



Annual Report on Research Integrity 2021/22

Introduction

The University of Worcester is committed to upholding the principles of the [Concordat to Support Research Integrity](#) as follows:

1. Upholding the highest standards of rigour and integrity in all aspects of research
2. Ensuring that research is conducted according to appropriate ethical, legal and professional frameworks, obligations and standards
3. 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
4. Using transparent, timely, robust and fair processes to deal with allegations of research misconduct should they arise
5. Working together to strengthen the integrity of research and to review progress regularly and openly

The Concordat is underpinned by both the [UK Research Integrity Office's Code of Practice for Research](#) and the [UKRI Policy and Guidelines on Governance of Good Research Conduct](#) which together represent an essential reference tool to support researchers and research organisations in the conduct of research of the highest quality and standards.

This Annual Report represents an overview of the work being carried out by colleagues across the University to put our institutional commitment to strengthening the integrity of our research into practice

This report was considered and approved by:

- Research Integrity and Governance sub-Committee on 14th September 2022
- Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee on 5th October 2022
- Academic Board on 12th October 2022
- The Board of Governors on 22nd November 2022

It was formally published on our website on 15th December 2022. You can find our previous Annual Reports here. If you wish to know more about this report or our wider approach to Research Integrity please email researchintegrity@worc.ac.uk with any questions.

Supporting and strengthening research integrity

The University's [Research and Knowledge Exchange Strategy 2020-2025](#) has Research Integrity at its heart. The strategy is underpinned by five core principles that should flow through all research activity of which the first is "ensuring our RKE is delivered with integrity and to the highest ethical standards".

At University-level, research integrity falls under the remit of the Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee. Its Research Integrity and Governance sub-Committee takes operational responsibility for research integrity. This sub-Committee is chaired by the University's Research Integrity Lead, Dr John-Paul Wilson.

It is the role of the Research Integrity and Governance Ethics sub-Committee to ensure that:

- the University has in place effective policies and procedures to govern research conduct (including research misconduct) and that these policies and procedures are up to date and align with external legislation, the Concordat, ethical and professional frameworks, and general and discipline-specific codes of practice;
- the University's policies and procedures are being effectively implemented across the University;
- the University has in place training and guidance, for both staff and students, that ensures they understand what constitutes research integrity and feed this through into the delivery of their research;
- the University has in place a communication strategy around Research Integrity such that staff and students engage effectively with procedures, training and guidance.

At College level, research integrity falls under the remit of three College Research Ethics Panels. These panels have primary responsibility for the implementation of the University's ethical approval processes and for providing day-to-day support for researchers around these processes and wider issues of research integrity. The three panel chairs (and deputy chairs) sit on the Research Integrity and Governance sub-Committee as well as providing periodic and annual reporting on the panels' activities. This link between University and College level assures that the University's systems and processes feed through fully into local practice but also ensures that disciplinary differences are reflected in policy, training and guidance.

Development of Policies and Procedures

In 2021/22, the University reviewed the following policies and procedures taking action as set out below:

- *Research Ethics Policy* - the review of this longstanding policy (and associated ethical review procedures) was completed and the revised policy was approved by Academic Board in April 2022; revisions were not substantive as it was decided the policy and associated procedures were fit for purpose.
- *Guidelines and Procedures for Good Research Conduct* (including procedures for Investigation of Research Misconduct) - the decision was taken in 2020/21 to replace this document with two new documents: a Research Integrity Policy and separate Procedures for investigating allegations of research misconduct.
- *Research Integrity Policy* – the new policy was developed by the Research Integrity

Lead drawing on good practice reflected in the UK RIO Code and UKRI Policy, as well as wider sector examples. It was subject to consultation through the University's Committee structure and was approved by Academic Board in July 2022 for implementation in academic year 22/23. It was decided by the Research Integrity and Governance sub-Committee that this policy would be subject to evaluation after 12 months to test the extent staff and students had effectively engaged with the new policy.

- *Procedures for dealing with allegations of research misconduct* – the Research Integrity lead developed these new procedures in close collaboration with the University's HR department to ensure they aligned with the University's staff and student disciplinary procedures. The new procedures closely follow the processes set out in UK RIO's procedures for investigating research misconduct. The proposed procedures were subject to consultation through the University's Committee structure and subject to approval by the University Executive Board in July 2022 for implementation in academic year 22/23. It was recognised that training needed to be put in place around the new procedures for the various staff potentially involved at various stages of any investigation.
- *Policy for Effective Management of Research Data* – following a brief review of the policy, it was decided that the full review and revision of this policy should be held over until 2022/23 to align with decisions being made about the University's publication and data repository.
- *Lone Working Procedures for researchers* – it was recognised that the procedures needed a significant overhaul as they were not being widely used by researchers working off-site. The review was carried over into 2022/23 to ensure that revised procedures fully engaged with relevant available technologies which could underpin good practice.

Training, Guidance & Support

The University continues to offer a programme of training around research integrity as part of its Researcher Development Programme for staff and research students. In 2021/22, the programme included workshops as follows:

- Introduction to Research Ethics
- Introduction to Research Integrity
- Research Data Management
- Undertaking Ethical Research
- Demystifying the Ethics Review Process
- What is research misconduct?

These workshops are embedded in modules which are a compulsory element of our doctoral programmes; thus all our research students must engage with these workshops. New staff are introduced to research integrity and to our ethical approval processes through induction and signposted to the relevant workshops; however, these workshops are not compulsory. Specific training is also provided for reviewers of applications for ethical approval.

In reviewing the training offer and staff/student engagement with this offer it was recognised that the offer itself could be usefully expanded and that staff engagement in particular should be increased. The decision was therefore taken to invest in Epigeum's Research Integrity programme (an online course for researchers). The content of this programme will be embedded in induction, in the doctoral researcher development programme, in relevant aspects of the staff researcher development programmes (e.g. Research Leadership and Research Supervisor training), as well as being made available to all staff. There was a soft launch of the programme in June 2022 with the intention of a fuller launch in the new academic year. It was further decided that there would be a review of this training at the end

of 22/23.

The University has continued to develop its extensive guidance for researchers on research ethics and integrity. In 2021/22, for example, guidance has been developed for researchers around recruitment of Participants via Social Media and working with gatekeepers.

A dedicated Research Integrity and Ethics site is maintained on our Virtual Learning Environment and is open to all staff and students. The site hosts all relevant policies, ethical approval documentation, training materials, internal guidance documentation, and links to relevant external frameworks and codes of practice. The site is under regular review and, as of this year, statistics on its usage are tracked by the Research Integrity and Governance sub-Committee. This data will be used to inform the development of the site.

Raising the Profile of Research Integrity

The University recognises the need to promulgate its policies and processes around research integrity more fully. It has therefore been agreed to run a series of events around research integrity in 2022/23. The exact shape of these events will be determined by the Research Integrity and Governance sub-Committee in Autumn 2022.

Addressing research misconduct

The University has long had in place procedures for investigating allegations of research misconduct aligned with the UK RIO processes. As noted above, the University has approved a new policy for investigating research misconduct allegations for 2022/23 which builds on the former procedures.

The University identifies a named contact (and an alternative contact) on its external and internal research integrity webpages for any individual who has any concerns with the conduct of research undertaken by staff or students at the University. Individuals may raise general concerns or may chose to make a formal allegation which may then be subject to investigation.

There were zero allegations of research misconduct submitted to the contacts or received through other mechanisms in 2021/22.

There were zero investigations of research misconduct undertaken in 2021/22.

Whilst the University is pleased in principle that no allegations of research misconduct have been received, it is also conscious that this may potentially be a reflection of individuals not always being aware of mechanisms to report such allegations or of individuals not feeling sufficiently empowered or knowledgeable to make such allegations. To this end, as part of the role out of the new policy in 2022/23, there will be careful consideration of all paperwork associated with research (e.g. participant information sheets) to ensure that it actively highlights our processes in this area, alongside its enhanced training offer and communication strategy set out above.