

Research Integrity Statement

2020-2021

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Research Integrity Statement 2020-2021

1. Introduction

Seeking to ensure the highest standards of good practice and ethical conduct in its research, the University of Strathclyde (hereafter Strathclyde) is committed to safeguarding and enhancing research integrity in accordance with The Concordat to Support Research Integrity (2019). This translates into policy, systems and practice aimed at delivering effective measures and continual improvement in a visible and joined-up manner to support a healthy research culture. Underpinning this is the University's Research Code of Practice which defines both the standards that researchers are expected to attain and desired good practice.

In fulfilment of the commitment to produce a short annual statement for approval by the University's governing body and publication on the institutional website, this statement:

- outlines the University's approach to research integrity;
- details actions and activities undertaken during 2020-21 and those planned for 2021-22;
- reports on formal investigations of research misconduct and lessons learned.

Strathclyde's research integrity statements for 2016-17, 2017-18 and 2019-20 are available to view and download at <https://www.strath.ac.uk/research/integrity/>.

2. Approach to research integrity

2.1 Named Person

In recognition of the seriousness of Strathclyde's commitment to research integrity, the Associate Principal with responsibility for Research has designated responsibility for ensuring that the University responds to and upholds the Concordat. This responsibility extends to research and knowledge exchange policies, ethics, postgraduate researcher development and research governance. To ensure confidentiality and encourage disclosure of concerns around misconduct, any queries related to research integrity are directed to a dedicated email address (research-integrity@strath.ac.uk) which is only accessible to the Associate Principal and select members of the Research Policy Team based in Research and Knowledge Exchange Services (RKES).

2.2 Research integrity leadership

The Associate Principal is supported in this work by the Deputy Associate Principals with Research and Knowledge Exchange portfolios in addition to the University Research & Knowledge Exchange Committee (RKEC). A strategic committee within Strathclyde's governance structure with reporting responsibilities to University Senate, RKEC is responsible for oversight of research and knowledge exchange strategy and policy, and the monitoring of their implementation. Key to this is ensuring that the University's commitments as signatory to The Concordat to Support Research Integrity are met. Accordingly, the principles of research integrity are supported across all domains by the following bodies with oversight from RKEC:

- University Ethics Committee (UEC);
- Animal Welfare Ethical Review Board (AWERB);
- Researcher Development Sub-Committee (RDSC);
- Open Research Group (ORG);
- Knowledge Exchange Group (KEG).
- Strathclyde Doctoral School.

Strathclyde's committee structure enables cohesion and consistency of communication at a senior level across the academic faculties and professional services directorates.

Within the faculties, information is communicated via staff and student structures as follows:

- Responsibility for Research Integrity is distributed through the faculties via the Vice Deans with responsibility for Research who represent their faculties on RKEC. Agreement made at committee level is disseminated via faculty, departmental and school management structures.
- Student representatives participate in the Researcher Development Sub-Committee and Strathclyde Doctoral School Board to ensure involvement in decision-making and communication of information into the wider student community. Expectations, information and guidance are also delivered to research students via their supervisors and postgraduate administrators in order to ensure that they are fully informed of best practice in research.

Formally established in 2019, the Research Policy Team located in RKES and led by the Research Policy Manager is responsible for: maintaining and advising on the Research Code of Practice (which includes the research misconduct process); providing secretariat support for RKEC, UEC and ORG; supporting the Associate Principal to implement the research misconduct process; and preparing the annual Research Integrity Statement in accordance with the Concordat.

2.3 Policies

Strathclyde maintains a range of policies and procedures to promote and monitor good practice and ethical conduct in its research. Central to these is an overarching Research Code of Practice which provides a definition of research and covers: the nature and scope of research integrity; independence of judgement and academic freedom; data protection; protecting authenticity; publication; authorship; intellectual property; sources of research funding; research misconduct; the process for dealing with allegation of research misconduct. It also signposts researchers to a comprehensive list of academic policies and procedures, including the following research policies and guidelines:

- Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research Students;
- Code of Practice on Investigations Involving Human Beings;
- Research Data Policy;
- Research Data Deposit Policy;
- Policy on Animal Research (in accordance with the Concordat on Openness).

3. Overview of actions and activities to support and strengthen research integrity

3.1 Researcher Training

Professional and personal development is a core component of research degrees at Strathclyde ensuring that our doctoral graduates have the skills and experience to be successful both in their studies and their future careers. Our PGR Researcher Development Programme (RDP), delivered by Faculties, Professional Services and external partners, is mapped to the UK's Researcher Development Framework and Statement (RDF/S), which articulates the knowledge, behaviours and attributes of successful researchers. The tailored RDP provides the postgraduate research community a range of opportunities to continue their personal, professional and career management skills development and enhance their generic skills, attributes and competencies for future employability both inside and outside of academia. Specific Research Integrity training is delivered through PGR induction (delivered twice annually and supplemented by our online PG Essentials module), via face-to-face workshops and as a 20-hour online resource available to all students. A wholesale review of the PGR lifecycle from regulations to administrative processes and systems was conducted in 2019-2020 and an extensive set of documented recommendations designed to enhance the overarching approach to supporting the PGR lifecycle are being implemented. Planned developments include an increased focus on research cultures and activities aligned to the themes highlighted through the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers.

Training for Early Career (including postdoctoral researchers, research fellows and research assistants), Mid-Career & Established Academics is delivered by our Organisational and Staff Development Unit (OSDU). In particular, the Unit's Strathclyde Programme in Academic practice, Researcher development and Knowledge exchange (SPARK), Strathclyde Programme in Research and Leadership (SPIRAL) and Strathclyde Supervisor Development Programme aim to deliver relevant content to our researchers. SPARK's specific Researcher Development provision aims to empower staff by providing them with the skills, experiences and understanding to reach their full potential, whilst at the same time providing the University with a means of assuring and enhancing quality in its research at all levels. Meanwhile SPIRAL focuses on developing and strengthening leadership across research and knowledge exchange while the Supervisor Programme provides comprehensive development opportunities for new and experienced doctoral Supervisors. All three programmes contribute significantly to the culture of Research Integrity at Strathclyde.

Specific training on Research Integrity issues including research data management is available to groups of researchers on request. In addition to the 20-hour online resource on Research Integrity, also available to students, there is a full research data management course available online via the Development & Training Gateway. Research Integrity events are now included as standard within OSDU's Researcher Development provision:

- 'Research Integrity in Practice' (SPIRAL Programme) – a twice-yearly, half-day workshop to support staff to understand and apply the principles of Research Integrity in their everyday work, and to explore how misconduct may arise and ways to alleviate such pressures, as well as drawing attention to Strathclyde's policies and procedures in these areas.
- Research Integrity and Ethics (Strathclyde Supervisor Development Programme) – previously a half-day workshop to support PGR supervisors to consider their own understanding of good research practice, make informed choices based on the principles of Research Integrity and consider how they can embed a culture of integrity within and beyond their supervisory relationships. During the transition to online training in 2020, this training was split into two separate workshops (see 4.1).
- Staff researchers are able to access the online suite of 'Research Integrity' workshops also available to PGRs.

3.2 Researcher Support Services

Strathclyde provides dedicated support in a number of areas in addition to structured training programmes to assist researchers in the fulfilment of their research responsibilities. Colleagues from across Professional Services provide specialist advice on topics with research integrity implications such as:

- Information Governance including GDPR;
- Ethics in Human and Animal Research;
- Records Management;
- Data Management;
- Open Access and Open Data;
- Cyber security.
- Dignity and Respect.

This provision is often delivered via cross-disciplinary/departmental groups involving specialists from Strategy & Policy, Information Services, Human Resources and RKES working with academics wherever appropriate. This extends to the handling of allegations of misconduct. If an allegation is made that appears to touch on more than one area of compliance, the relevant senior officers (namely the Associate Principal with responsibility for Research, University Secretary and Compliance Officer, and Director of Human Resources) will meet to discuss the appropriate channel(s) for the allegation to be considered.

4. Summary of actions and activities undertaken in 2020-21

4.1 Researcher training

To adapt the Strathclyde Supervisor Development Programme's Research Integrity and Ethics training to an online format, this course was split into two separate events – Research Integrity and Research Ethics. Initially the purpose of this was to avoid a half-day zoom call. However, the new format has been found to be more accessible as researchers can more readily find an available two hour window. It also allows for a more tailored discussion of research integrity and research ethics, as not all research at the University requires ethical approval, but must nonetheless be conducted with research integrity. As a result of these changes, these training sessions now have better attendance than the previous format.

4.2 Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers

Research integrity is a core component of Strathclyde's work to ensure a healthy and supportive research environment in line with the aims of the revised Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers (2019). Demonstrating an ongoing commitment to supporting the career and professional development of our researchers, Strathclyde became a signatory in June 2020 and named the Associate Principal with responsibility for Research as Senior Academic Concordat Champion and the Academic Development Lead (Research) within the Organisational and Staff Development Unit (OSDU) as Institutional Concordat Champion. With oversight from these champions and the Researcher Development Concordat Steering Group (RDCSG), the required gap analysis was undertaken by a dedicated Concordat Officer between October 2020 and April 2021, leading to the development of an institutional action plan. A broad spectrum of key stakeholders was consulted in this process through focus groups, engagement with the Researchers' Group, and analysis of Strathclyde's 2020 Culture, Employment and Development in Academic Research Survey (CEDARS) responses. With regular reporting to RKEC and RDSC throughout, the action plan was approved by University Court in spring 2021. Although researcher development was found to be well embedded across the University, actions were identified to enhance current initiatives to address gaps and challenges arising from new and strengthened obligations.

These actions are organised under five key themes: implementation and governance; research culture (including research integrity); researcher career development and progression; managers of researchers training and development; and engagement in policy and decision-making. To ensure focused and sustained progress, the following RDCSG working groups were formed in July 2021:

- Research Culture Working Group (addressing Equality, Diversity and Inclusion; Bullying and Harassment; Research Integrity; and Mental Health and Wellbeing); and
- Development and Recognition Working Group (addressing Professional and Career Development for Researchers; Training and Development for Managers of Researchers; Recognition of the full range of activities within Researcher and Manager roles).

4.3 Revision of Research Code of Practice

Following consultation with a broad range of researchers in 2019-20 to ascertain how research integrity is understood and practiced within the University, the need for a comprehensive review of the Research Code of Practice was identified to ensure full coverage reflecting recent sector developments and optimise its use. Recognising the time and resources required to do this effectively, this review will be undertaken during the course of 2021-22 in alignment with other institutional initiatives including the work of the RDCSG and its Research Culture Working Group. To ensure that the information contained in the current version is up to date (including hyperlinks), a minor update was prepared in summer 2021 for approval by University Senate.

4.4 Review of Ethical Procedures and Committees

Over the course of academic year 2019/2020, the Convener of the University Ethics Committee conducted a wide-ranging review of the operation of ethics services at Strathclyde. The results of this review were reported to RKEC in September 2020 and a number of actions were identified. The interruption of University activity as a result of the pandemic, and the increased workload on the University Ethics Committee as a result of all face-to-face research being reviewed at a University level due to the additional risk of COVID-19 transmission, have delayed progress with further developments. Plans for refining the application process (including the move to an online form), enhancing record-keeping and revising the University Ethics Committee Code of Practice will be taken forward in 2021-22 (as outlined in 5.3).

4.5 Nagoya Protocol compliance check

In response to a letter issued to the University by the Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS) on 13 May 2021, RKES collated and returned the required information pursuant to the Nagoya Protocol (Compliance) Regulations 2015. This legislation is relevant to those conducting research and development on the genetic or biochemical composition (including through the application of biotechnology) of genetic resources (plants, animals, microbes, fungi, other – but not human) accessed from overseas.

Following a review of the information submitted, OPSS concluded its engagement with Strathclyde on 6 September 2021 with a recommendation that consideration be given to implementing procedures to seek, keep and transfer all relevant documentation to prove that projects are either compliant or out of scope. Work is ongoing to incorporate lessons learned from the audit process into internal process and procedures to ensure appropriate due diligence and recordkeeping.

5. Action and activities planned for 2021-22

5.1 Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers

As noted in 4.2, actions identified in the approved Researcher Development Concordat Action Plan will be taken forward by two RDCSG working groups. The Research Culture Working Group has specific responsibility for progressing and ensuring alignment of actions around research integrity. Work over the next year will focus on: enhancing training on research integrity and related issues such as Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) and bullying and harassment; encouraging a positive research culture through case studies and improved guidance; increasing engagement with research integrity and research culture policies and decision making; raising awareness of support mechanisms for staff with research integrity and research culture concerns; collaborating with aligned initiatives to identify further approaches.

To ensure a visible and joined-up approach, the Research Culture Working Group is aligned with the following institutional projects and initiatives: Equality Outcomes, Athena SWAN, People Strategy, Research Excellence Framework (REF), Thrive@Strathclyde, Inquiry Recommendations Implementation Group (IRIG), STEM Equals, Research Integrity Concordat, Equally Safe, Culture & Values Accelerator Team, Research and Innovation Accelerator Team, Healthy Working Lives Gold Award Action Plan, and Enhancing the PGR Experience.

5.2 Comprehensive review of Research Code of Practice

With oversight from RKEC and in consultation with key stakeholders, during 2021-22 the Research Policy Team will undertake a comprehensive review of the Research Code of Practice and revise the document to ensure full coverage reflecting recent sector developments and changes within the University. Associated materials and processes will also be developed to optimise its use in alignment with related institutional initiatives, specifically the work of the RDCSG and its Research Culture Working Group which is taking forward actions around research integrity.

5.3 Review of ethical procedures and committees

Taking forward actions from the UEC Convenor's review, the Research Policy Team will revise the Code of Practice on Investigations Involving Human Beings to ensure that the guidance is clear and up to date. A revised application form will also be produced, with potential for this form to be completed online. A review of management of NHS studies is also planned, as well as the management of data, in particular the ethical use of open data. This includes both data to which Strathclyde researchers have access to and our own data which others might want to use. Ensuring that data imported and exported are ethically sourced and used requires attention.

5.4 Continuous Improvement

In order to support and promote continuous improvement in safeguarding and enhancing research integrity, the Research Policy Team will:

- Utilise the UKRIO Self-Assessment Tool for The Concordat to Support Research Integrity (Version 2.0, 2021) to identify areas of Strathclyde's research practices, systems and policies, researcher development and monitoring that may need to be revised in order to adhere to the requirements and recommendations of The Concordat to Support Research Integrity (2019). Suggestions for the content of annual research integrity statements will also be applied when writing Strathclyde's 2021-22 statement.
- Monitor sector & government guidance for recommendations or guidance that provide an opportunity for improvement.
- Ensure action on lessons learned from the handling of misconduct allegations, the Nagoya Protocol audit process, and reports prepared by UEC & AWERB.
- Seek out examples of best practice from other HEIs and research organisations. We expect our membership of UKRIO to greatly assist in this aspect of our learning.

6. Research Misconduct

6.1 Process for investigating allegations of research misconduct

In 2017/18, Strathclyde formalised and made public its process for investigating research misconduct by including it as an Appendix to the Research Code of Practice. Updated in line with best practice at this time, clear responsibilities were outlined for senior members of staff and internal processes and guidance were created to ensure that allegations of misconduct are dealt with in a transparent, timely, robust and fair manner. As this process has been in place since January 2018, a detailed review will be undertaken during 2021-22 to capture lessons learned and update the process to reflect current best practice within the sector. This will include the development of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) which are more closely aligned with other University investigation processes to ensure a coordinated and streamlined approach in dealing with allegations of misconduct and associated issues. Linked to the work being progressed to enhance Strathclyde's research culture, particular attention will be paid to creating and embedding an environment in which all staff, researchers and students feel comfortable reporting instances of misconduct.

6.2 Formal investigations of research misconduct

During the reporting period (2020-21), two formal investigations were undertaken in response to allegations of research misconduct. The allegations relate to authorship and IP (investigation complete – allegations not upheld) and plagiarism, including self-plagiarism (investigation complete – allegation upheld). As reported in the 2019-20 statement, two formal investigations had been conducted prior to this. These related to failure to follow ethical guidelines (2016-17 investigation complete - allegation upheld) and failure to recognise/report student falsification (2019-20 investigation complete – allegation not upheld).

6.3 Lessons learned

As well as learning lessons from the formal investigations undertaken, consideration has been given to issues highlighted in dealing with allegations that progressed no further than an informal investigation or simply required clarification to address concerns. Key learnings include:

- Researcher guidance and training should ensure a good understanding of background and foreground IP, including the implications of bringing in co-authors from outside a project.
- The potential for new technologies to facilitate academic dishonesty, particularly plagiarism, on a unprecedented scale should be highlighted so that suspect activity can be picked up and addressed early (e.g. excessive rate of publication).
- Guidance on authorship should be expanded to promote best practice in line with discipline-specific norms and enable a robust and fair approach to allegations around author inclusion or exclusion.
- Greater alignment of the University's various ethics bodies would increase transparency and enhance record-keeping to enable early identification of potential issues as well as a timely and robust response to allegations of misconduct.
- Guidance on data storage and sharing should be updated regularly in light of issues arising (e.g. safeguards to prevent anonymised data becoming identifiable when combined with other sources).