

# **Annual Statement on Research Integrity, academic year 2021-22**

## **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.

In 2016-17 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 2017-18 year. In 2017-18, 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 2018-19 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 2017-18 translate into practice and to share best practice.

Over the 2018-19 academic year the College 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.

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 to allow for a great 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 trialing 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.

### **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 Deputy College Secretary (Governance), [Katharine Bock](#) 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 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](#)", 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 2022 to ensure it remains fit for purpose. Final approval for all changes was given in December 2022. Its next review is due in March 2024.

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

- Over the 2021-22 academic year the College received one formal allegation of research misconduct but this did not progress to the formal investigation phase. The formal investigation phase of an allegation which was initiated in 2020-21 was completed in this year. No other allegations of research misconduct were received.
- Over the 2020-21 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 investigation which concluded in 2022 related to a historic allegation dating back several decades and following the investigation the allegation was not upheld. However, this case had been investigated on two previous occasions by the College and the 2022 formal investigation did find that these two previous investigations had been deficient when compared to accepted standards today, learning which has been fed back to the two areas that would lead the equivalent processes under our current procedures.

The process of investigating a complex and historic case also highlighted to us some areas in our procedure which were not well suited to investigations of this type, and this learning fed into the revisions made to our procedure in March 2022 which should make our processes more transparent to both complainant and respondent in the event further historic allegations are received by the College.

## **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 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 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 made available to staff through the [College's Research Integrity web pages](#) and are referenced in College induction processes.

All these policies were reviewed and updated in 2022 with the next review due in 2024.

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

All links accessed 10/12/2022