions to resolve them and promoting awareness and training in integrity and ethics. REIRG brings together senior members of academic staff, the University's Academic Lead for Research Integrity and Improvement, representatives of the Colleges, Edinburgh Research Office, the University's Institute for Academic Development, the Academic and Clinical Central Office for Research and Development, the Edinburgh Futures Institute and central university bodies including the Library, Records Management and the Health and Safety Department.

REIRG's activities are overseen by the **Research Strategy Group (RSG)**, a high level group Chaired by the Vice Principal Research and Enterprise and bringing together senior officers from around the University. As well as research ethics and integrity, RSG has, via its sub-groups, an overview of research culture, post-graduate research and research engagement. Among RSG's broader responsibilities are oversight of good research practice and stewardship of university-wide research policies, including those relating to researcher development, research ethics and integrity.

The examples given below provide insight into the huge range of initiatives and activities being undertaken at School, College and University levels to support and strengthen the application of research ethics and integrity principles in research. As a university community, we want to ensure that the commitment to leadership in good practice demonstrated by so many of our colleagues throughout the year is recognised and celebrated.

Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (AHSS)

At College level, the **AHSS Research Ethics, Integrity and Governance team** worked alongside colleagues to produce updated ethics guidance to help researchers navigate a research landscape that has changed significantly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. A key aspect of this has been the co-creation, with colleagues in the University's **Institute for Academic Development** and **Information Services**, of guidance relating to the ethical use of social media data. The finished product, which includes cases studies as well as advice, has been very well received and was subsequently shared across the University.

Elsewhere, the College's COVID-19 research guidance and risk checklist were revised and updated following consultation with colleagues.

The **Associate Dean (Research Ethics & Integrity)**, working alongside the **Research Ethics, Integrity and Governance team**, produced a reviewer's handbook designed to assist ethics reviewers in dealing with commonly faced ethical issues. The handbook also links to a number of internal and external resources and the hope is to adapt it for use university-wide.

A pilot designed to prepare the ground for a new online ethics review system has been ongoing in five of the College's eleven research intensive Schools. In most of those Schools, the pilot has replaced aging legacy systems and the new system is working well.

In the **School of History, Classics and Archaeology**, there has been a recognition that oral history is one of the research areas within the School where ethical challenges have tended arise most frequently. In response, the School has appointed a dedicated oral history representative to the School's Research Ethics Committee so that the committee has a source of specific advice on this important topic.

As part of a drive to build expertise and dedicated support in Open Data practices, the newly appointed **Director of Data and Open Research** in the **School of Philosophy, Psychology and Language Sciences, Prof Kenny Smith,** led a programme of events covering a range of data management-related topics including Open Data, Pre-registration and GitHub. A website has also been created to make guidance and information on these themes

easily accessible. Both the events and the new resources are judged to have been very successful in raising awareness and knowledge levels among the key research staff and student audiences.

During the year, the **Moray House School of Education and Sport (MHSES)** agreed to allocate specific workload to ethics reviewers. The allocation is one hour per application, with reviewers able to agree to review ten, twenty or forty five applications per year. An additional five hours per year is available to cover Continuous Professional Development (CPD). The workload allocation enables the School's ethics reviewer team to meet at least once per semester to identify areas for future CPD activities and practice improvement in ethics, data management and research integrity.

Medicine and Veterinary Medicine (MVM)

Beginning in August 2021, the College **Co-Directors of Research Ethics, Professor Sue Fletcher-Watson and Dr Christine Campbell,** have been working more closely with the Chairs of the four MVM-internal **Research Ethics Committees** to ensure that processes and training are aligned, and that learning is shared across the whole college. For example, the **Royal (Dick) Veterinary School** has been involved with the **Edinburgh Medical School Research Ethics Committee (EMREC)** to develop new processes as part of a Global Health Ethics working group. The Medical and Veterinary Schools working alongside one another has helped colleagues reflect on and streamline processes and resources for researchers and the Research Ethics Committees.

All four of the College **Research Ethics Committees** have made a concerted effort during the year to diversify their reviewer pools and specifically to include recognition of equality, diversity and inclusion imperatives in their agendas. The result has been expanded reviewer pools and Ethics Committees, encompassing a more diverse range of lived experiences, protected characteristics and more varied subject-area expertise. All MVM Research Ethics Committees also invite expert external reviewers to the pool when required.

The **Edinburgh University Research Optimisation Course (EUROC)**, whose development was mentioned in last year's report, launched this year and is now a required course for all new holders of Personal Licences (PILs) for research with animals. The course, which was developed by a team from the **CAMARADES (Collaborative Approach to Meta-Analysis and Review of Animal Data from Experimental Studies)** research group at the **Centre for Clinical Brain Sciences**, working together with colleagues from the **Roslin Institute**, aims to help researchers working with animal models to

improve study design in experiments with animals. All current PIL holders will also be required to complete the training in future.

As well as offering training and ethics workshops, the **Royal (Dick) Veterinary School's Human Ethical Review Committee (HERC)** has developed an online teaching site that contains lectures and resources on ethics, qualitative and quantitative research methods and research integrity. The result has been an improvement in the quality of ethics submissions and more robust, ethically sound research. Ethics applications have become more comprehensive and it is apparent that researchers are considering the ethical aspects of their projects at the design stage to a greater degree than before.

At **EMREC**, a training programme for reviewers facilitated group discussions of past applications and a sharing of ideas and best practice. This helped to strengthen reviewers' understanding of processes and grow confidence. The committee has recently expanded and so the training activities were also important in building a sense of community. Elsewhere, **EMREC** members have been actively involved in a number of working groups led by the College **Co-Directors of Research Ethics** with the following outputs:-

- an update to the EMREC application form to ensure greater clarity and ease of use and minimise workload for applicants and reviewers; and
- the development of a new Global Health ethics review position statement on dual-ethics review within Edinburgh Medical School. Instead of Edinburgh signing off ethics last as had previously been the case, EMREC will now review applications first in order to ensure more equitable partnerships and respect partners' local ethical understanding and practice.

In order to ensure transparency and the delivery of an efficient service, **EMREC** monitors turnaround times and regularly shares statistics on numbers of applications and timescales for issue of the first opinion letter. The EMREC team is also creating a database of commonly occurring issues to facilitate an evidence-based approach to future training sessions and address specific needs from Edinburgh Medical School – and more broadly across MVM.

<u>Science and Engineering (S&E)</u>

In the **School of Biological Sciences**, the annual Postgraduate Student Ethics Day addresses fraud, data management, statistics, the scientific process, diversity and bullying through the lens of three separate aspects of the student experience:-

(i) students' relationship with their own data;
(ii) their relationship with others in their immediate research environment; and

(iii) their relationship with the wider scientific community.

The day is focused on second year postgraduate students, partly for logistical reasons, but also because second year students are more likely than those in first year to become aware of and encounter ethical issues at that stage. There is considerable effort in advance of each year's event to identify ways of introducing topical issues, for example content on ethical aspects of artificial intelligence.

An important part of the day is that students are encouraged to approach any member of the School Research Ethics Committee for in-confidence discussions about concerns they may have. The aim of this approach is to help them to avoid ethics violations in the first place.

The **School of Engineering** has completed a new **Research Strategy** underpinned by the four guiding principles of collegiality, time for research, impact beyond papers and targeted investment. The Research Strategy includes a reinforcement of the School's commitment to promoting social responsibility and sustainability in all of its research activity and to implementing the University's Research Cultures Action Plan. This is based on the underlying values of "Research Citizenship", "Wellbeing", "Equality, Diversity and Inclusion", "Research Ethics and Integrity" and "Learning".

The School is also in discussions with colleagues in the University's **Research Data Service (RDS)** to explore ways of raising the profile of RDS services within the School. The RDS team plays an important role in helping staff and students to meet requirements related to open data in research. The School is also planning information sessions for its research institutes that put a strong emphasis on reaching out to PhD students.

The **School of Geosciences** extended the ethics and integrity training provided to UG and PG students across the School through a number of dedicated events and through courses, primarily delivered by members of the School **Research Ethics Committee**. These training events aim to ensure that the School's research and its researchers **embody and practice ethical principles and the core elements of researcher integrity**: Honesty, Rigour, Transparency and open communication, Care and respect, and Accountability. The events also help to demystify the School's policies and procedures for research ethics and integrity. They have reached students across all of the School's major areas of teaching and research, including undergraduates as they start their degree and again in third and fourth year as they plan and undertake dissertation research, taught postgraduate students and starting PhD students.

Edinburgh Parallel Computing Centre organises an **annual Research Ethics and Integrity seminar** for students and staff to provide information on

when ethics and integrity issues should be considered. This has led to an increase in the number of queries around research ethics and more engagement at an appropriate point in the lifecycle (i.e. before research has started).

Initiatives undertaken in the **School of Informatics** during 2021/22 included a collaboration between the **School Research Ethics Committee** and **Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught leads** to incorporate Ethics information into relevant student project workflows. The Research Ethics Committee also worked with the **Head of School** and **local HR team** to improve the information provided to new staff as part of inductions.

Research Ethics Committee members also collaborated with key **Postgraduate Research cohorts** in the School to raise awareness of Ethics and Integrity. A **joint workshop** was organised during session 2021/22 and delivered to Centres of Doctoral Training and other Postgraduate Research students at the beginning of the following session.

Additional resources have been made available via the **School's Ethics webpage**, for example a fifteen minute introductory video suitable for students and further examples of good participant information sheets and consent forms.

University level

A working group led by **Dr Ailsa Niven, outgoing Associate Dean (Research Ethics and Integrity)** in AHSS, completed drafting the University's **new Research Ethics Policy**. The new policy aims to harmonise processes in and approaches to ethical review across the University, ultimately raising standards for the ethical conduct of research. In terms of structure, the policy is built around five overarching principles informing research within the institution, namely (i) beneficence and non-maleficence, (ii) integrity, openness and transparency, (iii) dignity and respect, (iv) responsibility and accountability and (v) equality, diversity and inclusion. Responsibility for adherence to the policy rests on all of those involved in undertaking research, including the University as an employer of researchers. In recognition of this, the document incorporates outlines of the roles and responsibilities of Staff Researchers, Student Researchers, members of Research Ethics Committees and the University on an institutional level.

The Policy began its progress through the University's approval processes in April and was expected to be approved and published by the end of the year.

The **Research Misconduct Policy Review Group** met for the first time in April 2022, with follow up meetings in May and October of that year. The group is convened by **Edinburgh Research Office**'s **Research Integrity**

Manager and includes representatives of the **three Colleges, the Human Resources Director's Office, Human Resources Employee Relations & Employment Policy, Academic Services** and one of the University's three '**Named Persons**'.

The group's purpose is to produce a new Research Misconduct Policy and Procedure to replace the current document, which was approved in 2018. A working group did collaborate on a new policy during the autumn of 2019 and early part of 2020, however the COVID-19 pandemic meant that the resulting policy draft did not proceed to approval. It is anticipated that the work undertaken at that stage will be incorporated into the new Policy however. A draft of the new Research Misconduct Procedure was circulated to the group in February 2023. Next steps will include producing guidance to the Procedure based on participant roles, following the model of the guidance that accompanies the University's Disciplinary Procedure, before moving towards the consultation and approval processes.

Six key themes for change have been identified for recognition in the new Policy and Procedure:-

- Clarifying the processes connected with the initial steps in handling an allegation, before it reaches the first step on the prescribed misconduct investigation procedure. Informal conversations or peer discussions around practice concerns at an early stage can help to clarify issues and are to be encouraged.
- Adopting a refreshed communication and dissemination strategy to tackle a perceived lack of awareness of the current Policy and Procedure.
- Ensuring that tone in the document is not a bar to engagement.
- Ensuring that there is a pace to the new Procedure and that sanctions are followed through to completion.
- Identifying ways of better ensuring formal closure for both initiator and respondent at the end of the investigation (acknowledgement for the initiator that a process has taken place and for the respondent, greater clarity on the outcome – particularly in the case of exoneration).
- Identifying learnings that can be drawn from the role of the Named Person as it operates at other institutions.

3. Building a positive research culture

AHSS

At College level, the **College Research Ethics Committee** has introduced a new standing item at meetings: **'Bring a thorny issue'**. The idea is to

encourage discussion of difficult cases and sharing of best practice. This has been a great success, with ethics leads bringing a wide range of issues and colleagues sharing knowledge and support. The **College Research Ethics Committee Teams Channel** has also become more active, with a sense that colleagues feel more comfortable asking questions when they encounter complex or difficult issues between meetings.

As part of an ongoing commitment to fostering a diverse and inclusive research environment, especially for under-represented groups, the **School of Philosophy, Psychology and Language Sciences** implemented a series of measures during the year:-

- **mentoring workshops** for early career researchers, designed to promote mentoring as an opportunity, guide prospective mentors through the process and highlight the qualities that make a successful mentor;
- **publishing biographies of mentors** on the School Intranet in order to raise awareness among students and early career researchers looking for a mentor (and playing a role modelling function for colleagues considering putting themselves forward as role models).
- the appointment of **two anti-harassment officers,** which has generated positive feedback in terms of their role and the information sessions that they have held.
- the **Linguistic and English Language Department** has set up an **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion reading group** to discuss linguistic research through an equality, diversity and inclusion lens.

Against a background of a growth in the numbers of complex cases among staff and student ethics applications, the **School of Social and Political Science** has introduced a twice weekly **Ethics Surgery**. These surgeries allow researchers to book time with the Deputy Director of Research Ethics and Integrity to discuss ethics and methodology at the design or active stages of their project. The idea is to support a culture of reflection, where ethical considerations are built in right from the start.

At the **University of Edinburgh Business School,** research culture is an important focus for the School Research Committee and the School runs a number of initiatives to maintain a positive culture. Among the activities which operated during session 2021/22 were **regular seminars** to allow researchers an opportunity to share ideas and ongoing research and a number of **writing workshops and retreats**.

Building on the establishment of the seven thematic research hubs reported on in last year's Annual Research Ethics and Integrity Report, **Moray House School of Education and Sport** introduced the new role of **Thematic Hub Ethics Lead**, appointing one lead in each of the seven hubs. The role comes

with an allocation of twenty five hours per year to represent hub interests at ethics committee meetings and to support ethics within their respective hubs. Support includes communicating key messages on ethics and integrity matters and organising ethics related events and seminars tailored to their disciplinary area. An early impact following the introduction of the new role has been a rise in the number of ethics champions within the School, which in turn has improved lines of communication between the School ethics team and staff.

Also within **Moray House School of Education and Sport, Dr Sarah McGeown** led the development and roll out of a new monthly research-focused programme designed to encourage researchers at all levels of seniority to share examples of excellence and best practice. Known as the **Researcher Development series**, these sessions involve online presentations, followed by open discussions on aspects of practice that have worked (and those that have not), as well as question and answer opportunities. Specific topics covered so far have included 'Normalising and coping with rejection in research', 'Open research' and 'Engaging with External Partners'.

MVM

In September 2021, **MVM** celebrated national Post-Doc Appreciation Week by holding **social and career focused events** led by the College's **four Research Staff Societies (Easter Bush, Bioquarter, George Square and Western General Hospital)**. These events promoted research culture by bringing the community together, but importantly also by publicly recognising and celebrating key contributions to the College. More than a hundred nominations were received to recognise Post-Doc achievement in research supervision, public engagement and citizenship. Twelve prizes were awarded, three by each Research Staff Society. Feedback was extremely positive and there are plans to make the event an annual fixture.

Since October 2021, the **MVM Research Office** team has been hosting regular **research culture-themed sessions** for MVM research managers. These meetings serve as a forum for information and good practice-sharing, as well as for discussion. Themes tackled have included the results of the University's Research Culture Survey, the concept of responsible research metrics, and the College's ambitions and immediate plans to foster a better research culture.

In January 2022, a new **MVM Research Culture Hub** was launched, containing information about College-specific and wider University research culture initiatives, policies, guidelines committee, networks and working groups. The Hub also provides links to various resources and toolkits to help

colleagues start conversations about the challenges they face and the opportunities that exist to create a better research culture. The Hub has received a lot of positive feedback and there are plans to use it to collect examples of good research practice.

The **MVM Edinburgh Clinical Medical School Athena SWAN Inspiring People 4** online events were held over two days in January 2022. The sessions were focused on perceptions, assumptions and their impacts and effects around racism, disability and gender equality. Speakers included **Usher Institute lecturer and commentator Dr Gwenetta Curry** and the **human rights lawyer, activist and University Rector Debora Kayembe**, as well as external speakers. In total, 100 people attended either of the two sessions with very positive feedback.

January also saw the appointment of six **research staff champions** across the College. The research staff champion role involves being recognisable and visible as advisors to signpost early career researchers to the best sources of support on topics including training in current role, careers and transition to next role in, or beyond, academia. Also part of the remit are proactive engagement with local research staff and championing the interests of research staff in local management.

Elsewhere in the College, the **Flow Cytometry and Cell Sorting Facility** at the Queens Medical Research Institute received a **'hidden REF' award in 2021**. The aim of these awards is to recognise and celebrate vital, but often hidden contributions to research. The Flow Cytometry Team was key in supporting the College's COVID-19 research by ensuring that relevant health and safety documentation was prepared and by adapting procedures to allow clinical trials to progress smoothly. The Flow Cytometry technologists' achievements were based on their support for each other and their willingness to exceed expectations.

In the past year, **Bioresearch & Veterinary Services** has trained a large team of **Mental Health First Aiders** drawn from the ranks of Facility Managers, vets, and training officers. Also in the pipeline is a programme aimed at promoting a **'Culture of Care'** for staff and animals within the establishment. Part of the programme will involve engagement with the University's Chaplaincy to help colleagues deal with the emotional fatigue associated with killing research animals.

Finally, the **academic promotions round 2021/22** was the first year where the College actively encouraged applicants to consider the importance of their behaviours by referring to the **University's Behaviours Charter** (for example, "Important to reflect on HOW you have achieved what you have as well as WHAT you have achieved"). In 2022, 21 UoE grade 09 staff were

promoted to Personal Chair UoE grade 10 or ACN4 (48% (n=10) women), compared to 19 successful applications in 2020 (16% (n=3) women). No data for other protected characteristics were available for analysis. This reflects a shift in focus to the "how", which is designed to help embed a values-led approach across the College, thus contributing to good research culture.

S&E

The **School of Biological Sciences** employs a range of initiatives to promote a positive research culture. Examples include a **programme of Wednesday seminars** that typically include a talk by a post-doctoral colleague and a talk by a Principal Investigator. These build culture by raising awareness among the community of the range of expertise that exists in the School.

School-wide meetings and a newsletter are designed not only to provide information about research but also as a support mechanism. The meetings and newsletters are a useful way of highlighting the important contributions of support staff to the life of the School. The meetings in particular are well attended and are felt to be a success.

Partly in response a University programme of links with the Indian state of Gujarat, the School has made efforts towards internationalisation in the form of circulating information about overseas faculties. These activities are seen as a way of **promoting cross-cultural collaborations and supporting science in low and middle income countries**. More generally, the School's researchers maintain a huge number of international collaborations driven by their research interests and contacts made at international conferences. The Chair of the School's Research Ethics Committee believes that making resources available to enable early career researchers to attend conferences in situations where they are not grant funded to do so would serve the dual purpose of generating new international collaborations and supporting career progression.

The **School of Engineering** has created a **Staff Development Committee** which is co-chaired by the School's **Postdoctoral Research Associate Champion**. The purpose of the committee is to better understand challenges facing all staff, including all researchers and research support staff, and to undertake actions to develop staff. A strong emphasis is on wellbeing, workload and upskilling.

In recognition of women's important role in engineering research, the School launched the **Elizabeth Georgeson Fellowships** on International Women in Engineering Day in 2022. The fellowships, which enable the recruitment of two female fellows for a three-year term, demonstrate the School's strong support for women engineers' career development. On a similar theme, November 2021 saw the launch of the **Molly Fergusson Initiative**, which

promotes the visibility and community of those who identify as women within the School. The Initiative involves all women and their allies, working to support them through activities such as networking events, identifying funding to support staff- and student-led projects, and sharing information about resources and hidden barriers. The ultimate aim of the initiative is to encourage more female school leavers to study engineering, and more of our female graduates to remain in engineering professions.

Separately, an '**Engineering Covid-19 Medal Awards Ceremony'** was held at the School's all-staff meeting in November 2021 in recognition of the timely and valuable societal contributions of the School's individuals and teams in fighting the pandemic, especially in the early days of the crisis.

In the **School of Geosciences**, a series of seminars entitled **'Good Research'** and blog series containing colleague reflections on the theme **'What does 'Good Research' Mean to You?'** helped to promote a culture of ethical research and research(er) integrity within the School. These initiatives were interrupted by industrial action during Semester 2 and the School subsequently undertook a review into how to effectively engage with the whole School around issues of research culture. A parallel initiative has been the creation of a School **Culture Working Group** which seeks to improve and sustain school support for the health, wellbeing and working life of everyone working and studying in the school. The working group draws together staff working on diverse aspects of research culture (for example Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, sustainability, Athena Swan), and includes the Chair of the School Research Ethics and Integrity Committee.

The **Edinburgh Parallel Computing Centre** is encouraging staff to take advantage of **flexible working and compressed hours** to improve staff wellbeing. Additional support from senior researchers is being given to encourage and mentor staff in identification and submission of research bids via a new, regular **Funding Opportunities Meeting** which all staff, including technical and administrative staff, can attend.

In the **School of Informatics**, the School **Research Ethics Committee** has continued to hold and promote monthly **Ethics drop-in sessions** with the aim of making the committee more accessible to staff and students. The committee has developed further training materials and organised a **Postgraduate Researcher-focused workshop** in collaboration with the Centres for Doctoral Training. The workshop featured an external keynote speaker, **Prof Shannon Vallor**, of the **Edinburgh Futures Institute**. School processes are now well-developed, but workflows are continuously reviewed and improved upon accordingly.

University level

The University's **Research Cultures Working Group** was created to establish policies and mechanisms to promote positive research cultures at the University, incorporating equality, diversity and inclusion, across all career stages. Working on behalf of **Research Strategy Group,** the Research Cultures Working Group also provides oversight for the implementation group for the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers.

One of the group's early projects was a programme of bi-monthly thematic events, exploring a range of research related topics through a research culture lens. The first event took place in October 2021 and explored **the role of Dignity and Respect Advisors** at the University of Edinburgh and how they support colleagues dealing with issues of bullying and harassment. The event featured a presentation by **Dr Caroline Wallace, Head of HR – Equality, Diversity and Inclusion**, followed by a discussion between **Professor Jane Hillston** and **Dr Katie Nicoll Baines** about their experiences as Dignity and Respect Advisors.

A second event in December 2021 was hosted by Professor Hillston and featured **Dr Will Cawthorn** introducing the role of **research metrics, assessment and research practices** and how these impact on research culture. **Professor Malcolm Macleod, the University's Academic Lead for Research Integrity and Improvement** also presented on **research integrity and reproducibility.**

4. Reflecting on the challenges we have faced in promoting excellence in research practice, ethics and good research culture

AHSS

At College level, colleagues have noted a **degree of resistance to the ethics review process**, mainly from staff in one School.

The College also reports that one School has experienced ongoing issues with the **quality of ethics review** from a significant number of supervisors at all levels, with reports of some supervisors signing off applications that are felt to be weak in terms of addressing ethical issues. There is said to be a clear lack of engagement with the ethical review process among staff locally, which leads to additional workload for reviewers who may need to review an application from a single applicant several times before a favourable opinion can be given.

These reports have been received with concern by members of the **Research Ethics and Integrity Review Group (REIRG)**. Any sense that staff are

resisting the review process rings clear alarm bells and the College is supporting colleagues as they work to resolve the issues.

In the **School of History, Classics and Archaeology**, a key challenge has been to ensure that staff and students alike complete the School Ethics forms ahead of starting any new research. The previous ethics application system, which used a Word-document form, was not always followed. The move to an **online application form** has made a significant improvement to the situation and has enabled administrative staff to more easily monitor engagement with the application system. At present there is a particular focus on improving application rates among PhD students and a new page on the Learn training platform, designed to monitor adherence to School procedures, is under development.

The **School of Health in Social Science** has experienced a marked increase in the numbers of researchers seeking to conduct research oversees. The resulting international ethics applications can be challenging when no clear local ethics processes are in place, or where no local collaborators can be identified. In order to address these challenges, the School is working on plans to establish an **open discussion forum** where researchers can learn directly from the experiences of Principal Investigators in previous international projects. As well as creating opportunities for knowledge exchange within the School, the Deputy Director of Research Ethics and Integrity has approached the Research Ethics Committee in the **School of Social and Political Science** with a view to launching a programme of lunch meetings to offer a space for cross–School dialogue and knowledge exchange on matters of international ethics.

Having recognised that students' first encounter with the research ethics application process can be confusing, colleagues at the **Business School** have created annotated versions of the **College Participant Information Sheet and Consent form templates**. The aim is to demystify the wording and explain some of the complexity inherent in the process, thereby helping students to engage more fully and with confidence.

Early in the year, colleagues at **Moray House School of Education and Sport** learned that the **Global Data Institute for Child Safety**, a multi-million pound project led by **Professor Deborah Fry** and **Professor Catherine Maternowska**, had been funded. The institute, now known as the '**Childlight' project** is highly complex and sensitive, with a goal of ending the sexual exploitation and abuse of children, whether on- or offline.

Ethical review of research to be carried out as part of the project will require expertise across a range of fields (including public health, social work, data informatics, children and technology, data ethics, child sociology, law,

development studies and child protection) that is much wider than currently exists within the School. The solution has been to establish a **College Ethics Advisory Group** consisting of twelve members drawn from across the College with expertise in specialisms including violence against children, psychology, technology, counselling and criminology. The ability to call upon this cross-College pool of knowledge will ensure that high level independent ethical review can be undertaken, ensuring sufficient scrutiny and discussion across areas of disciplinary and methodological expertise and enabling shared ethical recommendations to be reached.

MVM

Research in the **College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine** is notable for the **complexity of governance structures** that include interfaces between university and NHS, and between clinical and non-clinical human or animal studies.

These structures can be complicated to navigate for research staff and students, with students in particular underestimating the timescales involved in, for example, obtaining sponsorship from the **Academic and Clinical Central Office for Research and Development (ACCORD)**. In response to this complexity, the College has developed a **flowchart describing the regulatory and ethical requirements on websites**. Support staff within the College also proactively provide guidance to potential ethics applicants and host regular meetings and events on challenging practical issues in research.

The increasing complexity of ethics applications relating to a wider variety of clinical and non-clinical projects and involving specialist issues such as health and safety and data ownership has placed the issue of **recruiting and retaining high quality staff** in sharp focus. Attracting and keeping good staff is increasingly important, especially when ethical review relies on those staff volunteering their time to review applications.

The College's response to the challenge has been to implement a range of strategies for supporting ethics reviewers in their roles. Measures have included ongoing training for Research Ethics Committee members, regularly updating ethics forms, guidelines and templates and increasing the size and diversity of the reviewer pool. Steps have also been taken to increase collaboration between internal ethics Research Ethics Committees, to make the case for more administrative support and to ensure that ethics committee membership is reflected in annual appraisals.

S&E

In the **School of Biological Sciences**, engaging Post-Doctoral staff and faculty in measures aimed at promoting excellence in research practice and

ethics has proven to be a challenge over a number of years. In recognition of the crucial importance of ethics and integrity in researcher career development, the School's Postgraduate Office has responded by making attendance at the annual Ethics Day compulsory.

The **School of Engineering** values communication between and across the Schools and Colleges to share best practice and identify solutions to ethics related issues. Since 2022, the School has been represented on the **Research Ethics and Integrity Review Group** by two staff members and the School community has benefited from more effective communication as a result.

The most significant challenges experienced in the **School of Geosciences** relate to managing workloads and encouraging engagement with ethics and integrity across the full breadth of research conducted within the School. Concerns around workload are linked to the lack of any formal workload allocation associated with membership of the Research Ethics Committee and, as recognised elsewhere, the significant investment of time that reviewing ethics submissions demands. Not only does that place pressure on those who voluntarily contribute to the ethics process, it also leaves the process vulnerable to industrial action.

The **Chair of the School's Research Ethics and Integrity Committee** is currently reviewing the processes in place and consulting on proposals to expand participation. These are expected to go to the School Management Committee in due course.

In the **Edinburgh Parallel Computing Centre** and the **School of Informatics**, workloads and associated pressures are also cited as a challenge in creating a good research culture.

For the **School of Informatics Research Ethics Committee**, accessing training and dealing with applications that are ethically complicated, or require significant time in the face of multiple competing pressures, are the key challenges.

5. Addressing Research Misconduct and assurance statements

5.1 High-level statement on any formal investigations of research misconduct that have been undertaken

AHSS

There were no formal investigations of research misconduct during the 2021/22 academic session.

MVM

One allegation of research misconduct was under formal investigation during the 2021/22 academic session.

S&E

There were no formal investigations carried out under the Research Misconduct Policy and Procedure during the 2021/22 academic session.

One allegation was referred to a Screening Panel, which concluded that there was no case to answer and the matter was accordingly concluded at the Screening Panel stage.

5.2 Assurance: Transparency, timeliness, robustness, fairness and continued appropriateness of processes for dealing with allegations of misconduct.

AHSS

In AHSS, allegations of research misconduct are processed according to the University's Research Misconduct Policy and Procedure. The perception in the College is that the process ensures that formal complaints about research misconduct are managed in a consistent manner, including in a timely fashion, while facilitating a thorough investigation with both initiators(s) and respondent(s) treated fairly.

When approached for formal advice, the **incoming College Associate Dean (Research Ethics and Integrity), Dr Sudeepa Abeysinghe,** has also been able to respond and, where appropriate, guide correspondents towards the formal policies.

Challenges in managing the process have included the burden that the policy and procedure place on a single College Named Person, where additional support would be desirable. This is a concern that is being addressed by the ongoing review of the University's Research Misconduct Policy and Procedure.

MVM

All allegations of research misconduct are managed by the **MVM Dean of Research and College Named Person, Professor Stuart Forbes**, and the **CMVM Deputy Dean for Research Culture and Integrity, Dr Thamarai Dorai-Schneiders**. The procedures implemented are informed by both the University Research Misconduct policy and the URKIO Procedures for the Investigation of Misconduct in Research. Every effort is made to ensure all potential and actual allegations are managed in a

transparent, timely, robust and fair manner, within the constraints of the procedures.

In the context of clinical research, **'deviations'** (any departure from an approved protocol, trial documents or any other information relating to the conduct of a trial that does not result in harm, or risk of harm to the research participant and does not have the potential to significantly affect the study outcomes) and **'violations'** (any departure from an approved protocol, trial documents or any other information relating to the conduct of a trial that may affect the safety of research participants or the study outcomes) are recorded and reported to the **Academic and Clinical Central Office for Research and Development (ACCORD)**.

When considered necessary, investigations are made to determine whether a violation meets the criteria of a serious breach; that is, whether it is likely to affect, to a significant degree a) the safety or physical or mental integrity of the subjects of the trial, or b) the scientific value of the trial. Such investigations must be documented and reported to the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency Inspectorate if a serious breach is identified.

S&E

The College previously provided detailed feedback on the current Research Misconduct Policy to Research Policy Group in session 2019/20 and has engaged with the working group currently drafting an updated version of this policy and accompanying procedures. The requirement remains how to deal effectively with compound allegations (i.e. including an element of research misconduct along with other types of allegation) which can come in from different routes and at different levels of the University. Further clarity of process, built on developed best practice, would be helpful.

In terms of the transparency of the research misconduct investigatory procedure, one Head of School within the College pointed to the tension between transparency in investigations and the requirements of HR procedures. Employment law requirements make transparency difficult to achieve in these situations.

5.3 Assurance: Learnings from formal investigations of research misconduct

In MVM, there is a recognition of the need to reinforce and promote the behaviours expected of staff. The College has maintained a practice of

actively promoting resources relating to research integrity and research culture to staff and students through a variety of initiatives.

In S&E, a perception was expressed that the lack of transparency referred to at section 5.2 could also represent a strong impediment to learning lessons from research misconduct investigations. The nub of the issue is a view that HR and legal requirements around protecting the identity of those involved in an allegation mean that very little information about what happened is made public. This in turn means that the wider community is unable to benefit from lessons learned. An analogy is drawn with health and safety procedures, where incidents can stem from a simple mistake that others could avoid if they knew the details.

Following the conclusion of research misconduct investigations, there needs to be more concerted action in order to make anonymised learning points available to the research community.

5.4 Assurance: Creating and embedding an environment in which all staff, researchers and students feel comfortable to report instances of research misconduct

AHSS

At College level, work has been ongoing to create a supportive research culture, where ethical issues can be discussed at any point in the research journey. As mentioned in section 3, the 'bring a thorny issue' standing item at College Research Ethics Committee meetings fosters open discussion and the sharing of knowledge and good practice between ethics leads. It also allows for a supportive environment for colleagues to share examples of potential bad practice and seek advice.

The College Research Ethics, Integrity and Governance Team also works constantly to build and strengthen relationships between ethics leads, ethics reviewers and researchers. This work enables colleagues to feel comfortable discussing difficult issues and seeking advice and support over potential ethics risks and challenges.

The Team has also undertaken work on the equality, diversity and inclusion aspects of research, with the aim of alleviating the power differentials that may militate against the reporting of misconduct. The College Equality Diversity and Inclusion lead, Jenny Hoy, spoke to a meeting of the College Research Ethics Committee as part of this initiative.

There is also clear guidance on the updated College Research Ethics and Integrity website about research misconduct policies, pathways for reporting and also signposts to key contacts.

Across the AHSS Schools, a variety of approaches are taken. Notable examples include the School of Law, where a combination of induction sessions, the School meeting, committees and one-to-one meetings are used to build rapport with staff and students. This is felt to be key in creating an environment where suspected instances of misconduct can be reported, with staff and students confident that these will be dealt with professionally and sensitively.

In the Business School, the Academic Misconduct Officer has conducted a programme of presentations for student cohorts to raise awareness of academic misconduct. The topics are as follows:-

- What is academic misconduct?
- How do our staff report them?
- How do we evaluate misconduct cases?
- How do we make decisions?

MVM

At College level, the processes for reporting allegations of research misconduct are clearly signposted on the MVM webpages. MVM has also appointed Research Staff Champions across the College who are named individuals and who are the first point of contact for individuals with concerns. The College and University are also in the late stages of preparing a research integrity training module specifically for CMVM clinical research investigators.

In the context of clinical research, any ACCORD staff member, or any member of a research team conducting a study sponsored by the University of Edinburgh and/or NHS Lothian may identify potential fraud or misconduct as measured against the relevant Standard Operating Procedure. When a report of potential fraud or misconduct is made, it is referred to the ACCORD Quality Assurance Manager, and senior ACCORD representatives are informed. This initial report may be made in person, by telephone, or by email. Anonymous telephone calls or emails are accepted. Should an investigation by the employer of the respondent conclude that fraud or misconduct did take place, the aim is to ensure that appropriate remedial action is taken as quickly as possible.

S&E

In the School of Biological Sciences, information around how to make an allegation of misconduct can be found on the School's Ethics Wiki page and senior staff raise the issue at School meetings and the annual Ethics Day. However, colleagues running Ethics Day have reported that they find it difficult to strike the right balance in addressing the reporting of research misconduct. There is a perception that overly encouraging reporting may result in false accusation by students who are not getting along with their supervisors, while to be fully frank about the typical consequences of making an allegation leads to underreporting.

The School's immediate response to this challenge is to encourage informal discussions prior to making a formal allegation, however it is felt that changes at university level are also required if the issue is to be effectively addressed.

It is understood that the practical consequence of initiating an allegation of misconduct against a supervisor is that, if upheld, the student will have to find a new supervisor. The disruption to the student's doctoral studies is perceived to be unacceptably damaging without investment in the form of 'resetting the clock' on their doctorate and providing additional funding. Equally, if an allegation is not upheld, the damage to the working relationship is likely to be so significant that similar disruption will result.

The conundrum lies in addressing these barriers to the good faith reporting of suspected misconduct, while at the same time avoiding incentives to those who may be tempted to abuse support mechanisms as a way of leaving a doctoral lab they have tired of and starting afresh.

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, Research Funders' policies on Research Ethics and Integrity.

Key points of contact across the University for research integrity and ethics related queries

University Whistleblowing Policy

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).

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