Annual statement on Research Integrity

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

The following annual statement has been approved by UREC and Research and Knowledge Transfer Committee of Senate and presented to Council in November 2023 and Senate in December 2023. The statement will be published externally in line with our responsibilities under the Concordat.

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

We have appointed an Associate Pro Vice Chancellor for Research Culture and Governance to provide leadership and support in respect of research integrity, research ethics, trusted research (with the PVC I&S), as well as the further development of a supportive and inclusive research culture. This role will now act as Chair to our University Research Ethics Committee and of a new sub-committee of Research and Knowledge Transfer Committee which will oversee the development of research environment issues including those which support integrity.

We have instigated a new regular communication programme to all staff covering matters relating to Environment and Integrity to increase understanding and awareness of integrity related issues.

Our Annual Research Festival is open to the colleagues and the community. This year the festival included events around Open Access and talks and posters about our research and processes, including tours of our laboratories. It also included events on best practice for user engagement.

We have progressed with our support for Open Research through Library Services and an Open Research Working Group is run to identify and promote issues of Open Research. Our Open Research Award scheme resulted in a number of best practice videos which are now publicly available.

We have produced a new online PI handbook for Post Award support which includes links to research ethics pages and training and information on the Frameworks and Concordats. Our webpages also include information on how the Research Ethics Committees operate, the standards of review and linkage to relevant University policies.

We are developing best practice in research by co-creating communities of user groups with input into all phases of the project (from the development to the outcomes) based on our successful Brunel Older People's Reference Group (BORG). Two new communities will be established in 23/24 focussing on young adults and minority ethnic groups.

We are open to feedback from colleagues and, as part of our internal integrity code review process, we ask relevant departments and policy holders for updates and recommendations. We review the detailed feedback from our College Research Ethics Committees who deal with our Ethics system and run training and we use this to guide our planning process.

We are updating our University Strategy and Research Academic Delivery plan at the time of writing. The plans will confirm our commitment to Research Integrity, our charter marks, benchmarking activities and awards. We will continue to monitor our research activities against our ethical principles and ensure that Concordats and Research Integrity are fully embedded.

We will maintain our commitments to promoting and advancing equality, diversity, and inclusion across our research communities.

We will promote our research values internally and externally and will continue to support annual research festival, seminar series, open labs, public events, and student engagement activities.

Procedure for Investigation of Research Misconduct

The revised Procedure for Investigation of Research Misconduct was approved by Council in March 2022, following consultation with various internal stakeholders and engagement with the UK Research Integrity Office. The revised Procedure is publicly accessible via the University webpages.

Continuing our commitment to training

Training for academic supervisors and research ethics reviewers is provided by the central Research Ethics team and facilitated by the Organisational Development team, which affords better visibility and recording of attendance across the University. Reviewers must attend at least one training session before undertaking review on behalf of a Brunel REC and must attend refresher training every 12 months thereafter.

Colleges run training events for taught students, doctoral researchers, and staff. These are supplemented by training provided by individual departments to their students and staff members. We also run central training workshops for reviewers and supervisors with responsibility for taught student research projects.

Communication

Information and guidance on university ethics and integrity are disseminated as follows:

- Web page updates: Central pages and College specific pages
- Email circulars and IntraBrunel
- Responding to individual queries from staff and students
- To research leaders via College Research Strategy Group
- Via Departmental Ethics Co-ordinators

Trusted Research

Trusted Research is a cross government, cross research and innovation sector term for protecting the UK's intellectual property, sensitive research, people and infrastructure from potential theft, misuse and exploitation, including as a result of hostile activity by state and other actors. Consequently, UKRI has brought together work on research and innovation under a single work programme, Trusted Research and Innovation (TR&I). Issues around Trusted Research are especially relevant to STEM subjects, emerging technologies, and commercially sensitive research.

Brunel has set in place a number of processes and policies to manage the risks associated with working with overseas partners on research and innovation projects. This framework is to ensure that Brunel complies with relevant UK legislation, is contractually compliant with UKRI terms and conditions, that it adopts best practice in the management of its international research projects and that the reputation and interests of the University and our staff are protected.

Update to the Research Integrity Code

An internal review of the Research Integrity Code has been completed. Revisions include additional information relating University Concordats and Charters, revision to the section on IP and Commercialisation, expansion of information on Trusted Research with an additional link to the Brunel webpage which includes detailed policy and guidance.

The code has been made easier to read through minor changes to the format.
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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 as follows:

1. Fabrication: making up results, other outputs (for example, artefacts) or aspects of research, including documentation and participant consent, and presenting and/or recording them as if they were real

2. Falsification: inappropriately manipulating and/or selecting research processes, materials, equipment, data, imagery and/or consents

3. Financial misconduct

4. Plagiarism or deception in proposing, carrying out or reporting results of primary research

5. Deliberate, reckless, or negligent deviations from accepted practice in conducting research

6. Conducting research with human participants without first obtaining research ethics approval

7. Failure to follow an agreed protocol, particularly if this failure results in unreasonable risk or harm to humans, other vertebrates, or the environment

8. Failure to meet legal, ethical or professional obligations, including not observing legal, ethical and other requirements for human research participants, animal subjects, or human organs or tissue used in research, or for the protection of the environment

   • breach of duty of care for humans involved in research whether deliberately, recklessly or by gross negligence, including failure to obtain appropriate informed consent
   • misuse of personal data, including inappropriate disclosures of the identity of research participants and other breaches of confidentiality
   • improper conduct in peer review of research proposals, results or manuscripts submitted for publication (including failure to disclose conflicts of interest; inadequate disclosure of clearly limited competence; misappropriation of the content of material; and breach of confidentiality or abuse of material provided in confidence for the purposes of peer review)

9. Misrepresentation of

   • data, including suppression of relevant results/data or knowingly, recklessly or by gross negligence presenting a flawed interpretation of data
   • involvement, including inappropriate claims to authorship or attribution of work and denial of authorship/attribution to persons who have made an appropriate contribution
   • interests, including failure to declare competing interests of researchers or funders of a study
   • qualifications, experience and/or credentials
   • publication history, through undisclosed duplication of publication, including undisclosed duplicate submission of manuscripts for publication

10. Facilitating misconduct in research by collusion in, or concealment of, such actions by others

11. Failure to maintain a duty of confidence where such confidentiality is expressly required or implied

12. Failure to ensure that any appropriate safeguards to protect human participants are embedded and followed.

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.

3. *Formal investigations of research misconduct 2022/23*

The University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) made 0 investigations into staff or doctoral researchers.

For taught students, there were 67 investigations into Academic conduct in relation to ethics in UG final year projects or PGT dissertations. Of these, 47 were closed, 11 investigations were resolved formally; 9 remain under review (December 2023 data).

The University has conducted analysis to better understand high risk areas for these cases and is working to identify suitable measures regarding the increased number of submissions and cases including demand management, increasing reviewer base and streamlining processes.

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

For staff and doctoral researchers we note that a zero return is a positive indicator, however we remain vigilant and are increasing our communication process to ensure that awareness remains high and that colleagues feel empowered to raise any concern.

For taught students, the expansion of a small number of courses has had an impact on the workflow system with an increased number of referred cases .The University is considering a number of processes to manage the demand placed on the system and ways improve training for our students to reduce the number of referrals.

Training for students will continue to include lectures, workshops, simulated ethics applications, clear course guidance, web-based learning and engagement with research integrity training where the proposed research involves human participants.

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.

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

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.

New colleagues are directed to training, and the Research Integrity code is highlighted in the welcome letter, online resources, welcome talks and induction checklists. Colleagues on contracts with a research element are encouraged further to complete the University Research integrity training unit, which is discipline specific and includes training relating to identifying and reporting misconduct.

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