Teesside University Research Governance

Annual Statement on activities supporting research integrity

October 2015 for academic year 2014-15

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 2014-15 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 2014-15, the Committee made significant progress in implementing aspects of research integrity assurance agreed in the previous academic year and referred to in the Annual Statement for 2013-14.

Supporting and strengthening research integrity: strategy

The *Framework and Code of Practice for Ensuring Research Integrity* in its current form has been in place since academic year 2012-13*.* A list of the relevant documents applicable to research ethics and integrity is given at the back of this statement.

In 2013-14, it was agreed that a research integrity specific role linked with each of the Research Institutes but independent of the academic School structure, be created. In 2014-15, appropriate staff for this role were identified, independent of the School RECs and it was agreed that the role be called *Research Integrity Liaison Officer*. Staff identified for this role are ex-officio members of UREIC and attend UREIC meetings alongside REC Chairs and other University staff with duties associated with ethics, integrity, and compliance. A briefing event between four Research Integrity Liaison Officers and the Research Governance & Training Manager was held. A set of role descriptors was created.

At the start of each academic year, UREIC conducts an annual report system, including audit. From 2015-16 it is expected that the strategic elements noted in this statement will be in place and will be included as part of the annual reporting cycle. 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 'Research Integrity Briefings' were created for use on web pages and in training sessions.

The *Policy, Procedures and Guidelines for Research Ethics* already 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.

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. Postgraduate research students must attend mandatory research ethics and integrity training for PGR cohorts. This training is taken in the first month of admission and is linked to permission to progress to a 2nd year. These sessions are specified in offer letters along with dates of required attendance. Postgraduate research supervisors attend mandatory training prior to supervising students, which includes practical management techniques for PGR projects and covers research integrity and ethical review. In 2014-15, research administrators participated in research integrity training for the first time and each year will attend an update session. New research staff must

attend mandatory induction sessions. For the first time in 2014-15, these staff received a briefing from the Research Governance & Training Manager, including information about research integrity. Existing research staff are invited to attend one of the research ethics and integrity training sessions running several times annually. New REC members are required to attend the research ethics training sessions, which run three times per year, once per term.

Formal training is led by the Research Governance & Training Manager. 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 & Training Manager.

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.

In 2014-15, significant revision was made to the section of the *Framework* related to allegations of research misconduct against staff. Detailed screening procedures for allegations were created and clear specifications about the composition of investigation panels and criteria for referring decision making to the *Disciplinary Policy* and associated procedures following screening were added. The revised section of the *Framework* was approved by the University's Academic Board on 8-July-2015 and is pending full implementation after consultation with trade unions, via Human Resources.

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.

Reporting of misconduct on research components of professional doctorates and taught postgraduate courses is collated retrospectively annually by OSCAR (Office of Student Complaints, Appeals and Regulations). 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 2014-15 related to *allegations against staff*.

Two investigations at *doctoral* level were on going when the Annual Statement for 2013-14 was created, both of these investigations have now been concluded as follows:

- An investigation of an allegation of data fabrication proved that misconduct had occurred, resulting in a formal fitness-to-practice hearing being convened;

- An allegation of confidentiality breach made by an external examiner against a doctoral student was upheld but in consultation with the external examiner in question, the work was permitted to be revised to remove the offending data.

In 2014-15, the following allegations were received and investigations undertaken, related to *doctoral level*:

- A specific methodological element of a doctoral thesis was alleged by an external examiner to have been conducted unethically and that it might not have been properly reviewed by a research ethics committee. Initial screening demonstrated that the project had been reviewed properly by an REC but that the application for review had not referred to the element of methodology in question. The external examiner subsequently required that the candidate remove this element of the thesis and add a commentary about ethical consideration of methods to the existing text of the thesis before moving onto viva examination. Consequently a further investigation was not undertaken.

- An interim assessment for a first-year doctoral project was alleged by an external assessor to have been plagiarised. A formal Stage 1 hearing was held and plagiarism was proven. A Stage 1 penalty was imposed consisting of formal remedial action by supervisors, issue of a formal warning and student record flagged with record of investigation and outcome. Any subsequent instance of alleged misconduct will move automatically to a Stage 2 with penalty of withdrawal or failure if proven.

Summary of relevant research integrity documentation

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