University of Edinburgh: Annual statement on research integrity 2022-2023

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	University of Edinburgh
1B. Type of organisation: **higher education institution/industry/independent research performing organisation/other (please state)**	Higher Education
1C. Date statement approved by governing body (DD/MM/YY)	15/09/24
1D. Web address of organisation's research integrity page (if applicable)	https://research-office.ed.ac.uk/research-integrity
1E. Named senior member of staff to oversee research integrity	Name: Lorna Thomson
	Email address: researchintegrity@ed.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	Name: Rowena Lamb
	Email address: researchintegrity@ed.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.

2.1 Description of institutional policies and systems

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 Concordat is underpinned by both the UK Research Integrity Office's Code of Practice for Research and the UKRI Policy on the Governance of Good Research Practice. Together, they represent an essential reference tool to support researchers and research organisations in the conduct of research of the highest quality and standards.

Responsibility for safeguarding the integrity of research at the university is shared across the university. Centrally, the **Edinburgh Research Office** owns the **Ethics Policy** and the **Research Misconduct Policy**. The **Research Governance, Compliance & Risk team** (RGC&RT) in the **Edinburgh Research Office** is responsible for ensuring that the policies remain fit for purpose and compliant with the Concordat to support research integrity, as well as guidance published by the **UK Research Integrity Office**, and to liaise nationally and internationally on integrity and ethics related topics that impact the University and its research.

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. Each college has their own Research Ethics and Integrity webpages, as well as their own structures and processes for managing ethical review for staff and students. Each college has a Named Person in respect of allegations of research misconduct, and conducts and manages investigations concerning their college.

This annual report represents a snapshot of the hard work being carried out by colleagues across the University to put our institutional commitment to strengthening the integrity of our research into practice. 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.

Links to previous Annual Research Integrity Reports can be found by visiting the dedicated section of **Edinburgh Research Office's** Research Integrity webpages. All links referenced in this report can be found in **Annex A** to this report.

2.2 Communications and engagement

University level

Information on the University's policies and processes are openly available on the university website. This is supported by a number of internal sites and SharePoint sites, hosting further guidance and information to support researchers, which is updated regularly, as well as more direct communication channels.

Ensuring wide membership of the **Research Ethics and Integrity Review Group**, as well as working groups focussed on research related areas, such as research culture and research misconduct, promote and enable cross-institutional input into discussions and decision-making.

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 following represents examples of practice across our three colleges.

CAHSS

The College provides direct communication to the **School Ethics Leads** on matters of policy, practice, and research culture (via the College Research Ethics Committee) as well as direct communication to researchers on processes and policies of research ethics and integrity (via SharePoint and website pages).

To help maintain high standards of research integrity, schools have a variety of communication and engagement pathways to promote research ethics and good practice; including school Research Ethics SharePoint and webpages, newsletters, weekly round-up emails, lunchtime seminars social media and through the work of the RECs. Lunchtime seminars enable staff and PhD researchers to present their research and facilitate cross subject area thought and discussion, as well as providing researchers with a space to develop emerging research, explore different avenues of existing research or to reflect on research that is complete.

In a number of schools, communication and engagement is led by the Ethics Lead with support from colleagues in subject areas, and subject areas ethics convenors work day to day with the practical elements of the ethics process, reporting to school level any areas

for improvement. In some schools, line managers are tasked with raising research ethics in annual research reviews with colleagues to encourage discussion around positive research culture.

Most schools ensure there is a standing item on the **Research Committee** agenda to provide an update regarding any ethical development or issues for their consideration. Ethics Leads in schools are pro-active in attending training sessions for both Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught students to enable them to engage with ethical considerations during the development of their dissertations. Some schools have introduced ethical drop-in sessions/surgeries to allow researchers to engage directly in discussion regarding any elements of the ethics of their research that they may need support with.

CMVM

To guide researchers through the various regulatory and ethical requirements, the **CMVM Research Office** produced a flowchart as guidance, which is held on the **CMVM Research Ethics and Integrity website** and **SharePoint** pages. In addition, the **EMREC**, **HERC**, **VERC** and **AWERB** have specific up-to-date websites or SharePoint sites where application forms, templates, access to training materials and research ethics and integrity best practice materials are shared.

Within CMVM researchers also have access to support provided by a joint sponsor office between NHS Lothia**n** and the University of Edinburgh; the **Academic and Clinical Central Office for Research and Development** (ACCORD).

In addition, the **Animal Welfare Ethical Review Body** (AWERB) meets monthly to consider and advise UoE licence holders on whether to support Project Licence applications involving the use of animals in research.

CSE

The **Schools of Biological Sciences**, **Engineering**, **GeoSciences**, and **EPCC** each have their own internal webpages covering integrity and ethics, which are updated regularly.

Within the School of Mathematics information on regulations and guidance including updates and changes, are disseminated via periodic emails to all staff and school forum as well updates at staff meetings, to ensure that all researchers are aware of the need for ethical review. The proper attribution of intellectual contributions is the most relevant integrity related topic for the School, and this is ingrained in the teaching and training at any level, starting with appropriate citations in an undergraduate thesis. The **School of Physics and Astronomy** provide a query system to all researchers within the School via their website, with researchers receiving a response from the **Ethics Office**r within 24 hours. In addition to the internal wiki, staff are updated on ethics, integrity, and research

culture information biannually through staff seminars.

The **School of Engineering** completed and implemented the **School Research Strategy**, which was created with involvement from all staff within the School. The strategy sets out the School's vision and is available on the wiki site, alongside information on research environment and culture. In addition, the new intention-to-submit process includes clearer guidance for applicants and Head of Research Institutes to support early identification of support required.

Within the **School of GeoSciences** there is a three-tier review process that all students and staff (including emeritus) must engage with, whether funded or not. The policies are disseminated to all staff and students through the School webpages and regular emails, which include information on relevant training opportunities. Beyond this the **School's Research Ethics and Integrity Committee** are available to staff as a source of guidance and advice for grant applications. Similarly, students are supported by class-based discussions of ethics and/or mentoring by supervisors.

In the **School of Biological Sciences**, a representative from each institute sits on the **Ethics Committee** who are able to be on the agenda of their institute's faculty meetings; a main mechanism for disseminating ethical issues to the faculty. Ethical review is embedded into student work with students completing ethics applications for their projects, including undergraduate honours students who complete an ethics checklist, which is designed to identify any ethical issues which can then be discussed with their supervisors.

Since 2007, the school has run a postgraduate student **Ethics Day**, covering fraud, data management, statistics, the scientific process, diversity and bullying. Students are given a series of lectures dealing with 3 core relationships that scientists have to deal with. The first of these is their relationship with their data and covers what constitutes fraud, statistics and reproducibility, responsibilities for data management and storage, and data ownership. The second focuses on the immediate lab environment where relevant interactions include those with their supervisors and colleagues, and is focused on positive community behaviour, bullying and harassment, and expectations at different levels of career evolution. The third is focused on the scientist's relationship to the greater scientific community and society, and includes ethical aspects of publication and peer review both as processes and as community duties, interactions with media such as press releases, and public engagement and education.

In addition to the lectures, there are interactive sessions, including the discussion of 4-5 scenarios discussed within groups, followed by a wider discussion and a panel discussion later in the day, as well as time for the submission and discussion of anonymous questions from attendees. Attendees are also encouraged to approach any members of the Ethics Committee in full privacy and confidence if they have any concerns.

The plans for Ethics Day evolve each year taking into account feedback from students, the

Post-Graduate Office and any current issues arising.

2.3 Culture, development and leadership

University level

The University of Edinburgh very much recognises that supporting and enabling a positive research culture is vital to its success; a culture that nurtures and recognises community, openness, good research practice and fair recognition. In February 2023 the **Research Cultures Action Plan** was agreed by **University Executive**, with the **Research Cultures Delivery plan** developed over the summer. The delivery plan sets out the specific measures that will be taken to deliver the Research Cultures Action Plan, and is publicly available on the Edinburgh Research Office's Research Culture webpage.

The Research Cultures Action Plan is overseen by the **Research Strategy Group**, Chaired by the Vice Principal Research and Enterprise. Alongside this, the **Research Cultures Forum**, made up of representatives from across the University, was actively engaged in the development of the action plan.

To further support implementation three new posts will be created in the **Institute for Academic Development**, to provide careers support for early career researchers, PI training, and a new senior professional post to lead on Research Cultures work.

The research culture webpage also provides access to the commitments the University has made and supports, including the Concordat to support research integrity, the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment, the Researcher Development Concordat and the Technician Commitment. In 2022, the University additionally signed up to the Coalition of Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA).

To ensure sharing of best practice and a coordinated approach, as well as reducing the potential for duplication, the **Concordat Implementation Group** (CIG) was created to ensure a collaborative approach to embedding the core principles and practices from the Researcher Development Concordat and Technician commitment into university initiatives via an agreed concordat action plan.

In addition, to the above, there is also a **Technician Commitment action plan** setting out the University's plan for supporting technicians in the following areas:

- Visibility - Ensuring that all technicians within the organisation are identifiable and that the contribution of technicians is visible within and beyond the institution
- Recognition – Supporting technicians to gain recognition through professional registration
- Career development – Enabling career development opportunities for technicians through the provision of clear, documented career pathways

- Sustainability - Ensuring the future sustainability of technical skills across the organisation and that technical expertise is fully utilised

The following represents examples of practice across our three Colleges.

To further the University's commitment in respect of technicians, in February 2023 the University Executive approved the following recommendations:

- Creation of a University of Edinburgh technician definition for staff roles who would be within scope of the TALENT commission

- Creation of a senior strategic lead for technical staff, subject to further discussion on grading, terms and reporting line

- A feasibility study to be conducted on running a skills survey of staff in roles

- Adopting a university-wide Fair Publication Policy to recognise the contribution and raise visibility of technical staff in research

- Optimising the Technician Steering Committee reporting structure

CAHSS

During 2022-2023 **CAHSS** undertook a range of culture, development and leadership tasks, including updating key ethics and integrity frameworks, providing training and materials for schools, and facilitating key discussion spaces around research ethics, integrity and culture issues (detailed later in this report).

To help ensure that research culture is a live component, schools make a conscious effort to include research ethics and integrity in on-going discussions around research culture. Further, updates and improvements to guidance, systems, processes and training for ethics and integrity are based on suggestions from staff members and students across the school. Centrally provided leadership and training opportunities are signposted to, and (where appropriate), individuals are actively encouraged to consider these

The following are examples of specific activities undertaken in schools to promote a positive research culture and foster high standards of research integrity:

The **School of Health in Social Science** have developed a Postgraduate Researcher Ethics Series, a school funded series of seminars on ethics and integrity, with guest speakers from across the University.

Moray House School of Education & Sport introduced ongoing monthly Researcher Development Sessions focused on ethical challenges, and led by ethics leads. They involve short online presentations (which are recorded), followed by non-recorded open discussion and Q&A opportunities; a recent topic included a focus on the new University research ethics policy.

The **Graduate School of Moray House School of Education and Sport** provided a

programme of bespoke Postgraduate Researcher workshops (e.g., ethics and data), as well as signposting to the **Institute for Academic Development** support available.

The **School of Law** have an **ECPR** group who, with the support of their representative, explore development and training opportunities that are targeted to their career stages, as well as providing a supportive environment.

Moray House School of Education & Sport holds a research mentoring programme which has been in place for a few years and aims to support colleagues in need of support/steering around research. This included providing support around research planning, completion of outputs etc.

A group of colleagues in the **School of Literatures, Languages and Cultures**, and the **School of Social and Political Science** (with the support of the College) moved forward in creating a collaborative space for reflection on ethics (including in relation to the emotional stresses of complex research). This work gave rise to the **Ethical Pressure on Thinking group**, launched in June 2023 with a symposium including external and internal speakers.

CMVM

To support the **Research Cultures Action Plan**, **CMVM** created a College Research Culture Hub website. The website includes the **CMVM Research Culture Catalogue** which collects and catalogues examples of actions, initiatives and projects that happen in the College, and which are aimed at improving research culture at different levels and scales. The catalogue has received excellent feedback and is proving to be a valuable resource for both academic and professional services staff. In addition, the **CMVM Research Office** continue to host regular monthly research culture sessions for CMVM research managers and other professional services staff. These meetings provide an opportunity for informal discussion on research culture topics, sharing good practice and challenges, and learning about relevant projects and developments in the College and the wider University.

In addition, the University and CMVM are in the late stages of preparing a research integrity training module specifically for CMVM clinical research investigators.

CSE

Within CSE, the **School of Biological Sciences** (SBS) has a mentoring/support program for post-docs, providing another forum for raising ethical issues. The aim is to have a member of the **Ethics Committee**, who is also one of the mentors, to attend the forum to facilitate dissemination of the ethics culture. The School also seeks to arrange one or two lectures each year on issues relating to ethics/fraud; often journal representatives discussing how they check for image manipulation etc. These lectures are generally well attended by postdoctoral researchers, and are also a way to promote ethics amongst

faculty staff and students.

The **School of Chemistry** takes a multifaceted approach to reinforce their commitment to ethical research practices and a healthy research culture. This includes polices relating to ethical conduct, data management and responsible authorship that are supported by local monitoring and reporting mechanisms, and regular communication of expectations.

The **School of Engineering Postdoctoral Research Associates Forum** now has representatives from each of the seven Research Institutes, whose role is to feedback to and engage with the PDRA community and to gain insight into what support is needed.

Within the **School of Mathematics**, positive and successful mentorship plays a significant role in the promotion and reward process. Many internal seminars and working groups encourage sharing of ideas, leading to a collaborative environment, as well as early feedback improving the quality and rigour of the research undertaken. The School regularly surveys post-doctoral researchers about their mentoring experience, following-up on potential problems. In addition, second supervisors discuss the student/advisor relationship in their regular meeting with the student each semester, and the training for PhD mentors includes this topic.

2.4 Monitoring and reporting

University level

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**.

As part of annual reporting in research integrity, and to support the creation of the university annual report, each college submits an annual report to REIRG for discussion.

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 following represents examples of practice across our three colleges.

CAHSS

School RECs alongside **School administrative teams** monitor, coordinate and report on ethics applications and processes. Each school creates an annual report on ethics and integrity activities, reflecting on the previous academic year.

There are plans for a formal auditing of online applications and systems for 2024/2025.

CMVM

In respect of clinical research, as part of the **ACCORD Quality Management System** (QMS), there are a number of policies and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) relating to quality, the identification, handling and onward reporting of serious breaches of Good Clinical Practice or protocols, suspected fraud, research misconduct and the management of protocol deviations and violations. These documents are managed by the **ACCORD Quality Assurance (QA) Manager** and are subject to review before two years have elapsed since the effective date of each SOP. Review and appropriate updates are made by the **University of Edinburgh** and **NHS Lothian Heads of Research Governance**, the **CMVM Research Governance Managers**, **CMVM Clinical Research Facilitators**, the **NHS Lothian QA Manager** and **Senior Clinical Trial Monitor**.

Any ACCORD staff member or any member of a research team conducting a study sponsored by the University of Edinburgh and/or NHS Lothian can identify potential fraud or misconduct in accordance with the relevant SOP which is submitted to the ACCORD QA Manager and senior ACCORD representatives are informed. This initial contact may be made in person, via telephone or via e-mail. Anonymous telephone calls or e-mails are accepted. If the representatives believe that the event does not constitute fraud or misconduct, no further action is taken and the decision recorded. Alternatively, the representatives will instruct the QA Manager to inform the substantive employer of the individual suspected of fraud/misconduct. This may be the Head of School for the research involved, or the Head of College if there is a conflict of interest. The employer will then investigate the incident and convey the outcome to ACCORD. If it is concluded that fraud/misconduct did take place, remedial action is undertaken as quickly as possible.

CSE

In the **School of Biological Sciences**, records of ethical evaluations of projects are maintained and project numbers assigned at the initiation of projects. Student ethical review records are maintained on their student record. All records relating to research

misconduct are maintained according to data protection requirements.

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.

University level

To better support the university's commitment to the promotion of best practice and a positive research culture, the university provided a substantial financial commitment towards research culture, integrity and ethics, in line with the University's Research Strategy. As part of this commitment, a new team was created within the Edinburgh Research Office. The Research Governance, Compliance and Risk team will support the university in meeting its regulatory and legal obligations and upholds its commitments to the highest standards of research integrity, governance and compliance, including in respect of trusted research. The Head of Research Governance, Compliance and Risk was recruited towards the end of this reporting period, and will take up their role in October 2023.

As part of the university's commitment to supporting good research practice, a healthy research culture and best practice in research and researcher evaluation, the university organised the first **Good Research Practice Week** in November 2022.

The week is open to all University of Edinburgh researchers, postgraduate research students, technicians and research support professional services colleagues, and is designed to help share and celebrate initiatives taking place across the university. Awards are given for initiatives in the following categories; good research citizenship, responsible research, open research, and positive disruptor.

The Good Research Practice week is due to be held again in November 2023.

CAHSS

At college level, SharePoint and webpages were updated to include information on submitting ethics applications, College Sponsorship, guidance on ethical topics, and information about the Ethics Committee, as well as instructions for raising concerns regarding research misconduct. Specific examples of the above include:

- Updating the Ethics and Governance SharePoint and webpages, and CAHSS Research Ethics Framework (CREF).

- The formulation of the CAHSS Research Integrity Framework (CRIF). This is a new Framework, where the previous version of CREF had included some aspects of research integrity. The CRIF was considered desirable in order to better distinguish issues of research ethics and research integrity. In addition, the CRIF: outlines the principles of research integrity which all CAHSS researchers must adhere to; outlines the responsibility of and accountability of colleagues in good research practice and in understanding what constitutes research misconduct; outlines the responsibilities of supervisors in relation to supporting students with research integrity; outlines the research integrity complaints process.

- Training sessions and materials via the **College Research Ethics Committee** (CREC), which included topics on: boundaries between ethics and integrity issues; defining when ethical processing is necessary in relation to KEI; ethics surrounding safeguarding and research with children; copyright and authorship practices.

- Facilitated discussions for key issues in research ethics, research culture, and research integrity was provided via CREC. Discussion areas included: PI responsibilities in relation to early career researchers; managing ethics non-submitters in line with the 2022 University Ethics Policy; building an understanding of research ethics within schools; strategies to recognise ethics leads' time in ethics work.

At school level, there was a great focus to review and improve ethics processes and also the availability of information around ethics and ethics review. Some schools also created annotated template applications or user guides for the college online ethics system, to help applicants understand the reasoning behind the questions asked, which helped applicants engage with the process. These also included links to relevant university policies and processes. One school ran a series of drop-in sessions for UG and PGT students to allow them to discuss submission of ethics applications with individual researchers, including guidance around potential ethical issues and the opportunity to troubleshoot areas they have found difficult.

One school oversaw the translation of the college PIS and PCF into five languages commonly used in their research. Schools provided a series of training sessions across the year, which included a research ethics workshop examining case studies of the type which are commonly found and ethics surgeries, allowing researchers to discuss difficult issues.

One school established a School REC; a major development for helping to establish a system of independent review of ethics applications and embedding research ethics in subject areas. REC meetings serve as a forum for developing policies and processes, and for review of particular REIG applications for training purposes.

One school undertook a Review of Support for Research Initiative (RSRI) in order to identify and fill gaps in support, and enhance the organisational structure. Positively, this review will result in a number of new posts to enhance to professional services support for research and research ethics.

CMVM

In the past 12 months, all CMVM RECs have made a specific and targeted effort to diversify their reviewer pool and specifically include equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in their agendas. This has resulted in larger reviewer groups/committees with more diverse lived experiences, protected characteristics, gender balance and varied subject-area expertise. All CMVM RECs invite expert reviewers to the pool when required.

A number of initiatives to support and strengthen research ethics and integrity have been delivered across the RECs, including training activities, such as for postgraduate students and researchers on completing applications, and liaising with MSc programme coordinators.

CMVM RECs provide advice and support to applicants, including meeting individually with researchers and supervisors to support more complex applications and ethically challenging scenarios.

Further example of REC specific initiatives are as follows:

HERC

A number of HERC members sit on the **Easter Bush Campus EDI Committee** which has proven invaluable when reviewing complex cases, which include the use of secondary/internet data, challenging consent aspects, gender, culture, or vulnerable participants.

As a result of these efforts, over the past year there has been a noticeable improvement in the quality of ethics submissions and more robust ethically sound research being proposed.

A new HERC SharePoint site was launched in summer 2023. This ensures that students, researchers, external supervisors, and staff have access (previously only students had access to Learn) to a wide range of information, including the ethics process and templates, guidance, and training information. Most recent updates include guidelines on 'ethics and autoethnographic research', as well as 'ethics and using images and video from the internet'.

VERC

During 2022-23, the VERC Co-Chairs participated as founding members of the **UK Association of Veterinary Ethics Committees**, which aims to promote good practice and harmonise standards in relation to veterinary ethical review across the UK and ensure the

R(D)SVS is aligned with UK best practice.

EMREC

Recognising that EMREC was receiving an increasing number of global health applications and that some reviewers may have limited experience of global health research, guidance was produced to support reviewers in carrying out global health reviews, with input received from experienced global health researchers, **HERC**, and **ACCORD**. The guidance emphasised that while core principles of ethics review are the same irrespective of whether a UK or international context, there may be additional factors to be aware of in global health reviews. These include cultural considerations, legal contexts, literacy and language issues, and inclusion of vulnerable populations.

As public involvement and engagement with research are increasingly important within CMVM, a **Working Group** was set up under the leadership of **Professor Sue Fletcher-Watson** (previous CMVM Co-Director of Research Ethics) to develop guidance on Public Engagement with Research and drew on expertise within EMREC and beyond. This led to the development of two documents, Public Engagement with Research Taxonomy, and a Self-assessment tool, both of which are available on the EMREC SharePoint site. The emphasis is on ethical conduct of Public Engagement activities, irrespective of whether not REC review is required.

To support undergraduate and postgraduate taught students and their supervisors in carrying out research dissertation projects and writing ethics applications, three training videos were developed by **Professor Sue Fletcher-Watson**. These focused on the key principles of ethical conduct of research, the processes involved in developing an ethics application, and carrying out independent review of these student applications.

CSE

In the **School of Geosciences**, training offered to students was regularly updated to flexibly meet demand and to encourage engagement with research ethics and integrity across the school. New guidance was also created for undergraduate and MSc dissertation supervisors about the review of dissertation projects, particularly when students wish to take on "high risk" research (e.g., research involving vulnerable populations), as well as updated and expanded guidance to clarify the review process for research conducted as part of UG/MSc coursework (as opposed to dissertations).

In addition, there is now a compulsory ethics screen for all MPhys project work for undergraduates, with the Ethics Officer providing one-to-one advice for students.

Within **EPCC**, as part of supporting the Research Cultures Action Plan, a new internal funding stream was created to enable any member of staff to bid for small amounts of time or resources to pursue individual research topics that could lead to a collaboration, grant proposal or research output.

The **School of Mathematics**, organised the yearly Scottish Mathematical Sciences Training Centre course on "Ethics of Mathematics" and the "Responsible Research and Innovation" for 1st year postgraduate research students. A new "Dignity and respect" officer role created with responsibility for recruitment, mentoring and career development.

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.

University level

In order to further increase support in leading the Research Cultures Action Plan a new Head of Research Culture will be appointed in the next academic year. The Research Governance, Compliance and Risk team will also expand to ensure increased area specific support in the trusted research and research integrity spaces.

CAHSS

Schools have made significant progress in a number of areas which has helped embed research ethics awareness and good practice across the College and there are a number of exciting plans for future development.

Ethics resources and training
Ethics Leads across the schools assisted with the review of IAD online ethics modules. The modules that have been released so far are widely used across the schools and the rest are greatly anticipated. One school introduced an extended induction session with a practical element, for PGRs, to complement the online modules.

Schools have worked extremely hard to update and extend guidance around ethics, integrity and ethics processes, which are available on a number of platforms. Work on this area is continuing and there are future plans for video tutorials and the establishment of formal research mentoring opportunities in some schools.

One school (based on the invitation from Ethics Leads in the School of Informatics), have together developed a set of questions for researchers working on research pertaining to online research as well as large language models. This will be published on SharePoint alongside similar question sets pertaining to collaboration and vulnerabilities. By providing a set of questions to work through, it is hoped it will promote an approach of reflection around ethics, and encourage thorough engagement rather than (only) following best

standards.

Ethics review process and compliance

Schools have been developing more detailed protocols and refining processes for the operation of the RECs and reviews of ethics applications. This includes; changing the review process to make it more effective, with regular committee meetings where issues and Level 2/3 applications are discussed in greater depth; new record keeping processes, resulting in smoother process for applicants and Ethics Committee reviewers; creating a checklist as a tool for a more consistent approach to ethics review and also to support new members of the REIC; and preparing resources to help researchers engage with the ethics process to ensure that their research is being undertaken in an ethically-engaged manner.

In the coming year one school will be hosting a series of research events including a writing retreat and sessions on emerging ethics issues (e.g., in AI and spatial data). This will culminate in a full day research celebration event at the end of Semester 2, which will be the second such event following the success of the 22/23 event held in June.

Another school have set aims within their school research strategy to keep building a positive research culture, including, for example, to foster a healthy research environment and to nurture research careers. Tangible actions to deliver these aims, have been developed that will be put into effect in the coming years. Events such as research presentation days, discussion sessions, research seminar series and research groups have also been planned.

The **School of Health in Social Science** have developed a Postgraduate Researcher Ethics Series, a school funded series of seminars on ethics and integrity, with guest speakers from across the university, and five events are planned for the next academic year.

CMVM

Overall, each REC has taken active steps to increase committee membership, and provided new and existing members with training opportunities to ensure confidence in review, as well as staking steps to address challenging area as they arise. Steps specific to each REC are summarised below.

HERC

HERC has been reflecting on complex research projects, where Health & Safety, conflict of interest, or data ownership are a major factor. This can be particularly challenging where students would like to use data available to them via their employment or via secondary sources. HERC are providing ongoing training for committee members and as well the research community to ensure research integrity. In 2024, HERC will produce guidelines on the use of secondary data. This will seek to address the ethical and consent issues around the use of data publicly available via the internet, as well as via employers.

During this reporting period, HERC launched a new SharePoint site providing more comprehensive resources and guidance. In 2024, it is planned that the Ethics form and guidelines will be updated in order to streamline processes.

VERC

VERC recruited additional members to the committee in order to address the delays caused by the current workload. It was also agreed to streamline the review process and increase proportionate review by creating a 'fast-track' application process for research involving the use of internal clinical data. This process is expected to be in place in the academic year 2023-24.

EMREC

Though plans to develop bespoke resources to support PGR students and supervisors were delayed this year, it is anticipated that these will be developed and delivered during the next academic year. In addition, there are plans to develop guidance for students and staff undertaking research in high-risk research contexts. This will be developed in 2024, in collaboration with **REIRG**.

CSE

In the next academic year, CSE will appoint a new Dean of Research Culture and REF who will play a pivotal role in focusing on the enhancement of research culture. The new Dean will be responsible for leading on initiatives to foster an inclusive, collegial and vibrant research culture in the context of the University Research Culture Action Plan. This includes:

- targeted support for under-represented groups and early career researchers;

- developing and rolling out career development programmes for all research staff, and with a special focus on enhancing career pathways for technicians;

- planning and overseeing the scaling-up of training programmes for ECRs, and for research leaders.

The new role will also have college oversight of ethics and integrity and act as Named Person for the college, as well as providing oversight of a university-wide online research ethics system, and supporting the university's sustainability commitments as part of responsible research and innovation.

In addition, a new Research Support Officer will be appointed with a focus on research culture and governance, who will support the delivery of the University's Research Cultures Action Plan.

School of Chemistry

In order to address the need for increased support, a School Research Committee will be set up with members of the committee taking on the role of Ethics Officer.

EPCC

EPCC will incorporate a new seminar into training for masters students, which will focus on ethics and integrity, as well as incorporating an overview of research culture.

School of Engineering

Following a trial in 2023, the school will move to a Fellowship panel scheme which will allow for more detailed review and feedback to potential applicants early in the process. The panels will meet three times a year and the first panel will convene in Spring 2024.

2D. Case study on good practice (optional) This section describes anonymised case studies that can be shared as good practice with other organisations.

Support for ethically complex projects

This case study focuses on the provision of support for a Knowledge Exchange and Impact project involving multiple, global partners in authoritarian contexts. The subject matter was sensitive and included research with vulnerable groups. In addition, the research methodology relied on Large Language Models and online research, which together made for a highly complex ethical landscape. In order to support the PI and research team, the school held a 'level' 3 panel, which drew on REC expertise and other topic- and methods-specific expertise, in order to best support the complex research. An iterative ethics process was initiated, with formalized meetings penciled into the research process, and an agreement that ethics surgeries offer a good space for urgent trouble shooting of high-risk issues. Feedback from the research team was that they felt supported and at the same time highly welcomed the initiative of an ad-hoc ethics and data security committee.

This example speaks to the School REC's ambition of being an agile, responsive and supportive infrastructure in place to support ethical robustness in a study where the needs of researcher and participants safety and integrity is of utmost importance and difficult to retain at all times.

Support for career re-integration

As part of efforts to promote a positive research culture, a school setup a bespoke fellowship with the Daphne Jackson Trust to support career re-integration (independently of and prior to the college scheme). After three rounds of recruitment a candidate meeting all criteria was identified in Summer 2023. Pending final review by the Trust of their proposal, it is anticipated that the successful applicant will start their Daphne Jackson fellowship in March 2024.

Support for EPSRC proposals

Within one school each new academic and some senior Post-Doctoral Research Associates are invited to attend an in-house EPSRC proposal workshop. The workshop

consists of two half days about one week apart. During the first day, senior academics discuss EPSRC's proposal assessment (from submission to prioritisation panel), the role of novelty and national importance, and the significance of response letters. Attendees submit an outline proposal in preparation for the second day during which proposals are assessed and ranked during a mock prioritisation exercise. Attendees regularly report that the workshop improved their proposal planning and writing process.

Section 3: Addressing research misconduct

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

This section provides a summary of:

- the relevant organisation policies/ processes for managing research misconduct allegations;

- 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; and

- anonymised key lessons learned from any investigations into allegations of misconduct.

3.1 Summary of relevant organisation policies/ processes including period review

University level

Research Misconduct

Information on research misconduct, including the University's definition and Research Misconduct Policy and procedure is available on the University's Research Office website, alongside the University's Whistleblowing Policy. Information relating to college specific procedures, including reporting forms, are available on college specific webpages.

The Policy was last updated in 2018, and as mentioned in the previous years' report, a draft of a revised Policy and Procedure was completed and under review by the Research Misconduct Policy Review Group. The group was convened by Edinburgh Research Office's Research Integrity Manager and included 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'.

Due to conflicting priorities, the review and completion of the approval process for the drafts was put on hold. It is anticipated that the process will recommence in the next academic year.

Student Conduct – Academic misconduct

The University's academic misconduct procedure, along with the reporting form, is available on the Academic misconduct website. The current version is for cases where the investigation began on or after 18 September 2023. The procedure for cases prior to this is also publicly available.

All forms of academic misconduct are regarded as an offence and are punishable under the University's Code of Student Conduct.

The University has a network of School and College Academic Misconduct Officers (SAMOS/CAMOS) who are responsible for investigating suspected cases at school or college level, and for determining appropriate penalties. College Academic Misconduct Officers are:

- College of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences: Dr David Saunders

- College of Medicine & Veterinary Medicine: Dr Martin Simmen

- College of Science & Engineering: Dr Matt Bell

CAHSS

The College Associate Dean (Research Ethics & Integrity) (ADREI), Dr Sudeepa Abeysinghe is the named person for CAHSS. The named person fields queries regarding research misconduct, via a designated research misconduct email address. These arise from internal contacts as well as externally (generally, via the university-level misconduct pages). The Named Person liaises with the College Academic Misconduct Officer (CAMO) in cases regarding taught students, where research malpractice arises via the dissertation phase of taught programmes. In these cases, misconduct is reviewed via the University Code of Student Conduct.

CMVM

All allegations of misconduct are managed by the Dean of Research (Professor Stuart Forbes), who is the Named Person for the College, as well as the 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 UKRIO Procedure 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 respect of clinical research, all 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 ACCORD office. When necessary, investigations are made to determine if a violation meets the criteria of a serious breach, and for those that do, these investigations are documented and reported to the MHRA GCP Inspectorate.

<u>**CSE**</u>

The Senior Officer (Named Person for the College) responsible for dealing with cases of misconduct is the Chair of the College Research Ethics & Integrity Committee, Professor Andy Mount with Dr Antony Maciocia (Dean of Postgraduate Research) named as deputy. The Named Person receives allegations of misconduct on behalf of the College and ensures that they are investigated appropriately. If the complainant believes that the college Named Person is also in conflict, the University's Whistleblowing Policy is referred to.

3.2 Summary of actions taken to create an environment in which all staff, researchers and students feel comfortable to report instances of misconduct

<u>**CAHSS**</u>

Information and guidance for research misconduct is communicated broadly in schools, across SharePoint pages, webpages, newsletters, ethics meetings/ surgeries and induction sessions. The Academic Services pages on academic misconduct are also sign-posted on school SharePoint pages and websites.

Schools communicate that research integrity in its broadest possible sense is key to the understanding of supporting research through ethics. As such, when advising on ethics, there are discussions about where advice and guidance in the field is headed and how the future ability to publish requires robust ethical research design. As such, emphasis is on promoting good research practice.

Currently, the research misconduct guidance for staff is through signposting to the college and university procedures. In 2022-23, the ADREI and the CAMO developed and provided specific guidance to School Academic Misconduct Officers (SAMOs) on misconduct related to research phases of taught student programmes.

For research misconduct, schools have individuals identified who can provide an informal sounding board for any initial concerns, and are familiar with the research misconduct procedures. Further, one school held a PGR ethics event where researchers were given the opportunity to discuss "what is research misconduct?" in an open and safe environment.

<u>**CMVM**</u>

Currently under review within CMVM is the creation of a Research Integrity Committee with a remit of embedding good research practice across the College in a positive, inclusive and robust environment. CMVM has also appointed Research Staff Champions, named individuals who act as the first point of contact for individuals wishing to raise concerns.

The College has also recently implemented an online informal reporting form relating to research misconduct with the appropriate governance in place to support individuals raising cases.

CSE

Within CSE staff and students are informed at multiple points, though webpages, wikis, email communication and in-person and online events, of good practice and responsibilities as well as the Research Misconduct Policy and the Academic Misconduct Procedure, and the connected processes. There are staff in various schools who act as an informal point of contact for staff and students to raise and discuss concerns with.

As reported in earlier sections, the College implemented a process by which informal allegations of misconduct may be made in the first instance. The School/Centre Named Person is the person who will review the submission of research misconduct as part of the informal allegation stage. If they determine that there is a possibility that the allegation concerns research misconduct, they will notify the College Named Person of the allegation. The School/Centre Named Person may be contacted in advance in order to discuss any details in confidence prior to submission, but it is submission of this form which will constitute the informal reporting of a research misconduct allegation. If the School/Centre Named Person is believed to be conflicted and cannot therefore impartially review the allegation, a reason must be given as to why this person is conflicted and it is then referred directly to the Named Person for the college or their deputy should they also be believed to be conflicted.

3.3 Summary of lessons learnt

CAHSS

Though there is collaboration between the relevant roles, student misconduct is often managed separately from research staff misconduct. Cases of misconduct for research students and where a taught student's misconduct relates to research activities can fall under several areas of practice, and it was noted that this area could be further clarified regarding where the primary responsibility for investigating cases should lay.

One complaint highlighted ethical issues in course design, which was raised at the College REC and work is ongoing within the school to ensure that ethics is more prominent in discussions going forward.

CSE

One allegation led to a school reviewing the processes for managing consultancies involving research staff and school facilities.

An allegation in another school highlighted the importance of opening up discussions on ethics and integrity to the wider community to assist in promoting a culture where students feel able to ask questions and likewise where supervisors present information openly, thereby enabling more open discussions. These open discussions can support the resolution of concerns at an informal stage, as well as clarifying areas that initially present as a concern, but through discussions, are proved not to be.

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

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				
Falsification				
Plagiarism				
Failure to meet legal, ethical and professional obligations	*6*	*1*	*1*	
Misrepresentation (e.g., data; involvement; interests; qualification; and/or publication history)				
Improper dealing with allegations of misconduct				
Multiple areas of concern (when received in a single allegation)				
*Other**				
Total:	**6**	**1**	**1**	
***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.**				
[Please insert response if applicable]				

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, Whistleblowing Policy, Research Funders' policies on Research Ethics and Integrity.

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

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).

Research Talent and Culture homepage

Links to the Research Culture Action Plan, CMVM Research Cultures hub, researcher learning and development, information on the responsible use of metrics.

Technician Commitment

Information on the commitment and the University's Action Plan.

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