University of Edinburgh

Annual Research Ethics and Integrity Report (2015-16)
University of Edinburgh's Risk Management Committee

Submitted by: Research Policy Group (RPG)

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Executive Summary

The University of Edinburgh is dedicated to maintaining the highest standards of scholarly and scientific integrity in its research. The University follows the five commitments set out in the Universities UK Concordat to support Research Integrity[1]. The UUK Concordat has the support of the four national Higher Education Funding Bodies as well as Research Councils UK, the NHS National Institute for Health Research and the Wellcome Trust.

The University expects all its staff – both academic and support - as well as students and academic visitors using University research facilities to carry out high quality research that is in line with the UUK Concordat. As a signatory to the UUK Concordat, the University is expected to present a short annual statement to the University's governing body and make it publicly available thereafter.

This report illustrates the practical measures undertaken at the University to foster a research environment that promotes good practice as well as having clear processes in place for investigating allegations of research misconduct. The process that underpins the generation of this report is intended to drive internal review and promote good practice.

Since the publication of the University's first annual report UUK has published a progress report which illustrates how the sector overall is implementing the Concordat. The University's Research Ethics and Integrity Review Group is assessing how we can adopt the next steps in the progress report to ensure that we are, and <u>can show</u>, that we are promoting a positive culture of research integrity. We are particularly conscious of this need in the light of the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee undertaking an inquiry into Research Integrity.

During 16-17 academic session the University is revising its Research Misconduct Policy in light of changes that Research Councils UK have made to its 'Guidelines on Governance of Good Research conduct', which we must comply with in order to receive funding. This change means that all Organisations in receipt of RCUK funding must develop policies and procedures that will enable them to report on informal allegations of research misconduct in addition to formal allegations. Via its Research Ethics Integrity and Review Group, RPG is taking responsibility for ensuring the University is able to meet these additional obligations and researchers at all levels are aware of this change.

Actions and activities undertaken to support and strengthen understanding of research integrity issues

University level

The Research Ethics and Integrity Review Group is working with the Head of Researcher Development and Depute Director of the Institute of Academic Development to set up a Best Practice day.

Research Ethics and Integrity training is primarily delivered at School level and is integrated into arrangements for research training in the three Colleges for new academic staff and postgraduates (both research and taught). Reflecting the University's commitment to 'seeing all our undergraduates develop as

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[1]Links to all relevant internal and external Research Ethics and Integrity websites are given in the annex

student/ researchers', Schools are increasingly incorporating training to relevant undergraduate courses. The examples are intended to illustrate the types of training provided in 2015/16 and key new developments.

<u>Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (AHSS)</u>

The College has made number of changes to its operations as a result of the audit of its research ethics and integrity procedures, which was a key feature of the 2014/15 report. A key College level change was to appoint an Associate Dean for Research Ethics (0.2 FTE; 2 years). Since taking up appointment on 1 August 2016, the post holder has proposed a programme of training events for 2016-17 and 2017-18, which at the time of writing, was being discussed with the College's Research Ethics Committee and the Institute of Academic Development.

Having reviewed its policies, procedures and forms in 2014/15 as a part of the College wide audit, the School of Law adopted a comprehensive approach to disseminating information about the streamlined processes and more concise forms to all staff. As part of the dissemination drive, a research funding workshop held for staff included a session on Research Ethics and Integrity.

A seminar on Research Ethics was part of the Advanced Doctoral training programme for PhD students in the School of History Classics and Archaeology. This seminar was in addition to coverage of the research Ethics and integrity issues, which is mandatory for all the school's new PhD students in welcome week.

<u>Medicine and Veterinary Medicine (MVM)</u>

In addition to the training delivered by the Academic and Clinical Centre for Research and Development (ACCORD), the Edinburgh Education Programme and a two-day Clinical training Management Course, the Deanery of Molecular, Genetic and Population Health Sciences offers an online Clinical Trials MSc. This taught postgraduate programme is targeted at Health professionals and incorporates a thorough grounding in all aspects of Research Integrity and Ethics, including the appropriate treatment of data derived from patients or tissue taken from patients.

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

The School of Informatics now includes ethics training within its Professional Issues course that is delivered to undergraduates in year 4. The course is compulsory for all degrees that are accredited by the British Computing Society. The focus of the course is on privacy and data protection as these are the issues most pertinent to Informatics professionals.

Ethics and Integrity teaching material developed originally for use in undergraduate Geography Research methods courses, has been extended so that it is can be used to introduce research ethics concepts to all undergraduates on programmes belonging to the School of Geosciences.

<u>Central University Support Services</u>

The University Research Integrity webpages have been completely overhauled so they truly act as a University-wide repository. The pages are regularly maintained to ensure they are up to date.

Outline of processes for ethical approval of research proposals, dealing with allegations of misconduct and review of these processes

Processes for ethical approval of research proposals and dealing with allegations of misconduct

The 2014-15 Research Ethics and Integrity Report which is available from the Research Integrity website provides a detailed description of Governance arrangements at University, College and School level. That report describes three layers of the University's annual research ethics and integrity review process, in which School review their research ethics and integrity policies and practices, these reports are assessed at College level and used as the basis as the College reports which are in turn reviewed at University level. Schools are expected to base their reports around the RCUK's Research Integrity assurance questions. This means that School reports can be used not only as a part of internal review but also enable the University to readily demonstrate to RCUK that we have procedures for governing research practice and investigating allegations of research misconduct.

Governance and Strategic Planning intend to present the Governance information in the 2014-15 report as a standalone document that will be available to anyone visiting the University's Research Integrity website[2]. As a result detailed governance information is not repeated in this annual report. The governance document will be reviewed annually to ensure that it is up to date. Every five years a full description of the governance arrangements for the ethical approval of research proposals and dealing with allegations of research misconduct will part of the annual report.

Review of processes

CAHSS

As previously stated, AHSS appointed an Associate Dean for Research Ethics. The post-holder is responsible for ensuring that the recommendations from the audit of the College's research Ethics policies mentioned in last year's annual report are carried out. Reflecting the increased awareness of research governance and sponsorship requirements for research relating to healthcare and provide more support to the Associate Dean, a full-time Research Governance Co-ordinator was also appointed in 2015/16. The post holder works alongside the staff in the Academic and Clinical Centre for Research and Development and the MVM Research Governance Office.

Several AHSS schools have extended the scope of their monitoring of activity that could come with within the scope of the UUK Concordat and now expect all undergraduate students to complete ethics forms online as a part of the dissertation support system. The use of an online system captures more activity that was possible with the former paper based systems.

CMVM

Recognising the growth in interest in research that is not within the scope of governance of clinical experiments or those involving animals, MVM has set up Deanery level ethics and integrity committees, with a tiered system broadly similar to those operating in the other Colleges. Following the introduction of a self-certification form for assessing research proposals that involved student volunteers, the College's Advisory Committee that used consider such requests has revised its operations so that it can consider the growing number of medical or veterinary pedagogic research proposals.

CSE

In the 2016 Summer vacation the CSE College Office employed a student as an intern who, with contributions from School Ethics Officers and Research Administrators, carried out a full review of CSE Research Ethics and Integrity websites and processes. The outcome of this review was an updated College Ethics and Integrity website and the sharing of best practice between several Schools. The School of Geosciences has started to use Sharepoint©[3] to hosts its ethics and integrity form for research proposals to streamline the processing of the School's ethics applications

High level statement about allegations of research misconduct and any formal investigations

All Schools in AHSS and S&E have nominated staff who would be responsible for the initial assessments of allegations of research misconduct, which would be in accordance with the University's Research Misconduct policy for staff. In MVM, an allegation would also involve ACCORD if it were a breach of good Clinical Practice. Allegations of misconduct that concern research involving animals would involve the Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Body.

Schools report the number of research cases submitted for approval as well as any remedial action that has had to be undertaken. For research, the Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Board or ACCORD maintains involving animals or patients / clinical tissue taken from them the records respectively.

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[2] Links to all relevant internal and external Research Ethics and Integrity websites are given in the annex
[3] SharePoint is a web-based application that the University supports which allows for internal and secure storage and retrieval of electronic documents. The application integrates with Microsoft programmes

Concerning allegations, there was one reported incident involving an NHS patient, which was due to the lack of identification of research-related questionnaires amongst ordinary NHS issued forms. The School acknowledged the issue and incorporated more guidance and scrutiny to the assessment of projects of this ilk. This was a positive outcome for all involved.

There are two ongoing allegations that are being investigated. In both cases the schools in question have undertaken a review of their procedures to improve awareness of good research practice. The ACCORD office reported that the small number of issues that it has had cause to investigate. These have not been deemed to be breaches of good Clinical Practice as they were administrative errors involving visit window timelines or minor misunderstandings of eligibility criteria.

The Colleges are aware that RCUK expect the bodies it funds to develop policies and procedures that enable them to report informal and formal allegations of research misconduct. Via REIRG, RPG will work together with ACCORD and the Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Board to revise their procedures accordingly.

Report annex

University websites

- **University Research Integrity homepage**
  Hosted and maintained by Governance and Strategic Planning

  Links to the REIRG website; External online training resource; University policies relevant to Research ethics and Integrity; Research Funders' policies on Research ethics and Integrity.

College Research Ethics and Integrity websites

- College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences
- College of Science and Engineering
- College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine

Academic and Clinical Office for Research and Development

- **ACCORD**

Covers all research within the scope of NHS Research Ethics Committee Review and all clinical trials covered by the Medicines for Human Use (Clinical trial regulations)

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

- UUK concordat on Research Integrity
- UUK Concordat progress report (published November 2016)

The five commitments set out in the UUK concordat

- *We are committed to maintaining the highest standards of rigour and integrity in all aspects of research*
- *We are committed to ensuring that research is conducted according to appropriate ethical, legal and professional frameworks, obligations and standards*
- *We are committed to supporting a research environment that is underpinned by a culture integrity and based on good governance, best practice and support for the development of researchers*
- *We are committed to using transparent, robust and fair processes to deal with allegations of research misconduct should they arise*
- *We are committed to working together to* strengthen the integrity of research and to reviewing progress regularly and openly.

UKRIO

- Code of practice for Research – Promoting good practice and preventing misconduct
- Self-Assessment tool for the Concordat to Support Research Integrity
  (hard copy available from University's Research Support Office)

RCUK

- Policies and Guidelines on Governance of good Research Contact
- Research Integrity Assurance questions

House of Commons Science and Technology

- HoC Science and Technology Research Integrity Inquiry
- Parliamentary Office for Science and Technology – Note on Research Integrity
- Russell Group response to the HoC enquiry