Brunel University London

Annual statement on Research Integrity

The University is a signatory to [The Concordat to Research Integrity 2019.](#)

The following annual statement was approved by UREC and Research and Knowledge Transfer Committee of Senate and presented to Council in November 2021.

1. *The following actions and activities have been undertaken to support and strengthen understanding and the application of research integrity issues.*

   ### Review of the BREO system in consultation with the Colleges

   The BREO system remains under continuous review through consultation with users. This year we have made minor changes to the application form to increase ease of use by students and reduce resubmissions.

   ### Development of University-wide approach to mandatory training for research ethics reviewers and academic supervisors

   Training for academic supervisors and research ethics reviewers is provided by the Research Ethics team and facilitated by the Organisational Development team, which affords better visibility and recording of attendance across the University. It is recommended that supervisors with responsibility for supervision of student research projects be mandated to attend a training workshop, as we continue to see issues around supervisors' understanding of the importance of the process in some areas, and competing demands on supervisors' time which detract from their engagement with the process.

   ### Development of involvement in national multi-institutional forum for sharing of best practice

   The Assistant University Secretary maintains close professional relationships with equivalent senior post holders at other London research institutions. London Research Integrity Consortium: The Consortium, led by Kings, has met a number of times during AY 20/21 to discuss best practice across the sector. Discussions centred on institutional training and support for researchers throughout their careers.

   ### Audit of CREC effectiveness and activity

   The audit is underway, although loss of resources and issues relating to the pandemic have delayed its progress. The audit will include assessment of standards of review, resource allocation within the Colleges/UREC, standard of supervision (relating to research ethics), adherence to the Standard Operating Procedures, and training provision.

   ### Introduction of Student Ethics Ambassadors

A new initiative, headed by the Assistant University Secretary, is due to launch during the current academic year. The initiative involves training students to act as conduits between the Research Ethics Committees (RECs) and the student population, assisting with promulgation of the University's values and peer-to-peer guidance on the process to be followed. One College (CHMLS) has expressed interest in piloting the scheme; the previous UBS President also expressed support for the initiative.

Recognition of research ethics review for academic colleagues via the Workload Allocation Model

The work undertaken by research ethics reviewers is now recognised under the Workload Allocation Model (WAM); however, it is understood that utilisation of this facility (as it relates to ethical review) across the University is low. There remains work to be done in promoting the facility within WAM and ensuring Heads of Department duly recognise the time commitment and responsibility placed upon academic reviewers.

New research webpages

A number of new internal websites have been developed to increase access and visibility of research integrity matters to research staff, particularly to new starters. These contain links to research ethics pages and training and information on the Frameworks and Concordats.

Research during Covid-19

A new policy was approved by Executive Board on 25 August 2020 formalising restrictions on research activity involving human participants during the pandemic. In line with the easing of restrictions across the UK, all projects involving face-to-face interaction with participants are now reviewed at CREC or UREC level with all applications requiring a detailed Risk Assessment setting out the proposed safety measures. All international (face-to-face) research remains subject to exemption and review by UREC; this is likely to remain in place for some time while international travel (and the response to Covid-19 in different regions) remains uncertain.

Support for distance learners

The University has continued to develop online courses. A 'first stage' Research Ethics Committee has been established for external colleagues. This looks at applications before they are made to a Brunel REC and has resulted in an improvement in the standards of submission, easing the process for colleagues and students.

Update to the Research Integrity Code

A revision of the Research Integrity Code is underway. The Code amendments include a revision to the content to reflect the research process more clearly and increase accessibility. Additional detail has been added regarding training, support and safeguarding processes in relation to disclosure and whistleblowing and public accessibility of research outputs and findings. The internal audit questions have been amended to reflect the requirements outlined in the latest version of the UUK Concordat.

2. Processes for dealing with allegations of misconduct

Any person engaging in research in the name of Brunel University London is expected to observe the highest standards of conduct. The general principles in relation to research are addressed in the Brunel University London Research Integrity Code and in the University Code of Research Ethics.

The University has established and maintains standard procedures for the investigation of misconduct in research, ensuring that such allegations are thorough, fair and conducted in a timely manner. These are outlined in Council Ordinance 18 Procedures for Investigation of Research Misconduct

The University defines research misconduct thus:

Research misconduct includes fabrication, falsification, fiscal wrong-doing, plagiarism or deception in proposing, carrying out or reporting results of research, deliberate and dangerous or negligent deviations from accepted practice in conducting research, or conducting research with human participants without first obtaining research ethics approval. It includes failure to follow an agreed protocol if this failure results in unreasonable risk or harm to humans, other vertebrates, or the environment, and facilitating misconduct in research by collusion in, or concealment of, such actions by others. Any plan or conspiracy or attempt to do any of these things is also considered to be research misconduct. This also includes failure to follow rules and regulations including those of a third party with a legitimate interest in the research of the University.

Any allegation of research misconduct should be reported confidentially to the Secretary to Council or, in the event of a potential conflict of interest or absence, his/her nominated representative appointed by the Chair of Council. Any allegations of fiscal malfeasance or irregularity in relation to research activity should be reported confidentially to the Director of Finance.

2020/21 Review of Research Misconduct Procedure

A review of this policy is underway in consultation with internal stakeholders, A new iteration of the policy has been developed, aiming to streamline the internal investigation process, clarify any different routes for staff and student cases and ensure compatibility with other relevant University policies and external regulations. It is expected the revised draft will be presented to Council for approval in the Academic year 2021/2022.

3. Formal investigations of research misconduct 2020/21

The University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) made 42 investigations into research misconduct in 2020/21 (all students). Of these, 37 were upheld.

Nineteen investigations were resolved formally; none involved research funded by a Research Council.

This is an increase in number from the previous year, thought to be due to the increase in online learning associated with Covid 19 and associated issues with communication and in-person support for students at the early stages of the process

4. What the University has learned from formal investigations of research misconduct and actions taken to prevent the same type of incident re-occurring

All investigations undertaken during this period involved ethical approval for supervised student research projects; the University has therefore improved research ethics training provision for academic supervisors, including mandatory training where required. Training for students includes lectures, clear course guidance, web-based learning and engagement with research integrity training where the proposed research involves human participants. The new student ethics ambassador initiative is intended to provide additional peer learning support for students as they engage with the ethics process.

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

Council Ordinance 18 Procedures for Investigation of Research Misconduct outlines a University central contact for cases of suspected misconduct and makes provision for individuals with concerns over research conduct to raise their issues in confidence and for confidentiality during the investigations.

This is clearly displayed on the University external research integrity webpage and the University internal research policy page and is clearly flagged on central staff research pages and linked to by each College research page. Contacts for reporting research misconduct are displayed on our webpages and colleagues are assured of the provisions for anonymity in our research misconduct policy.

Colleagues on Teaching and Research and Research only contracts are encouraged to complete the University Research integrity training unit, which is discipline specific and includes training relating to identifying and reporting misconduct. This training and the research Integrity code is highlighted in the welcome letter for new appointees and Senior research Administrators in Colleges include this in induction checklists.

For Post Graduate Research students, the University's code of practice for research degrees sets out the University's mandatory policies and procedures. This includes a link to the Research Integrity code and highlights specifically the code of research ethics.

Links to the code and online integrity are also shown on the Graduate school training development and support page.

A discussion of ethics and data management is specified in the Research degree code as part of the 4 week progression review and review points include discussions around research management skills. Details of the contact point for queries around research misconduct is on the 'my research' page of the e-vision portal for post graduate research students.

Students on taught programmes receive guidance from supervisors in relation to ethics and misconduct as part of teaching provision

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