Annual Statement on Research Integrity Academic year 2018-19

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 Colleges 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 complimented 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.

In 16-17 some gaps in terms of research integrity training provision for staff were identified, and the College Ethics Committee identified this as a priority area for the 17-18 year. In 17-18, whilst ad hoc training continued through presentations, workshops and guest speakers, the College Ethics Committee worked with the Schools to identify real/realistic, generalisable, challenging questions and a [set of training materials were produced and placed onto the College website](#) to support Schools to begin to develop more structured training programmes to be delivered in house. Potential gaps in the formal training of supervisors of PhD students were also identified, especially when those supervisors are external to the College.

A supervisors network was set up in 18-19 to allow peer-to-peer support in considering questions relating to the supervision of PGR students, and ethics and integrity has been flagged as an area that the network should look into. For the first time in 2017-18 we asked the Schools to report on their training provision around ethics and integrity and this will allow us to monitor that the fruitful discussions from 17-18 translate into practice and to share best practice.

Over the 18-19 academic year the College has continued to run regular formal training sessions for PGR students about research ethics and research integrity. This work sits alongside work undertaken at the School or Departmental level. Examples of good practice over the last year include:

- In the School of Science, for MSc/PhD students, the School Ethic Chair leads a class on ethics during the Generic Research Skills class in the first term of each year. BSc students are expected to be trained by their supervisors during their final year project. I advertise by-appointment meetings to all postgraduate students and staff members. I insist that any staff member who is supervising a postgraduate/undergraduate project student for the first time make an appointment with me to discuss ethics details. We have a very detailed ethics website with links to risk assessments, DBS procedures and applications.
- In the School of Law, there has been significant investment in making our PGR and Master's students aware that they may require ethical approval and, as a result, we have seen an increase in enquiries. This is very positive, and we plan to build on this in 2019-20 by raising awareness among staff of the School's process of ethical review.
- In the School of Business, Economics and Informatics, students across the Departments receive ethics training as part of formal teaching sessions, typically in Research Methods or Dissertation workshops. The School offers three additional types of training session: a school level workshop and Department-specific workshops in Management and OP. In 2017-18 we designed our new research ethics Intranet environment which provides information for all four departments in the school on ethics related matters, such as links to ethics forms, protocols and review procedures.

- **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. Formal queries are raised with the Chair of the College Ethics Committee, Professor Stewart Motha and informal queries can 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 that all investigations are carried out in a fair, transparent and timely manner, giving appropriate support to the complainant whilst maintain 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", but with some amendments to reflect the Colleges relatively small size, evolution (since 2008) in our understanding of best practice, and to map more effectively onto other Colleges 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 is due to be reviewed in the 19-20 academic year to ensure it remains fit for purpose.

- **High-level statement on any formal investigations of research misconduct that have been undertaken.**
    - Over the 17-18 academic year the College did not receive any formal allegations of research misconduct so zero investigations were undertaken.
    - Over the 17-18 academic year, the College received two informal queries about whether or not research misconduct may have occurred. In both cases it was determined that research misconduct had not 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 re-occurring.**

Both the informal queries mentioned in the section above required some investigation work to determine whether or not misconduct may have occurred. This did highlight an area in our misconduct procedure which needs attention – currently the policy is silent about whether and how and informal investigation should be reported in the event a formal allegation is also raised. This will be addressed in the 19-20 review of the policy

- **How the institution creates and embeds a research environment in which all staff, researchers and students feel comfortable to report instances of misconduct.**

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 web pages 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 describes 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 made available to staff through the University web pages and are referenced in College induction processes.

All these policies are due to be reviewed and updated in the 19-20 academic year.

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

all links accessed 11/11/18.