

## UK Research and Innovation annual narrative statement on research integrity, 2020

### **Background**

As a signatory to the Concordat to Support Research Integrity<sup>1</sup>, UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) has publicly committed to supporting and contributing to a healthy research culture and environment that nurtures high levels of research integrity. This annual narrative statement on activities related to research integrity details how we have used our role to support the sector to strengthen values that are conducive to high integrity in research and how we have embedded these same values in our own processes.

Since it was formed on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2018, UKRI has produced one annual narrative statement. Previously, RCUK produced six joint statements covering the period of 1 July 2012 - 31st March 2018 between them. All previous statements are available from:

<https://www.ukri.org/our-work/supporting-healthy-research-and-innovation-culture/research-integrity/>

UKRI brings together the seven disciplinary research councils, Research England, which is responsible for supporting research and knowledge exchange at higher education institutions in England, and the UK's innovation agency, Innovate UK<sup>2</sup>. While all UKRI councils fund research and innovation, three<sup>3</sup> also employ research staff directly at centres, institutes, units and facilities. A central group provides governance, strategy, policy, communications and corporate functions across UKRI. All parts of UKRI contribute to our support for research integrity in different ways. UKRI is sponsored by the UK Government (Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy) and works closely with them as we invest in, facilitate, support and assure research and innovation activities across the UK.

### **Narrative statement on research integrity**

This narrative statement includes activities undertaken by UKRI from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020 where they contributed significantly to our support for research integrity, and to the implementation of the Concordat and the relevant terms and conditions of UKRI research and training grants<sup>4</sup>.

#### i) Establishment of the Research Integrity Strategy and Policy team

In Summer 2019, UKRI established a new central strategy and policy team focused on research integrity, which sits within a wider team working across the organisation that also covers aspects of the culture and environment of research and innovation such as equality, diversity and inclusion, and open research. The central research integrity team complements a network of research integrity leads from across the nine councils and their work cuts across UKRI, touching on funding assurance, governance, HR and funding policy.

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<sup>1</sup> Concordat to Support Research Integrity: <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2019/the-concordat-to-support-research-integrity.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> UKRI councils: <https://www.ukri.org/councils/>

<sup>3</sup> The councils that employ research staff are the Natural Environment Research Council, The Medical Research Council, and the Science and Technology Facilities Council.

<sup>4</sup> UKRI full economic costing and training grant terms and conditions: <https://www.ukri.org/apply-for-funding/before-you-apply/your-responsibilities-if-you-get-funding/meeting-ukri-terms-and-conditions-for-funding/#contents-list>  
Research England terms and conditions of grant: <https://re.ukri.org/finance/terms-and-conditions-of-research-england-grant/>

During this reporting period, the team conducted extensive sector-wide stakeholder engagement to scope the remit and function of a new national committee focused on safeguarding integrity standards of research in the UK. As part of this work, in early 2020, the team worked with Universities UK and the Association of Research Managers and Administrators to convene a series of roundtable discussions with research managers and others from a wide range of universities and other research organisations. The team also built relationships with similar research integrity bodies overseas, such as in Australia, Canada, the USA and across Europe, to understand and explore potential models that could be adopted by a new UK committee on research integrity.

ii) Records of research misconduct allegations, as reported to individual research councils, or otherwise detected by the research councils (including research misconduct allegations reported in organisations that are a legal part of UKRI)

The research integrity leads of the nine councils of UKRI, alongside central strategy and policy colleagues, work together closely on research integrity through an internal 'Good Research Conduct Network' (GRECON), which, currently meets between four and six times a year. Data has previously only been recorded for the research councils of UKRI, in line with pre-existing policy<sup>5</sup>. However, a new addition for this statement is the inclusion of Research England data, though not data related to innovation projects funded via Innovate UK. The central research misconduct log is a spreadsheet that collates allegations of research misconduct reported to, or otherwise detected by<sup>6</sup>, the research councils and Research England. It is based on individual councils' spreadsheets, with identifying data of respondents removed, leaving data on the type of misconduct alleged, the lead institution, and the progress (with dates) of any investigation<sup>7</sup>. The aim of the log is to provide a basis for GRECON members to learn from each other, promote consistency of action and identify possible duplicate notifications. It also helps discern trends within the data for strategic understanding. All data is held and managed in line with relevant data protection laws.

The research councils' policies set out that where an allegation of research misconduct is about someone funded by, or engaged with, the research councils, even if it is about work not connected with a grant from a UK research council, the case should be reported to the relevant council. Research England expects to be notified by Higher Education providers when an allegation, which could reasonably be considered as directly or indirectly supported by our funding, is referred for formal investigation, and of the outcome of any formal investigations of research misconduct, as set out in the Terms and Conditions of Research England grants<sup>8</sup>.

In accordance with the Concordat, and our policy for the research councils<sup>9</sup> and Research England, UKRI does not investigate allegations of research misconduct in the research performing organisations that we fund, unless those organisations are part of UKRI in legal terms. During this reporting period, there were two allegations of research misconduct relating

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<sup>5</sup>Governance of Good Research Conduct Policy: <https://www.ukri.org/about-us/policies-standards-and-data/good-research-resource-hub/research-integrity/>

<sup>6</sup> The relevant UKRI policy requires research organisations to notify UKRI when allegations of research misconduct are investigated. However, on occasions UKRI becomes aware of such cases, for example via our Funding Assurance Programme, before the research organisation has reported them to us.

<sup>7</sup> Further details about how information on allegations is handled by UKRI are given in the UKRI policy FAQs: <https://www.ukri.org/about-us/policies-standards-and-data/good-research-resource-hub/research-integrity/>

<sup>8</sup><https://re.ukri.org/documents/2019/terms-and-conditions-of-research-england-grant-final-pdf/>

<sup>9</sup> Governance of Good Research Conduct Policy: <https://www.ukri.org/about-us/policies-standards-and-data/good-research-resource-hub/research-integrity/>, Section 4.

to researchers employed by UKRI based at such organisations (specifically, at MRC Units or Institutes). In the first case, alleged research misconduct had taken place at a previous institution, however, the researcher had left their position and moved to an MRC Unit before the allegation was reported. This individual was not employed by UKRI at the time of the alleged misconduct, and therefore UKRI was not responsible for leading any investigation. In the second case, an allegation was made against a researcher based at an MRC Institute when the research misconduct was alleged to have occurred. Neither of these allegations were upheld.

Summary information for allegations reported to the research councils, or otherwise detected by them is given in **Annex 1** for Financial Year 2019-2020<sup>10</sup>. It should be noted that any discernable upward trend in numbers of cases may reflect increased awareness of research councils' policy requirements and better reporting.

iii) Information relating to Research Integrity collected by the UKRI Funding Assurance Programme of Research Organisations

Research Organisations (ROs) that receive funding from the research councils are subject to the UKRI Funding Assurance Programme<sup>11</sup>. The programme provides assurance to the UKRI Accounting Officer that public funds destined for research are properly safeguarded and used for the purposes intended by Parliament.

This is achieved by examining compliance with the terms and conditions which accompany research funding across four pillars of assurance:

- research grants and fellowships
- doctoral training funding
- transparent approach to costing
- non-financial terms and conditions

Priorities are set within the Funding Assurance Programme based on levels of risk; the most research-intensive research organisations should expect assurance activity approximately every three years, and other research organisations less frequently unless specific risks are identified. UKRI Funding Assurance undertake assignments either as visits to research organisations or as desk-based reviews.

During Financial Year 2019-20, there were **35** assurance assignments (comprising **18** site visits and **17** desk-based reviews). The ROs involved are listed at **Annex 2**. During the fieldwork, policies are reviewed against expectations within the research councils' current policy and guidelines; meetings also take place, where deemed necessary, with departmental staff to evidence the way Research Integrity, Ethics and Misconduct are managed within the Research Organisation. For each assignment report, there is a section that records any findings relevant to Research Integrity, Ethics or Misconduct.

In 2019-20, UKRI continued to incorporate a sample of international research organisations into its Funding Assurance Programme in response to the increase of UKRI funding to non-UK

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<sup>10</sup> It should be noted that some cases may be duplicated, where reported to more than one research council. The councils are working towards eliminating such 'double counting'.

<sup>11</sup> UKRI Funding Assurance Programme: <https://www.ukri.org/about-us/policies-and-standards/funding-assurance-programme/>

organisations. It is noted that UK research organisations are expected to include reporting on overseas subcontractors and should have processes in place for research integrity assurance.

iv) Revision of Concordat to Support Research Integrity

In 2019, as a member of the UUK signatories working group, UKRI took an active role in the revision of the Concordat to Support Research Integrity.

The revised concordat to support research integrity was published on 25 October 2019 in response to recommendations set out in a 2018 report by the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee. The updated concordat builds upon the first version of the Concordat to Support Research Integrity (2012) but provides greater clarification on the expectations of researchers, employers of researchers and funders of research to encourage and safeguard the highest standards of integrity in UK research.

Our commitment to the revised concordat reaffirms to policy makers, international partners, business and the public that confidence can be placed in UKRI funded research and our world leading researchers.

v) Other related activities

UKRI strongly believes that everyone has a responsibility to support the sector to maintain high levels of integrity in research. A wide range of activities took place across the organisation to illustrate this, including:

- Over late 2019 and early 2020, BBSRC designed and developed a research culture survey for UKRI-BBSRC PhD students. The survey, launched in the summer of 2020, was particularly focused on the socioeconomic background and wellbeing of PhD students.
- Research England commissioned a landscape study in response to a Science and Technology Select Committee report<sup>12</sup> recommendation, fieldwork for which involved a major survey, interviews and focus groups across the research community during late 2019.
- In late 2019, UKRI collaborated on The Wellcome Trust's report<sup>13</sup> on research culture (published 2020). The importance of bringing universities into discussions was noted, as was the pressure on delivery that was created by short-term competitive funding.
- UK Reproducibility Network<sup>14</sup>, a national peer-led consortium supporting robust research, launched from September 2018 and has funding from AHRC, ESRC, MRC, NERC and Research England.

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<sup>12</sup> Science and Technology Committee (2018) Report of an inquiry into research integrity: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmsctech/350/35002.htm>

<sup>13</sup> Wellcome Trust on research culture: <https://cms.wellcome.org/sites/default/files/what-researchers-think-about-the-culture-they-work-in.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> UK Reproducibility Network: <https://www.ukrn.org/>



- In late 2019, UKRI published evidence reviews on equality, diversity and inclusion<sup>15</sup> and bullying and harassment<sup>16</sup> to inform a five-year programme to foster a more inclusive and diverse research and innovation environment. The reviews, which were carried out by Advance HE and King's College London on behalf of UKRI, illustrated the key challenges in these areas, both in the UK and internationally, and evaluated the effectiveness of different interventions and practices. UKRI believes that a diverse and inclusive research environment contributes to research integrity.

The integrity of UK research depends on a wide range of contributions from people across the UK research and innovation system, working in an environment that recognises and rewards those contributions. UKRI will continue to play a leading role in promoting that environment, working with others across the system.

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<sup>15</sup> UKRI EDI evidence reviews:

<https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/UKRI-020920-EDI-EvidenceReviewUK.pdf>

<https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/UKRI-020920-EDI-EvidenceReviewInternational.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> UKRI bullying and harassment evidence review: <https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/UKRI-020920-BullyingAndHarassmentEvidenceReview.pdf>

**MISCONDUCT ALLEGATIONS INFORMATION HELD BY THE RESEARCH COUNCILS AND RESEARCH ENGLAND**

Financial Year 19-20.

 Records of misconduct allegations information held by the research councils from Financial Years 2015-16 to 2018-19 are available on the UKRI website<sup>17</sup>

Research council	Type of misconduct <sup>18</sup>	Date first informed	Allegation proceeded to formal investigation?	Outcome
FY 2019-20				
AHRC	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
BBSRC	Falsification	03/04/2019	No	Allegation not upheld
	Misrepresentation	03/06/2019	Yes	Allegation not upheld
	Other	14/06/2019	No	Allegation not upheld
	Falsification	06/08/2019	Yes	Allegation upheld
	Falsification	26/09/2019	No	Allegation not upheld
	Misrepresentation	14/10/2019	Yes	Allegation not upheld
	Falsification	28/10/2019	No	Allegation not upheld
	Falsification	09/12/2019	No	Allegation not upheld
EPSRC	Misrepresentation	03/04/2019	No	Allegation not upheld
	Misrepresentation	26/06/2019	No	Allegation not upheld
	Other	02/08/2019	No	Allegation not upheld
	Plagiarism	03/02/2020	No	Allegation not upheld
	Other	12/03/2020		Ongoing
ESRC	Plagiarism	05/05/2019		Ongoing
MRC	Fabrication	15/04/2019	No	Allegation upheld
	Falsification	18/04/2019	Yes	Allegation not upheld

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.ukri.org/about-us/policies-and-standards/research-integrity/>
<sup>18</sup> Classified according to the categories of research misconduct set out in the UKRI Policy and Guidelines on Governance of Good Research Conduct.

Research council	Type of misconduct <sup>18</sup>	Date first informed	Allegation proceeded to formal investigation?	Outcome
	Misrepresentation	03/06/2019	Yes	Allegation not upheld
	Falsification	15/06/2019	No	Allegation not upheld
	Falsification	24/06/2019	Yes	Allegation not upheld
	Falsification	23/07/2019	No	Allegation not upheld
	Plagiarism	03/04/2019	Yes	Ongoing
	Falsification	19/07/2019	No	Ongoing
	Falsification	20/07/2019	No	Ongoing
	Misrepresentation	28/01/2020	No	Ongoing
	Falsification	11/01/2020	No	Allegation not upheld
NERC	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
RE	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
STFC	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil

Ongoing cases that concluded during the reported period

Research council	Type of misconduct	Date first informed	Allegation proceeded to formal investigation?	Outcome
AHRC	Plagiarism	13/12/2018	No	Allegation not upheld
BBSRC	Other	26/07/2019	No	Allegation not upheld
	Fabrication	20/07/2019	No	Allegation not upheld
EPSRC	Breach of duty of care	29/03/2019	Yes	Allegation upheld
ESRC	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
MRC	Falsification	24/06/2018	Yes	Allegation upheld
	Plagiarism	09/10/2018	Yes	Allegation not upheld
	Falsification	02/01/2019	Yes	Allegation upheld
	Falsification	15/02/2019	No	Allegation not upheld
	Falsification	24/03/2019	Yes	Allegation upheld
	Plagiarism	06/03/2019	Yes	Allegation upheld
NERC	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil



Research council	Type of misconduct	Date first informed	Allegation proceeded to formal investigation?	Outcome
RE	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
STFC	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil

**NOTE:**

In accordance with UK data protection legislation, we would not normally disclose the identity of any individuals involved in any research misconduct allegations reported to UKRI. Information relating to the amount of funding in **Tables 1 & 2** also cannot be provided, as to do so may result in individual award holders being identified.

**FUNDING ASSURANCE QUESTIONNAIRE RETURNS, 2019/20**

Questionnaires were received from the following 35 organisations for 2019/20:

Research Organisation
<b>Visits</b>
King's College London
University of Warwick
University of Leicester
Loughborough University
University of East Anglia
University of Sussex
University of Bristol
University of Sheffield
University of Glasgow
University of Birmingham
Cardiff University
Imperial College London
Queen Mary, University of London
Heriot-Watt University
University of Nottingham
Makerere University
Infectious Diseases Institute
University of Nairobi
<b>Desk-based reviews</b>
School of Oriental and African Studies
University of Huddersfield
University of The West of England, Bristol
City University, London
University of Brighton
Natural History Museum
University of Northumbria at Newcastle
University of Dundee
Liverpool John Moores University
Brunel University London
Aberystwyth University
Royal Holloway, University of London
University of Aberdeen



Research Organisation
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Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine
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Robert Gordon University
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Sangath
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University of Portsmouth
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