

Queen's University Belfast

Annual Statement of Compliance with The Concordat to Support Research Integrity 2016-17

1. Annual Statement of Compliance

- 1.1 Universities UK issued the Concordat to Support Research Integrity in 2012 with the expectation that Research Organisations would comply with five key commitments:
- i. "Maintaining the highest standards of rigour and integrity in all aspects of research;
 - ii. Ensuring that research is conducted according to appropriate ethical, legal and professional frameworks, obligations and standards;
 - iii. Supporting a research environment that is underpinned by a culture of integrity and based on good governance, best practice and support for the development of researchers;
 - iv. Using transparent, robust and fair processes to deal with allegations of research misconduct should they arise;
 - v. Working together to strengthen the integrity of research and to reviewing progress regularly and openly."
- 1.2 Queen's University Belfast is required to produce an annual statement to Senate on its progress to enhance and embed research integrity, across the Institution. This is the fourth such statement and covers the period 01 August 2016 to 31 July 2017. All statements are available through the Research Governance, Ethics and Integrity website to support transparency <http://www.qub.ac.uk/Research/Governance-ethics-and-integrity/Research-integrity>. It should be noted that each annual statement is designed to be read as a stand-a-lone report. Therefore, contextual text may not always change from year to year.
- 1.3 The University receives funding from Research Councils UK (RCUK) and as part of the funding terms and conditions it is important the University provides assurance to them that procedures are in place to govern good research practice, and for the investigation and reporting of unacceptable research conduct.
- 1.4 In accordance with Commitment 3 of the Concordat, the University's Pro-Vice-Chancellor (PVC) for Research, Postgraduates and Enterprise is the senior academic lead on research integrity matters. The PVC is Chair of the University's Research Governance and Integrity Committee, he/she is supported by the Faculty Deans of Research and by the Research Governance, Ethics and Integrity Team. The Research Governance, Ethics and Integrity Team are responsible for the development of the necessary requirements to fulfill the University's commitment to the Concordat.

2. Supporting and strengthening Integrity

2.1 **Research Data Management**

2.1.1 Commitment 1 of the Concordat requires the University to maintain '*the highest standards of rigour and integrity in all aspects of research*'. A significant process to support this commitment is through good Research Data Management. The University's Research Data Management Policy requires researchers to comply with all relevant funder requirements, of which the common requirements include:

- a. Preparation of a Data Management Plan (DMP) either during the application process or at the outset of a research project.
- b. Publishing data underpinning published research findings in an online repository.
- c. Including an access statement in published research outputs stating how the underpinning data can be accessed.
- d. Retaining data generated during a research project for a minimum of 10 years.
- e. Storing research data in a safe, secure, backed-up location and paying due regard to any legal or ethical concerns arising from the collection and management of research data.

2.1.2 The University's Research Policy Office supports good data management through the delivery of training in both Research Data Management and Data Management Planning. In the 2016-17, academic year this was carried out through workshops organised within each of the University's 20 academic schools. Workshops are open to academic staff and postgraduate research students, and provide an overview of funder policies regarding research data management and best practice guidelines to develop a Data Management Plan. Alongside training on compliance with funder requirements, the University seeks to improve researcher engagement with best practice in Research Data Management, subsequently a series of two researcher led seminars shall be held during 2017-18 on the topic.

2.1.3 Staff in the Research Policy Office assist researchers with the preparation of Data Management Plans to support grant applications to various funding bodies. They work in conjunction with the Research and Development Team, which is also part of the Research and Enterprise Directorate.

2.1.4 The University's Research Data Manager acts as a curator to the Queen's University Active Data Storage Cluster and for datasets uploaded to institutional PURE repository. The Active Data Storage Cluster has been designed to support curation and management of large datasets. However, where a genuine need can be demonstrated, the facility can be available for all Queen's researchers. Currently 25 projects have data management supported through this facility, with 22 projects approved in 2016-17.

2.1.5 The University's PURE repository provides an important data management tool for archiving and publishing research data. Currently 98 datasets are hosted on PURE. This reflects a growing awareness of Queen's researchers with the principles of open data and good data management.

2.2 **Research Ethics**

2.2.1 During 2016-17 the Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences implemented the first phase pilot of operating a Faculty Research Ethics Committee (REC) structure.

- 2.2.2 The Faculty REC was established and it has drawn membership from each School within the Faculty. Much work was undertaken by Faculty members to ensure that a robust, standardized full and proportionate application forms were developed and, importantly, fit for purpose for the Schools within the Faculty. Additionally, a mechanism to consider and adopt projects that had received a favourable ethical review from other institutions was also developed.
- 2.2.3 These systems have been fully implemented and as the year ends the final School within the Faculty has joined, enabling the second phase of the pilot to commence in 2017-18. A full evaluation will be undertaken once this has been operational for six months.
- 2.2.4 To ensure this new structure adheres to good practice and the requirements of funders, a recruitment exercise was undertaken to appoint lay members to the Committee. The University was delighted with the response received from local alumni, willing to give of their time and support this new initiative.
- 2.2.5 Following a vacancy within the Research Governance, Ethics and Integrity Team the existing structure was reviewed and it was agreed to replace the vacancy with a person whose dedicated role would be to support academics, researchers and students with research ethics. At the end of July 2017 the University Research Ethics Officer commenced post.
- 2.2.6 As a signatory to the Concordat on Openness on the use of Animals in Research the University maintains a publically available website dedicated to the use of animals in research www.qub.ac.uk/sites/AnimalResearch/. Statistics of animal use are openly available on the site and detailed by species.
- 2.2.7 As part of the University's governance structures, the Animal Welfare Ethical Review Body made its annual report to the University's Research Ethics Committee.

2.3 Assurance

- 2.3.1 The University's Research Governance and Integrity Committee (RGIC), chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research, Postgraduate and Enterprise met three times during the year. Amongst other things the Committee ensured that a program of audits governing distinct aspects of research were conducted. The areas for audit were:
- i. Compliance with the Human Tissue Act.
 - ii. Compliance with the Research Governance Framework for Health and Social Care.
 - iii. Compliance with the UK Clinical Trials Regulations.
 - iv. Studies funded by Research Councils UK (RCUK).

An aggregated audit report was presented to RGIC for their consideration, which the Committee reviewed to identify potential areas of concern that required additional training or support. The Committee were also attentive to ensuring any corrective action plans were implemented in a timely manner.

- 2.3.2 From February to May 2017 the University was subject to a RCUK Funding Assurance Review (FAR). The review focused on the control environment in place at Queen's, at both pre-and-post-award stage. This review also included a review of research governance, ethics and integrity. RCUK reported their findings in June 2017, and assigned the highest available rating of 'substantial compliance' to the University.

2.4 Training and support to researchers

- 2.4.1 The Research Governance, Ethics and Integrity Team provides support to academics, researchers and postgraduate research students with navigating the required governance and ethical approvals needed to conduct certain types of research. A core value of the Team's work has been to equip the research community through training, to ensure that there is comprehensive understanding of legislative requirements. The Team were invited to participate in both corporate and local induction programs, as well as provide input to degree modules. In addition to these opportunities the Team organized and/or delivered training on the Human Tissue Act, Informed Consent and Ethics and Governance for Health and Social Care Research.
- 2.4.2 In April 2017 the Human Tissue Authority issued their revised Codes of Practice on the use of human tissue. Subsequently, all 9 HTA Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) were reviewed and updated to ensure they were fit for purpose. Given other SOPs used to support the research governance processes feed into compliance requirements for the Human Tissue Act, these too were reviewed and updated, as required.

3 Allegations of Misconduct in Research

- 3.1 Commitment 4 of the Concordat, the University has in place Regulations Governing an Allegation of Misconduct in Research. The procedure for the investigation of an allegation contains an initial screening stage. This allows the allegation to be reviewed to determine whether it relates to misconduct in research or if it should be considered under a different process. Once screened, Stage 1 of the Regulations would be implemented, if required. Stage 1 involves talking to relevant personnel and review of evidence relevant to the allegation. For example, and depending on the nature of the allegation, documentation, electronic files, email correspondence and laboratory notebooks can be requested and reviewed by the Screening Panel.
- 3.2 This was the first year within which the post-graduate community were part of these regulations. During 2016-17 the University received six allegations relating to staff and PGR students. Table 1, below, details the category of the University against whom the allegation was made, the Faculty to which they belong and the nature of the allegation.

Table 1: Allegation of Misconduct in Research received during 2016-17

Staff / Student	Faculty	Nature of allegation
Staff	MHLS	Plagiarism
Staff	MHLS	Authorship
Staff	AHSS	Misuse of research funds and lack of ethical approval
Staff	EPS	Breach of duty of care
Student	MHLS	Manipulation of figures*
Student	AHSS	Plagiarism

(*addressed through education and training)

- 3.3 For all but one of the allegations the concerns raised were concluded at the end of a Stage 1 investigation with the conclusion that the allegation was "mistaken, frivolous, vexatious and/or without substance with insufficient evidence to support it". Therefore,

the allegation was not upheld and was subsequently dismissed. Both the person who had made the allegation and the person against whom the allegation was made were informed of the outcome.

- 3.4 The allegation marked with an asterisk on the table identifies one allegation where it was considered by the screening/stage 1 panel that there was some substance to the concerns raised, but that this would be best addressed through education and training. The student was advised that should a similar situation arise in the future, the allegation would be escalated immediately to the second stage of the process and a panel convened.

4 External Engagement

- 4.1 The Head of Research Governance, Ethics and Integrity is an active member of the Russell Group Heads of Research Governance Forum. The Group was involved in responding to the consultation on the Research Integrity POSTnote. The POSTnote was produced by the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology as part of the process to inform MPs in relation to the Science and Technology Committee inquiry into Research Integrity.
- 4.2 A number of topics has been considered by this Group during 2016-17, in particular, the Nagoya Protocol, Institutional structures for the oversight of research ethics and integrity and work with the Health Research Authority.

End.