

## **Teesside University Research Governance**

### **Annual Statement on activities supporting research integrity 2013-2014**

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#### Institutional context of this statement

Research integrity activity is co-ordinated by the Graduate Research School (GRS) and the University Research Ethics and Integrity Committee (UREIC). The Research Governance & Training Manager in GRS is Secretary to UREIC and, in tandem with Chair of UREIC, is responsible for leading the University's work in research integrity assurance.

The terms of reference of UREIC are:

- (a) To oversee the research ethics and research integrity training provided by the University.
- (b) To consider issues relating to research ethics and integrity, including the ethical propriety and legal compliance of research projects, as referred to it by RPC, URDSC, RESCs of Schools, or individual staff or students.
- (c) To review, on a regular basis, the University's policies, procedures and guidelines relating to research ethics, research conduct and research integrity.
- (d) To report annually to the Research Policy Committee.
- (e) To provide information and advice to researchers in the University on issues relating to research ethics.
- (f) To consult internally/externally as necessary.

UREIC met four times over the 2013-14 academic year. The Committee's agenda covered all aspects of research ethics review done by School RECs; and a specific section of each meeting agenda devoted specifically to strategy and policy on research integrity in all its aspects.

For 2013-14, the Committee made significant progress in agreeing the parameters of the University's long-term approach to research integrity with the aim of achieving compliance with the *Concordat to Support Research Integrity* by the end of academic year 2014-15. Members recognised the complexity of ensuring research integrity: policy and procedures are already in place to set standards, but the cultural and environmental factors ensuring that research integrity becomes embedded in research practice across the institution were acknowledged as much more difficult to manage at the central

committee level. To this effect, discussions on policy and procedure were largely concluded with concrete decisions and actions to improve formal policy and documentation, whilst the more difficult task of co-ordinating local research integrity and overall development within research institutes and Schools remained at the planning stage with a view to implementing new systems locally over 2014-15.

### Supporting and strengthening research integrity: strategy

UREIC and GRS are committed to the development of systems, procedures, policies, guidance and support which are aimed at long-term sustainability and effectiveness in ensuring research integrity rather than a short-term compliance-driven approach. The development of long-term effectiveness is based on evidence into the effectiveness of ethics programmes in large and complex organisations as well as evidence provided by the effectiveness of research ethics review systems at Teesside. The University has over the past three years undertaken an extensive revision of ethics review policies and systems, moving from a central-system to a devolved system which ensures that review is conducted to standards appropriate for the disciplines in each academic School. This has proved successful in improving staff and student engagement with the process of ethical review.

A similar rationale has driven UREIC's consideration of support processes for research integrity. With the view that central policy and systems are unlikely to achieve long-term research integrity *in practice*, the approach for 2013-14 has largely been: a) to assess what systems and procedures are likely to be effective for the University's research community; b) alignment of systems and procedures with the structure and culture of the institution; c) addressing operational issues that are known, via existing ethical review systems, to be more difficult to handle centrally.

It is the view of GRS and UREIC that research integrity depends fundamentally on the awareness, understanding, and actions of researchers (whether students or staff), support staff, management and administrators; as well as on management systems. Although the latter are important mechanisms, they cannot substitute for decisions and actions taken by researchers, who must ultimately take responsibility for the integrity of their work whilst it is being conducted. The institution's approach must, therefore, be: a) to ensure that researchers are aware of, and understand, the relevant issues; b) that researchers are adequately supported in understanding the issues and putting standards and principles into practice; c) that researchers are given opportunities to learn more or obtain advice about research integrity

where they have difficult situations to resolve as well as in basic standards; d) that management and other support roles *enable* researchers to act with integrity and do not implement systems which hinder this goal; e) that when situations arise where integrity may be or is comprised, the institution reviews whether management and support systems are adequate, as well as addressing the particular instance or case of misconduct in question. The matter of integrity is principally about researcher conduct, but the parameters within which research conduct takes place are created by management and institutional structure, thereby implicating institutional factors in instances where integrity may be or is compromised.

With this in mind, in 2013-14 UREIC took the following as starting points for long-term development of research integrity when discussing where Teesside University stands vis-à-vis the *Concordat to Support Research Integrity*:

- 1) Principal responsibilities should be at the local, not central, level for monitoring and support of research integrity;
- 2) Workloads for extra responsibilities for REC Chairs/members should be considered a hindrance to research integrity development: monitoring and support locally are different functions from ethics review and most REC time is already devoted to review of applications, as is defined within their Terms of Reference. It is undesirable as well as impractical to expect RECs to take on this responsibility;
- 3) Staff training, support, and mentoring, particularly for supervisors, should be the first priority in devolved responsibility; this is particularly important given the primarily teaching remit of academic Schools;
- 4) Student training and support can be put in place via existing framework and regulations for award of degrees.

In 2012-13, the University reviewed and revised the policy documentation on research integrity, resulting in the *Framework and Code of Practice for Ensuring Research Integrity*. Student regulations, for both research degree programmes and professional doctorates, were brought into alignment. The *Policies, Procedures, and Guidelines for Research Ethics* were updated in 2012 and are reviewed annually to amend details of the review process and incorporate new guidance material as appropriate.

Six principles for ethical review form the basis of the *Policies, Procedures and Guidelines for Research Ethics*, are featured on the main research ethics webpages, and are used in all formal training for students and staff. In addition the document *Guidance on Data Protection in Research Contexts* provides expert advice on data-related issues.

A list of the relevant documents applicable to research ethics and integrity is given at the back of this statement along with the six principles for research ethics.

The implementation of the University's *Framework and Code of Practice for Ensuring Research Integrity* is a key component in development of research integrity as well as demonstrating the institution's commitment to achieving compliance with external standards. However, concerns about the difference between *evidencing a commitment* to research integrity and *how this would be monitored and ensured at local level* were thought to be the principal challenge. To address this, it was agreed that a research integrity specific role, independent of the academic School structure, be created in each of the Research Institutes. Over 2014-15, appropriate staff for this role would be identified, roles defined, and systems put in place to embed this role into the Institute structure, independent of School RECs. Staff with the research integrity role would be ex-officio members of UREIC, allowing for clear communication from centre to local level and vice-versa; and for Chairs of SRECs on UREIC to share information and monitor local research integrity issues with the staff in this role. The advantage of this system is that a balance is achieved between the need for central oversight and properly devolved responsibilities at the local level. The proposed Institute model was discussed by the Chair of UREIC with the Dean of GRS for action in 2014-15.

Reporting lines are based on the existing committee structure. Using the Institute model, the Research Institutes sub-Committee (RISC) allows for close working with the management and staff in Institutes. Since, RISC reports to University Research Policy Committee (URPC), as does UREIC, this ensures that URPC is briefed on on-going issues and actions. UREIC Chair will begin to attend RISC meetings as part of reporting and is already an ex-officio member of URPC, which ensures consistency of reporting and for information from the higher committee to be shared effectively to sub committees. URPC reports each year to Academic Board on research integrity.

At the start of each academic year, UREIC conducts an annual report system, including audit: from 2014-15 this will also include research integrity specific audit. Whilst this will be a limited exercise for year 2013-14, from 2015-16 it is expected that the strategic elements noted in this statement will be in place. As part of the audit, both the UKRIO self-assessment tool and the Association for Research Ethics (AfRE) Framework matrix for research ethics committee review will be used.

### Supporting and strengthening research integrity: guidance, support, training

In addition to the policy context of the *Framework* and the regulatory documents, a set of guidelines will be disseminated at the start of 2014-15 academic year providing a detailed gloss on the principles and responsibilities contained in the *Framework*.

The *Policy, Procedures and Guidelines for Research Ethics* contains extensive detailed guidance on the principles of research ethics review and provides expert reference points for all students and staff applying for ethical review clearance. Two briefing sheets are in preparation summarising essential points for both research integrity and research ethics for dissemination alongside the more detailed documents and for reference by students and staff. The *Singapore Statement on Research Integrity* provides the model for these.

Whilst training in research ethics and integrity has been going on in a structured form for a number of years, UREIC has recently reviewed the way in which different levels of students and staff may require specific and bespoke training. As a matter of long-term development, the following groups have been identified as relevant groupings for which training and other support will be provided:

#### Postgraduate research:

Mandatory research ethics and integrity training is provided for PGR cohorts. This training is taken in the first month of admission and is linked to permission to progress to a 2<sup>nd</sup> year. These sessions are specified in offer letters along with dates of required attendance. Content includes an overview of international guidelines and UK expectations on research integrity; data management, interpretation and analysis; planning and design issues; authorship, publication, and review; research communication and media; dual-use, public interest, and advocacy; principles of ethical review, including valid consent; harm and risk management; confidentiality and disclosure. Tailored case studies are used extensively for discussion.

#### Postgraduate research supervisors:

New supervisors attend mandatory training prior to supervising students, which includes practical management techniques for PGR projects and covers research integrity and ethical review.

Taught student projects and staff supervising taught student projects:

Ethical review is required for all UG and PGT projects. Staff supervising these projects are required to take responsibility for ethical review for their students. As a result, staff are encouraged to attend formal training but Chairs of local RECs also provide individual support and advice.

New research staff:

On starting work, new staff attend a mandatory Induction. GRS provide new research staff with a range of support and guidance documents. New staff are encouraged to attend the research integrity and research ethics training sessions, which run three times per year, once per term.

Existing research staff:

New REC members are required to attend the research ethics training sessions, which run three times per year, once per term. However, attendance at formal training by other existing research staff remains an area of concern. UREIC has identified this issue as a priority. The main challenge remains staff availability to attend a limited number of formal training sessions. The approach taken to local support is aimed at resolving this by providing flexible support where needed, whilst also encouraging staff to attend formal training where possible.

Administrative staff with research remit:

From 2014-15, all administrative staff with research responsibilities will have bespoke training in research integrity and ethics provided. These sessions are designed specifically for administrative tasks and are not simply an extension of the sessions provided for students and research staff. The training of administrative staff is viewed as a key dissemination and oversight mechanism at the local level, as well as providing another safeguard from a monitoring perspective.

Formal training is led by the Research Governance and Training Manager, an internationally recognized expert in research ethics and integrity. All materials used are bespoke and based on international standards and principles. Advice and guidance is also provided frequently to individual members of staff and students by appointment with the Research Governance Manager.

A research project conducted in collaboration with staff from another institution is in the final stages. The outcomes of the project will take the form of training and guidance material for use in research integrity training across the sector as well as in-house.

## Addressing research misconduct

The University has two documents relating specifically to reporting and investigation of allegations of research misconduct. The *Framework and Code of Practice for Ensuring Research Integrity* is an institution-wide document setting out principles, standards, and responsibilities for research integrity, as well as definitions of research misconduct and procedures for allegations and investigations. In addition, the *Regulations Relating to Research Misconduct on Research Degrees* sets out definitions and procedures applied specifically to research degree programmes, including stages of reporting by supervisors, examiners, or other parties. The definitions of misconduct are the same in both documents, with extended definitions where misconduct applies in examination situations that do not apply to other students or to staff.

Staff procedures in the *Framework* refer to the institution's *Disciplinary Policy*. It is anticipated that during 2014-15 this will be extended to include detailed screening procedures for allegations and more specification about the composition of investigation panels and criteria for referring decision making to the *Disciplinary Policy* and associated procedures. The *Framework* is designed to refer outside itself to other relevant University policies and procedures where possible to ensure consistency and alignment with related matters, such as academic misconduct on taught programmes; intellectual property policies; data management and protection; and research ethics review.

All processes are characterised by high standards of rigour and fairness. Whilst the procedure for staff depends on other HR-systems in the *Disciplinary Policy*, and it is expected that research-specific elements will be further defined in 2014-15, the procedures for research degree programmes contain extensive mechanisms for fairness, transparency and to protect confidentiality. These procedures, particularly the screening procedure, will be used as a model for expanding and improving those applicable to staff in the *Framework*.

The definitions and procedures for research degree programmes were reviewed and revised to include specific aspects that arose in actual cases of misconduct and in investigation of those cases. The screening procedure, which includes the use of a pro-forma for receiving allegations, and detailed specification of the grounds for and basis on which investigations must proceed, were developed following misconduct allegations and investigations, and aim for clarity and transparency for both complainant and respondent. Training materials, delivery and other guidance were also revised on the basis of actual cases, particularly with reference to plagiarism and reporting lines for allegations.

### Instances, allegations and investigations of research misconduct

The responsibility for receiving of research misconduct allegations and for convening screening processes or formal investigations lies with the Graduate Research School, with monitoring responsibilities by UREIC. Whilst the instances of misconduct, allegations and investigations where this applies to research students and staff is monitored directly by GRS/UREIC, the long-term view set out in this statement requires that an institution-wide approach is taken to identifying relevant instances, even where these may lie outside of the “research” focus of the *Concordat to Support Research Integrity*. With this in mind, work has begun to develop systems to allow for a record of all pertinent instances on professional doctorate programmes and, ultimately, on taught postgraduate programmes which have a research component. The University’s *Framework* applies to work which, under the *Policies and Procedures for Research Ethics*, would be expected to undergo ethical review. It is recognized that this goes beyond what is expected in the *Concordat*, but tries to achieve consistency in expectations, and applies the principle that research activity requiring ethical review ought also to be subject to the broader standards of research integrity.

Reporting of misconduct on research components of professional doctorates and taught postgraduate courses is collated retrospectively annually by the Ombuds Office. Currently, systems are being developed to allow for finer granularity in the way this data is collected for use in future reporting.

No formal allegations were received or investigations undertaken in 2013-14 for staff and none are in process as of June 2014. Three investigations at doctoral level were undertaken in the past year:

- An allegation of plagiarism was upheld;
- The investigation of an allegation of data fabrication is on-going;
- An allegation of confidentiality breach is in the screening stage.

One adverse event, involving a research participant on a taught student research project, was investigated and resulted in review and revision of risk assessment at ethical review stage and for improved consent procedures in the discipline involved.



## External engagement

The University is not a formal member of UKRIO. However, the Research Governance and Training Manager is an advisor for UKRIO and was a contributor to the UKRIO self-assessment tool. He also presented at the UKRIO conference in May 2014. The University is a member of AfRE and has been for a number of years. The Research Governance Manager is a member of the AfRE University Development Group and was involved with the development of AfRE's *Framework and Policies for RECs*. Sharing of good practice with other institutions is viewed as vital to the improvement of research integrity and ethics across the sector.

## Summary of relevant documentation referred to in this statement

### *Policy, Procedures and Guidelines for Research Ethics*

<http://www.tees.ac.uk/docs/DocRepo/Research/ethics.pdf>

### *Framework and Code of Practice for Ensuring Research Integrity*

<http://www.tees.ac.uk/docs/docrepo/research/code%20of%20practice1.pdf>

### *Regulations Relating to Research Misconduct on Research Degrees*

<http://www.tees.ac.uk/docs/index.cfm?folder=Student%20Regulations&name=Research%20Regulations>

### *Guidance on Data Protection in Research Contexts*

<http://www.tees.ac.uk/docs/docrepo/research/Guidance%20on%20data%20in%20research%20contexts.pdf>

The following URL is where the web pages hosting all the relevant documentation for both ethics review and research integrity can be found:

<http://www.tees.ac.uk/sections/research/governance.cfm>

## Teesside University's Principles for Research Ethics

These principles are used as the basis for ethical review. Each academic School has a local ethics committee, known as a School Research Ethics Committee (SREC). The Chair for each SREC is an ex-officio member of UREIC.

### Principle 1

Harm to research participants must be avoided: the protection of the dignity, rights, safety and well-being of all actual and potential participants, researchers, non-participating members of the public, and the environment takes precedence over scientific, or any other, considerations or interests.

### Principle 2

Research should be designed, reviewed and undertaken to ensure adherence to the highest standards of quality, integrity, ethical propriety and governance, and legal compliance.

### Principle 3

Researchers and participants must normally be informed as fully as possible about the purposes, methods and intended possible uses of the research, what their participation in the research entails, and what risks and benefits are involved. This information should be accurate, clear, and easily understood by the potential participant, who should have the capacity to understand what is involved in their participation. Research proposing variation from this principle may be approved but only in very specific contexts in which the lack of proper information must be justified by the value of the research.

### Principle 4

Research participants must consent to participate in a voluntary way, free from any coercion, undue influence, or manipulation. Use of inducements to encourage participation must be carefully monitored.

### Principle 5

The confidentiality of information supplied by research participants, and their anonymity, must be respected except in cases where illegal behaviour is discovered. All data and other materials from and about research participants will be collected, processed, retained, stored, and disposed of, in accordance with current legal requirements.

### Principle 6

The independence of research must be clear, and any conflicts of interest or partiality must be disclosed. Publication of research results must be done fairly and with the public good taking priority over private or personal interests.