

Annual Statement of Compliance with the Concordat to Support Research Integrity 2021-2022

1. Introduction

1.1 The Concordat to Support Research Integrity, published in October 2019, provides a national framework for good research conduct and governance. Its signatories include the Department for the Economy (Northern Ireland), the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, the National Institute for Health Research, the Scottish Funding Council, UK Research and Innovation, Universities UK and the Wellcome Trust.

The Concordat is based on commitment to five principles:

- i. To uphold the highest standards of rigour and integrity in all aspects of research;
- ii. To ensure that research is conducted according to appropriate ethical, legal and professional frameworks, obligations and standards;
- iii. To support a research environment that is underpinned by a culture of integrity and based on good governance, best practice, and support for the development of researchers;
- iv. To use transparent, timely, robust and fair processes to deal with allegations of research misconduct should they arise;
- v. To work together to strengthen the integrity of research and to review progress regularly and openly.

1.2 This annual statement outlines the University's compliance with the governance requirements mandated by the Concordat, highlights progress towards embedding a culture of research integrity across the institution, and sets out an improvement plan to further enhance good practice in research.

1.3 This statement has been considered and approved by the Committee for Open Research and Research Integrity (CORRI), the University Board for Research & Innovation, the University Senate and the University Council.

1.4 The senior lead on all matters relating to research integrity is Professor Parveen Yaqoob, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC) and Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research and Innovation (PVC R&I), and Chair of the CORRI, which oversees implementation of the Concordat. The membership of CORRI comprises a Research Dean, the Head of Research Services, the Head of Governance, the Head of Quality Assurance in Research, the Head of Research Communications and Engagement, the Research Data Manager, the Head of Planning and Reporting, the Associate Director of Library Services, a Specialist Teaching and Research Support Analyst, two academic representatives and an Open Research Champion, who this year is an Early Career Researcher.

1.5 Research integrity is a key element of our University Research Strategy, which states that we will *"improve accessibility and transparency of our research through technology and open research practices; support the reproducibility of research through staff training and by making data and outputs open and accessible through the University's Research Data Archive and the University's institutional repository (CentAUR); sustain a culture of research integrity in line with commitments in the Concordat to Support Research Integrity"*.

1.6 A Working Group, established in October 2019, conducted a reflective institutional review of performance with respect to research integrity across the institution. This Group conducted a detailed self-assessment, using a framework compiled by the UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO). Recommendations for improvement were formulated into an action plan, against which progress has been reported in this annual statement for the last few years. In October 2021, the

Appendix:

UKRIO self-assessment tool was updated; in particular, CORRI discussed the following amendments and clarifications to the self-assessment at its meeting in Spring 2022:

- Policies and systems (section 2.4).
- Research misconduct (section 4).
- Operation and governance of ethics committees (section 2.6).
- Equality, diversity and inclusion and sustainability supported by activities relating to research integrity; this requires further investigation as there is currently nothing relating to research in the UoR Environmental Policy.
- Updated guidance on the structure and content of the annual statement on research integrity, which has been taken into account during the preparation of this year's statement.

2. Policies and systems

2.1 The key committee with oversight of matters relating to research integrity is the CORRI. However, other relevant committees include:

- i. The University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) meets 11 times per year and is comprised of 8 members of academic staff from Schools active in human research, 3 lay members and a member of staff from Academic and Governance Services. The UREC (i) assesses the ethical propriety of all research using human subjects, human samples or human personal data to be undertaken at the University, however funded; (ii) has the power to require modifications and the discretion to disallow research projects on ethical grounds; (iii) offers advice on ethical implications of proposed research and encourages high standards of behaviour with respect to University research involving human beings and (iv) monitors the progress of research projects submitted to it and has the discretion to terminate research on ethical grounds. Local ethics committees operate in Schools where there is a high proportion of research involving humans or animals; in these cases, there is significant interaction and communication between the School committee and the UREC.
- ii. The Animal Welfare Ethics Review Body (AWERB), normally meets three times per year. In addition, separate meetings are held to approve project licences (new and amendments). The AWERB is comprised of academic staff from those Schools undertaking animal research, two lay members, two named veterinary surgeons (large and small animals) and five named animal care and welfare officers. The meeting is Chaired by the University Licence Holder. The University maintains a publicly available website dedicated to the use of animals in research. Statistics on animal use are openly available on the site and are detailed by species ([Animal Research \(reading.ac.uk\)](http://AnimalResearch.reading.ac.uk))

2.2 A number of key individuals and groups play specific roles in supporting research integrity as follows:

Head of Quality Assurance in Research: maintains the University Code of Good Practice in Research (Appendix 1) and is responsible for provision of QAR support and training for staff and postgraduate students. Acts as Secretary to the University Research Ethics Committee.

Director of Research Services: acceptance of research funding awards on behalf of the University, ensuring researchers are aware of their obligations on grants and contracts and that research contracts entered into by the University are fair to all parties involved in collaborations.

Head of Governance: is the Secretary to the University's AWERB and the University's Audit Committee, as well as being a member of the Committee for Open Research and Research Integrity; is responsible for managing processes in relation to student complaints/appeals/academic misconduct/fitness to practice and study; is one of the recipients of whistleblowing reports.

Chief Strategy Officer and University Secretary: holder of the institutional Establishment Licence.

Co-Chairs of the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) and chairs of local ethics committees: see 2.1i above.

Appendix:

UK Reproducibility Network senior academic representative and local network lead: the former is the institutional lead for the UKRN and external stakeholders, while the latter leads on internal networks of researchers.

The Research Engagement Team provides Open Research services with the purpose of increasing the accessibility, transparency and re-usability of research produced at the University. Support is provided for Open Access publishing, effective management, preservation and sharing of research data, and responsible use of metrics. The team is instrumental in delivering the University's Open Research Action Plan and manages the University's Open Research Champions Programme.

- 2.3 Policies relevant to the Concordat are listed in Appendix 1, along with weblink addresses. The CORRI reviews the research integrity element of all policies over a 3-year cycle. A guidance note on preventing harm in research, with associated training, and guidance for responsible evaluation of research are currently being developed. In addition, we have established a working group on Risk and Security in Research charged with developing policies to ensure compliance with the Trusted Research agenda. The current locations of the policies within the University website are somewhat dispersed and not clearly linked to the research integrity pages; there is ongoing work to move policies, check links between them, and check which policies should be available externally in conjunction with a major University website rebuild, which will be completed ahead of the next academic year.
- 2.4 The revised UKRIO self-assessment tool contains a significant amount of new detail about what policies should include and how they should be cross-referenced, reviewed against external standards, be accessible by members of the public and participants in research, and potentially aligned with standards and regulations set out by the Office for Students and the Office of the Independent Adjudicator. It was agreed by CORRI that this would be taken into consideration as part of the normal cycle of review of policies relating to research integrity and reported back to CORRI each time a relevant policy is revised.
- 2.5 The Code of Good Practice in Research was last updated in June 2020 and is available on the research integrity pages of the website ([Research integrity \(reading.ac.uk\)](https://www.researchintegrity.ac.uk)). The next update will be informed by new joint guidance on research ethics from the UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO) and the Association for Research Managers and Administrators (ARMA).
- 2.6 In line with the revised UKRIO self-assessment tool, the Head of Quality Assurance in Research is reviewing the research ethics web pages and identifying gaps in current practice relating to the operation and governance of ethics committees in order to make recommendations to the CORRI on how to address them. Key areas of focus are (i) consideration of formal, systematic feedback from stakeholders, (ii) communication between local and central ethics committees to strengthen common practice, and (iii) monitoring and auditing of compliance with institutional and external requirements.
- 2.7 The CORRI is committed to improving the availability of existing resources and guidance relating to research integrity and is developing a communications plan to support understanding of the Concordat, the legal/ethical frameworks and standards and behaviours relating to research integrity, and to raise awareness about support for researchers in need of assistance and processes for staff to raise concerns. The plan is being aligned with a wider piece of work supporting research culture.

3. Supporting and strengthening research integrity, including research culture and leadership

- 3.1 While research integrity is a core element of the University research strategy (section 1.5) and the CORRI has strategic and operation oversight of research integrity, communication about the Concordat and a healthy research culture has, to date, not been extensive. The allocation of ring-fenced QR funding from Research England specifically for research culture affords the opportunity to address this. We have embarked on a research-led process to understand perceptions of desirable research culture amongst our community and to co-produce a vision of positive research culture and an action plan to achieve it. Accompanying this piece of work will be a communications plan, which will specifically reference the Concordat to Support

Appendix:

Research Integrity, and plans to elicit feedback. Our work on research culture has already begun with some focus groups and will be inclusive of participants across the research ecosystem, including professional services, addressing the need to consider equality, diversity and inclusion. In addition, as part of the Open Research Action Plan, surveys on software practices and engagement and understanding of open research have been conducted by the Research Data Manager and a team of Open Research Champions respectively. These surveys have provided valuable insight into what is working well and areas where improvement is required, which will be followed up by the Committee for Open Research and Research Integrity.

- 3.2 Recognising that training and development of good practice in research is relevant through all career stages, the CORRI conducted an audit of current training provision with a research integrity element and investigated the nature of research integrity training across the sector. It identified a need to provide research integrity training specifically aligned with the Concordat. The first step was to work with the UKRIO to produce a short online introduction to research integrity, grounded in the 2019 Research and Innovation Strategy, and the 2020-26 University Strategy. This is currently being prepared and will be ready to launch in the autumn. The second was to work with the European VIRT2UE project to complement this introduction with a series of in-depth online modules (15 in total); these will be launched in conjunction with the above two modules. The third step was to design tailored training based on five exercises developed by VIRT2UE, adapted for specific research areas. The model is based on a train-the-trainer approach, where trainers complete the five exercises over three days. To date, 12 researchers have been trained as trainers and they have subsequently trained a total of 68 research students and staff. Specific online training on research ethics involving human participation, on the Human Tissue Act and on Good Clinical Practice is also provided for those working in areas that require this.
- 3.3 Research integrity training is also embedded in an Open Research Action Plan established by CORRI, and members of the committee have been engaging with Schools to deliver sessions which have a research integrity element. CORRI has also established a community of Open Research Champions, which will support open and reproducible research practices and facilitate sharing of best practice.
- 3.4 This year saw the launch of a Leadership Development Programme for Research Division Leads, which enables Research Division Leads to develop leadership skills, to link the University Research Strategy with their research division plans and to create a desirable research culture. This new programme complements two other Development Programmes (Inclusive Leadership and Leading Through Influence), which are available to research staff and Functions leads and which support the the University Research Strategy, as well as its Leadership Framework.
- 3.5 The University is a member of the UK Reproducibility Network (UKRN), an independent network of stakeholders in the UK dedicated to improvement in the quality, integrity and reproducibility of academic research. Each institutional partner has a senior academic representative (Dr Phil Newton, Research Dean for Environment for the University of Reading) and a local network lead (Dr Etienne Roesch, PCLS). The academic leads liaise with grassroots networks of researchers and with UKRN stakeholders, including funders and publishers. The UKRN received UKRI RED funding for a five-year programme of work across the consortium to accelerate the uptake of high-quality open research practices and the many benefits to research quality, integrity and public trust that will result. As a core member of the consortium, the University will benefit from multi-institutional, high-quality training in open and transparent research practices, a framework for evaluation of institutional practice and opportunities to share good practice.
- 3.6 This year, PVCs R&I chair the S10 Network, which comprises ten southern research-intensive universities forming a ring around London. The group has held a session on research integrity attended by the Chief Executive of the UKRIO and plans to host a workshop focussing on research culture in the summer of 2022.

4. Addressing research misconduct

- 4.1 **For students:** The University has specifically identified research misconduct as that arising in the course of research or its reporting, and which includes, but need not be limited to: (i) fabrication, falsification, misrepresentation of data and/or interests and/or involvement; (ii) plagiarism; (iii) failure to follow accepted procedures or to exercise due care in carrying out responsibilities for avoiding unreasonable risk or harm to humans or animals used in research or the environment and for the proper handling of privileged or private information on individuals collected during the research. Research misconduct also includes any activity in research and/or scholarship and in its dissemination, which brings the name of the University into disrepute.

All allegations are handled as described in the Academic Misconduct and Academic Integrity policy (Appendix 1), enabling a rigorous, fair and transparent approach, in line with Commitment 4 of the Concordat and the UKRI Guidance For Research Organisation on the Investigation of Research Misconduct [UKRI-310322-GRP-Guidance2022.pdf]. A review of the Academic Misconduct process for students will be undertaken in 2022-23.

- 4.2 **For staff:** Allegations of research misconduct against a member of staff are subject to the University's disciplinary procedure (Appendix 1). If there are grounds for formal action following an investigation, a disciplinary panel will be established and a disciplinary hearing held to determine whether a formal sanction should be applied. Where the allegation relates to research misconduct, the University will notify the research funding body where applicable.
- 4.3 The case raised in the 2020-21 statement was closed. During 2021-22, there was one new allegation relating to research misconduct under Section 3.20 of the University's Code of Good Practice in Research. The allegation related to concerns about research misconduct in relation to exclusion as co-author on a published journal. An investigation had been undertaken within the School concerned which was not able to establish whether attribution had or had not been correctly assigned. The main author was not an employee of the University and no further action had been taken.
- 4.4 The institutional review of research integrity highlighted the need to consider how procedures relate to non-staff and students (e.g. visitors) engaged in research and to implement training for staff involved in investigations. We are progressing with work to address both of these areas..
- 4.6 A broad investigations training course has been designed, which is suitable for a range of roles and processes, comprises a half-day in-person session and includes a series of case studies. The course will be undertaken by key colleagues during June 2022.
- 4.7 There is ongoing work with HR to clarify how policies relating to research integrity and misconduct apply to visitors, consultant and emeritus staff.

5. Monitoring and reporting

- 5.1 The University collates anonymised information on allegations of research misconduct on an annual basis.
- 5.2 An institutional review of research integrity will be conducted by the CORRI every 3 years. The next review is due in 2022/23. In the interim, progress against the action plan will be reported in annual statements.
- 5.3 As the action plan is progressed, researchers will be surveyed to assess understanding of policies and processes and to get feedback on training and communication about research integrity.

Professor Parveen Yaqoob

Appendix:

**Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Pro-Vice-Chancellor Research & Innovation
Vice-Chancellor's Office, Whiteknights House**

Date of approval by Council: