

STAFFORDSHIRE UNIVERSITY BOARD OF GOVERNORS

TITLE OF PAPER	<i>Staffordshire University Annual Statement on Research Integrity 2019/20</i>
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1. Introduction

Staffordshire University expects high standards in the conduct of research undertaken by staff, students, honorary and emeritus titleholders, associates and consultants. The University aims to uphold the commitments outlined in the [Concordat to support research integrity](#) first published in 2012 and revised in October 2019, which provides a national framework for high standards of research conduct and its governance. As per the Concordat, Staffordshire University is committed to:

- upholding the highest standards of rigour and integrity in all aspects of research
- ensuring that research is conducted according to appropriate ethical, legal and professional frameworks, obligations and standards
- supporting 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
- using transparent, timely, robust and fair processes to deal with allegations of research misconduct should they arise
- working together to strengthen the integrity of research and to review progress regularly and openly.

In compliance with the Concordat, the University is publishing a Statement on Research Integrity on an annual basis, which is to be presented to its governing bodies (Academic Board and the Board of Governors). This statement covers the **academic year 2019-20**. It builds on the previous annual report for the academic year 2018-19, which also included an interim report for 2019-20 up to May 2020. This statement outlines the actions and activities undertaken throughout the course of the academic year, and the frameworks in place to foster and strengthen a culture of research integrity in line with the expectations within the Concordat. It also provides a high-level summary of investigations of research misconduct that have been undertaken by the University.

2. Named contacts for research integrity matters, in accordance with the Concordat

Research integrity is overseen by Deputy Vice Chancellor, Professor Martin Jones (martin.jones@staffs.ac.uk) and Director of Research, Dr Tim Horne (tim.horne@staffs.ac.uk). The University's first point of contact, should anyone require more information on matters of research integrity, is Research Policy and Governance Manager, Dr Cathal Rogers (cathal.rogers@staffs.ac.uk). Should any person wish to raise concerns about the integrity of research being conducted under the auspices of Staffordshire University, they can contact, in confidence, the Head of Research Environment and Development, Mrs Emma Davies (E.J.Davies@staffs.ac.uk).

In accordance with the Concordat on Research Integrity, the contact details for the above points of contact are kept up to date and are publicly available on Staffordshire University's external facing website: <https://www.staffs.ac.uk/research/opportunities-for-academics/research-governance/research-integrity> The institution's annual statements on research integrity are also compiled on this webpage, in accordance with the Concordat.

3. Governance and Policies

The governance of research at Staffordshire University is overseen by the Research and Innovation Committee, chaired by the Deputy Vice Chancellor, and reporting directly into Academic Board. The Research and Innovation Committee's terms of reference include the "development and implementation of institutional policy, procedure and guidance in respect of Research Governance, Environment, Ethics [and] research integrity". Research Ethics at Staffordshire University is overseen by the University Research Ethics Committee, which reports to the Research and Innovation Committee.

The main policies governing research integrity, and research ethics, are:

- [Staffordshire University Research Ethical Review Policy](#) - revised September 2019, due for review September 2022
- [Staffordshire University Code of Practice for Research](#) – revised June 2018, currently under review, to be approved in the 2020-21 academic year.
- The University's Research Misconduct Policy is embedded in the Code of Practice for Research (at section 13). The process for investigating allegations of Research Misconduct forms section 14 of this Policy.

All of the above policies are publicly available on the University's website:

<https://www.staffs.ac.uk/research/opportunities-for-academics/research-governance/research-integrity>

4. Summary of actions and activities undertaken to support and strengthen understanding and the application of research integrity issues

In the period under review (academic year 2019-20), Staffordshire University has undertaken several actions and activities to support and strengthen understanding and the application of research integrity issues. These include:

Actions undertaken to strengthen research integrity

- A gap analysis has been undertaken (April 2020) mapping Staffordshire University's policies and practices against the revised Concordat on Research Integrity (2019). An action plan for addressing and strengthening our provision was considered and approved by the Research and Innovation Committee in June 2020. Progress against this action plan is now monitored on a continual basis by the Research and Innovation Committee.
- As a result of the integrity gap analysis, a detailed communications plan was developed and rolled out in summer and autumn 2020, to refresh and update knowledge of staff (academic and support), and PGRs around matters of integrity, their commitments and the support and resources available.
- The Code of Practice for Research, which is the University's policy and guidelines on research integrity matters, is currently under review and will be revised and submitted for re-approval by Academic Board in the 2020-21 academic year.
- The Research Misconduct Policy, embedded in the Code of Practice, is under review, as per the two-year cycle. This policy is being revised against updated best practice in the sector, and in line with the updated and revised guidance for Research Misconduct in the Concordat on Research Integrity (2019).
- The University reviewed and updated the details of the contact for confidential whistle-blowers should any person wish to raise concerns about the integrity of research being conducted under the auspices of the University.
- In summer 2020, the University launched CEDARS (Culture, Employment and Development in Academic Research Survey) for the first time. This survey provided us with a baseline

understanding of staff knowledge and awareness of matters of research integrity, and where there are gaps in knowledge that require addressing. An action plan has been compiled in response to the results, overseen by the Research and Innovation Committee. This includes actions to raise awareness of the Concordat to Support Research Integrity.

- The existing provision for online ethics awareness training, previously advisory for academic staff, has been made mandatory from January 2020. Ahead of this re-launch, its content has been revised and updated and now covers matters of research integrity.
- The University's annual research development and training programme has been revised for the 2020-21 academic year. The revised programme includes training and awareness raising on matters of research integrity.

Actions undertaken to strengthen research ethics

In addition to the above listed actions to strengthen research integrity, the University has undertaken considerable work to strengthen the processes and awareness around research ethics in the period under review. While distinct from research integrity, we feel these actions warrant mention here as important aspects in the development of our research environment, governance and culture of research integrity.

- As mentioned above, online ethics awareness training is now mandatory for all academic staff.
- Online ethics training, and training for ethics reviewers has been developed and is available to academic staff from June 2020.
- The University undertook its first annual Ethics audit in 2019-20, in line with the revised Ethics Policy.
- As per the revised Ethical Review Policy, an annual institution publication audit was undertaken for the first time in March 2020 (reviewing publications produced in the calendar year 2019), to ensure publications produced under the auspices of Staffordshire University have undergone appropriate ethical review.
- The IPR (Independent Peer Review) process for NHS ethics is currently under review, and revisions reflect external changes that are being considered by the University Research Ethics Committee.
- The University Research Ethics Committee added a PGR representative to its membership in 2019-20.
- An online ethics approval system had been developed in summer 2020 and launched in September 2020, which will ultimately replace the current paper-based system. It is anticipated that this online system will significantly strengthen the efficiency of the ethics approval process.

5. Research Misconduct

The University's Research Misconduct Policy, and processes for investigating potential cases of misconduct, are embedded in the Code of Practice for Research. The processes in place are transparent, timely, robust and fair. The procedures adopted by the University draw on the principles set out in the UK Research Integrity Office's Procedure for the Investigation of Misconduct in Research. The policy is publicly accessible on the University's external facing website, aiding transparency. Where a formal investigation into allegations of research misconduct is undertaken, the investigation panel's report will be provided to the complainant and the respondent, who will have the opportunity to request amendment of any factual errors. The outcome of any investigation of research misconduct will be reported by the Deputy Vice Chancellor to the Research and Innovation Committee and the University Research Ethics Committee, ensuring transparency.

The investigation process is timely, with the subject(s) of an allegation being given a written response to the allegation(s) within ten working days. The policy stipulates that a formal investigation should

take no longer than thirty working days. Fairness and robustness are ensured at several stages of the process. The Deputy Vice Chancellor may seek the advice or views of external experts to ensure independent, expert input into the investigation, ensuring robustness. The policy provides for allegations that have some substance, but which are capable of being resolved without further investigation, to be resolved as such. The investigation panel, where one is needed, is composed of individuals not drawn from the same School as the complainant or respondent, to ensure impartiality and robustness of the investigation. The respondent will be interviewed by the investigation panel to allow them to respond in person to the claims. Similarly, the complainant will be interviewed by the panel, for robustness.

The Research Misconduct Policy, and the Code of Practice for Research in which it is situated, was last revised in June 2018. It is due for a scheduled review in the 2020-21 academic year. This review is being undertaken by the Research Policy and Governance Manager with academic guidance from the Associate Dean for Research and Enterprise for the School of Life Science and Education. This review is being overseen by the Research and Innovation Committee. Preparatory work has been undertaken to map this Policy against the revised and updated best practice as outlined in the 2019 Concordat, and best practice in the sector. Whilst this document is under review, we are confident that the current (2018) Research Misconduct Policy remains robust and appropriate to the needs of the organisation.

6. Formal investigations of Research Misconduct

Where concerns are raised about poor research practice, these can often be addressed via competency, education, and training mechanisms. Some concerns fall outside of the scope of research misconduct, as outlined in our Research Misconduct Policy and are instead dealt with according to the relevant HR procedure, or via academic misconduct (in the case of a PGR).

Where there is an accusation or suspicion of research misconduct, these are addressed through the research misconduct policy and an investigation is instigated, led by the Deputy Vice Chancellor. The instances of each category of research misconduct investigated in the period under review are indicated in the below table.

	Number of initial investigations completed (2019-20)	Number of formal investigations completed (2019-20)	Number of allegations upheld (in whole or in part) (2019-20)
Fabrication	0	0	0
Falsification	0	0	0
Plagiarism	0	0	0
Failure to meet obligations (e.g. legal, ethical and professional obligations)	0	0	0
Misrepresentation (e.g. of data, results, interpretation)	0	0	0
Improper dealing with allegations of misconduct	0	0	0

7. Reflection on misconduct investigations

There were no accusations or investigations into Research Misconduct in the period under review.

8. Embedding a supportive environment for reporting potential misconduct

As described in detail in the 2018-19 report (which included an interim report for 2019-20), the University is committed to maintaining and strengthening a research environment in which all staff, researchers and students feel comfortable to report instances of misconduct. Staffordshire University's Research, Innovation and Impact Strategy includes an ongoing commitment to ensure all researchers have an awareness of matters of research integrity and adhere to their commitments as outlined in the Concordat. This includes awareness of what constitutes research misconduct and how this can be reported in confidence. The Misconduct Policy makes clear that the identity of a complainant will not be disclosed at any stage during any misconduct investigation. This encourages a supportive framework to report any potential misconduct.

Support, advice and training is provided centrally through Research Innovation and Impact Services (RIIS), and locally in Schools by the Associate Deans for Research and Enterprise (ADREs). The ADREs have within their remit the development and fostering of an environment and culture of research integrity in their Schools. The culture in Schools is one where staff, researchers and students are assured that an allegation of misconduct will be handled in confidence.

Having run the CEDARS survey for the first time at the conclusion of the 2019-20 academic year, we now have evidence that we have a supportive environment for researchers to report potential misconduct. For instance, 77% of respondents felt comfortable reporting any incidents of research misconduct, 67% would trust the institution to investigate any reported incidents fairly and 65% would trust that the institution would take action if appropriate after investigation. It is important for the University to build on these broadly positive baseline results and to recognise the need to take actions institutionally and at School level to ensure that *all* staff feel comfortable in reporting instances of misconduct. The Director of Research and the ADREs will take ownership of further developing this supportive research environment, both institutionally and locally in Schools.

Finally, as referred to in the previous annual report, in May 2020 we reviewed and updated the contact for confidential whistle-blowers to the Head of Research Environment and Development. This senior position affords a good knowledge and understanding of matters of research integrity, in order to properly understand the matters at hand, without being directly involved in the development and implementation of relevant policies and processes. The nomination of a contact independent from the operational detail aids transparency and should give confidence to any potential whistle-blowers, further fostering a supportive environment for reporting potential misconduct.