

Annual Statement on Research Integrity, academic year 2023-24

Context

Various aspects of research governance are managed through nationally-produced concordats which provide templates of good practice to institutions. These concordats are endorsed by our funding bodies and are used to drive continuous improvement approaches to core research governance questions. Institutions are expected to implement the concordats but have some flexibility in interpretation to ensure activities best suit the local institutional context.

One of these concordats is the Concordat to Support Research Integrity. Commitment 5 in the Concordat states “We are committed to working together to strengthen the integrity of research and to reviewing progress regularly and openly” and that (...) “Employers of researchers will (...) produce a short annual statement, which must be presented to their own governing body, and subsequently be made publicly available, ordinarily through the institution’s website. This annual statement must include:

- a summary of actions and activities that have been undertaken to support and strengthen understanding and the application of research integrity issues (for example postgraduate and researcher training, or process reviews)
- a statement to provide assurance that the processes the institution has in place for dealing with allegations of misconduct are transparent, timely, robust and fair, and that they continue to be appropriate to the needs of the organisation
- a high-level statement on any formal investigations of research misconduct that have been undertaken, which will include data on the number of investigations. If no formal investigation has been undertaken, this should also be noted
- a statement on what the institution has learned from any formal investigations of research misconduct that have been undertaken, including what lessons have been learned to prevent the same type of incident re-occurring
- a statement on how the institution creates and embeds a research environment in which all staff, researchers and students feel comfortable to report instances of misconduct.

Introduction

As stated in the College’s Research Integrity Code of Practice, honesty, openness, accountability and integrity are vital qualities for any academic researcher in any academic discipline.

At Birkbeck all research is carried out in a climate where high standards of personal conduct are encouraged and expected. Everyone engaged in research, no matter what their level of experience, is expected to act with the highest standards of integrity.

To foster and maintain its research culture, Birkbeck expects all researchers to:

- maintain open and honest professional standards
- exercise accountability in research
- ensure leadership and cooperation in research groupings
- take special account of the needs of inexperienced researchers
- ensure training and supervision for researchers
- plan and conduct research in accordance with the requirements of funders and all relevant College and external codes of practice, legislation and regulatory bodies
- follow best current ethical practice
- exercise care and respect for participants in research projects
- ensure data is stored, shared, preserved and disposed of appropriately and responsibly

- document and making available research data
- ensure the results of research are openly accessible
- acknowledge the contribution of others
- take appropriate measures to protect intellectual property
- take action if research misconduct is suspected
- manage any conflicts of interest in line with the College policy.

This statement is part of the College's commitment to further strengthen our research integrity.

Research Integrity Statement

A summary of actions and activities that have been undertaken to support and strengthen understanding and the application of research integrity issues (for example postgraduate and researcher training, or process reviews).

The College recognises that there is still a body of work to be done to ensure that all our policies and procedures relating to research integrity, research ethics and research misconduct are effectively communicated to our researchers. Best practice in this area is constantly evolving and the College cannot 'rest on its laurels' in assuming that all researchers are aware of latest developments at all times. Training is an essential part of this work.

At the student level, all UG, PGT and PGR students receive relevant training in questions of ethics and integrity as a core part of their research methods modules, and through workshops etc. which are run to support the process of writing dissertations. At the PGR level, this is complemented by generic training and information sessions which are run by BGRS (the Birkbeck Graduate Research School). It is compulsory that all PGR students receive additional training in research ethics and integrity.

To summarise our key activities over the last five years:

Over the 2019-20 academic year, one area of the College that was significantly affected by the global COVID pandemic is the provision of staff and student training, and the College acknowledged that not only did we not make the progress we hoped in this year, we also went backwards in some areas.

However, the decision was taken that the transition to a blended approach to learning for our students will be applied to our staff training provision and over the summer in 2021 a comprehensive review of our training offer was undertaken allow for a greater use of the new online resources that the College now has access too. A priority for this review was to enhance our provision of researcher development training, including in the areas of ethics and integrity. One department is already trialling the use of our Moodle shell as a more effective mechanism to engage students with ethics applications.

This work continued in 2021-22 and whilst progress is slower than we would ideally like to see, there has at least been some tangible progress: a bespoke researcher development Moodle shell has been set up to house necessary resources and is being populated over time. A working group comprising the three operational leads for staff and PGR student development has been created and meets every two weeks to ensure progress continues to be made, and work has begun to develop a framework for research integrity for our academic staff and students to explain which training they need to undertake at which stage in order to ensure that their research has integrity. In recognition that the College hosts a number of joint appointments with UCL this framework is deliberately being developed to be synergistic with the equivalent framework from UCL.

Over 2022-23 the College undertook a major restructure, transitioning from a 5 School/16 Department structure to a 3 Faculty/8 School model. As a part of this all governance arrangements and committee memberships have been reviewed, including our ethics and integrity processes. In practice, the outcome of this review has led to minimal changes with each Faculty maintaining a Faculty Ethics Committee as will those Schools where the number of ethics applications justifies this (in practice this will be our Business School, our School of Psychological Sciences and our School of Social Sciences), as was the case in our School and Department model. The most significant change is that the academic membership of our College level Ethics Committee will be increased from 5 to 7 members to ensure we have effective academic representation. We view this change as positive.

Other changes which result from the restructure mean that Faculty Ethics Committees will from now have consistent Terms of Reference and there will be a requirement for all members of Faculty Ethics Committees to go through the same basic training to ensure they are fully up to date with changes to internal processes and the latest guidance.

Alongside the restructure we have managed to complete the work on our Research Integrity Framework and that work on that has moved on to consider how we can most effectively translate the framework into our systems and processes to ensure that it is a useful and effective tool. We hope to have a soft launch of the framework by the end of 2023 to allow us to monitor and adjust over the remainder of the 2023-24 academic year.

We began the 2023-24 academic year with a watching brief to ensure our new systems and processes bedded in effectively and that our ethics processes continued to function effectively, an issue which was compounded by a change to our ethics forms system which did not roll out as smoothly as we would have hoped.

From May 2024, we had a new Researcher Training Manager in post who met with all the School Ethics leads to discuss training needs and to begin work to comprehensively review, and where necessary refine, our approaches to training in this (and other) areas. One of the first outcomes from this work has been the creation of an improved suite of training materials for students to complete before they begin work in our Babylab and Toddlerlab.

Assurance that the processes the institution has in place for dealing with allegations of misconduct are transparent, timely, robust and fair, and that they continue to be appropriate to the needs of the organisation

Any person wishing to raise concerns about the integrity of research being undertaken by the College can do so formally or informally as described in the [College's Research Misconduct Procedure](#). For 2023-24 formal queries were raised with the Deputy College Secretary (Governance), [Katharine Bock](#) and informal queries could be raised with the Head of Research Strategy Support, [Dr Sarah Lee](#).

Our [Research Misconduct Procedure](#) outlines the procedure followed when there is an allegation of misconduct in research. This procedure is intended to ensure that all investigations are carried out in a fair, transparent and timely manner, giving appropriate support to the complainant whilst maintaining the presumption of innocence for the respondent. Appropriate protection of confidentiality for both the complainant and the respondent are also embodied within the procedure.

The Procedure draws heavily on the 2008 publication from the UK Research Integrity Office "[Procedure for the Investigation of Misconduct in Research \(ukrio.org\)](#)", but with some amendments to reflect the College's relatively small size, evolution (since 2008) in our understanding of best practice, and to map

more effectively onto other College's processes (for example, to allow a Research Misconduct investigation to constitute the first stage of a formal disciplinary process where this is appropriate).

This policy dates from 2016 and was last reviewed in March 2024 to ensure it remains fit for purpose. Its next review is due in March 2026.

High-level statement on any formal investigations of research misconduct that have been undertaken

- Over the 2023-24 academic year the College received one formal allegation of research misconduct.
- Over the 2022-23 academic year, the College received zero informal queries about whether or not research misconduct may have occurred.

What the institution has learned from any formal investigations of research misconduct that have been undertaken, including what lessons have been learned to prevent the same type of incident reoccurring

The formal allegation into research misconduct that we received was timed so that the process of this investigation fed into revisions to our procedure which were intended to make it more effective in our new structure. Whilst the timing was entirely serendipitous thinking through a real case whilst drafting alterations improved the robustness of our policy.

Additional notes

The College has a suite of policies and procedures in place to ensure that research (and our other activities) are undertaken to the highest standards of integrity and ethics. The College recognises the important role such documents play in embedding a culture of ethics and integrity and in supporting our researchers to understand the standards expected of them in terms of values and behaviours.

These policies and procedures are all available on our [Research integrity — Birkbeck, University of London \(bbk.ac.uk\)](https://www.bbk.ac.uk/research-integrity) webpages and are reviewed against national best practice benchmarks ca. every two years to ensure that they remain relevant and up to date.

Our [Research Integrity Code of Practice](#) is our institutional framework for good research practice, and sits alongside our [Responsibilities and Procedures for Ethical Review](#), which describe the framework and processes we have in place to ensure all our activities, including research, are conducted in accordance with fundamental ethics principles.

These policies are referenced in College induction processes.

All these policies were reviewed and updated in 2024 with the next review due in 2026.

The College is a subscriber to the Research Integrity Office and attends the annual conference.

All links accessed 09/10/2024.