

## UK Research and Innovation annual narrative statement on research integrity, 2021

### **Background**

UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) is committed to supporting and delivering research of the highest quality by fostering a thriving research culture. This annual narrative statement on activities related to research integrity provides detail of how we have used our role to support the sector to strengthen values and norms that are conducive to producing robust and trustworthy research and how we have embedded these values and norms into our own processes.

This is the third annual narrative statement of UKRI. During the period of 1 July 2012 - 31st March 2018, Research Councils UK (RCUK)<sup>1</sup> produced 6 joint statements.

### **Narrative statement on research integrity**

#### **i) Promoting high levels of research integrity**

UKRI strongly believes that everyone involved in research has a responsibility to support the sector to maintain high levels of integrity in research. The activities detailed below are examples<sup>2</sup> of the wide range of internally and externally facing work (ongoing and completed), undertaken by UKRI during the reporting period of 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 that aim to support the sector to produce research of the highest quality.

#### **Externally facing activities undertaken on behalf of the sector, or to support the research community**

##### **UK Committee on Research Integrity (UK CORI)**

During this reporting period, the UKRI Research Integrity Strategy and Policy team developed the governance proposal for the UK Committee on Research Integrity (UK CORI). This was an iterative process with UKRI's Board, who showed strong support for the committee being empowered to act and take decisions independently of UKRI.

The team, together with interim chair, Dr Helen Munn OBE, continued to engage extensively with stakeholders from across the sector to inform the development of the proposal for UK CORI. Two workshops were held in December 2020 with early career researchers and with research managers to give their views on the role of UK CORI. The sector was unanimous in support of a model which would focus on the promotion of research integrity by supporting a positive and inclusive research culture, rather than a focus on the assurance of research misconduct investigative processes.

##### **Landscape study**

In June 2020, Vitae, in partnership with the UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO) and the UK Reproducibility Network (UKRN), published the UKRI commissioned [Research Integrity landscape study](#)<sup>3</sup> in response to a Science and Technology Select Committee report

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<sup>1</sup> RCUK is the legacy name of the seven research councils which are: Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC), Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC), Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), Medical Research Council (MRC), Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) and the Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC).

<sup>2</sup> This list is non-exhaustive.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/vitae-publications/reports/research-integrity-a-landscape-study>



recommendation. Fieldwork for the study involved a major survey, interviews and focus groups across the research community. In December 2020, the UKRI internal Good Research Conduct Network (GRECON) held an internal workshop revisiting the 2020 Research Integrity Landscape report, including collective thinking to identify gaps and discussion of any discipline-specific implications arising from the recommendations.

### **UK Reproducibility Network extension**

The UK Reproducibility Network<sup>4</sup> (UKRN) had extended funding from AHRC, ESRC, MRC, NERC and Research England awarded in June 2020. UKRN is a national peer-led consortium that investigates factors contributing to robust research, promotes training activities and disseminates best practice relating to reproducibility and replicability.

### **Good Research Resource Hub**

In October 2020, the [Good Research Resource Hub](#)<sup>5</sup> was launched, coinciding with the launch of UKRI's new website. The Hub brings together policies, standards, and organisations to support researchers, innovators, and organisations. It is now curated on an ongoing basis by subject matter experts from across UKRI. To develop the Hub, UKRI established an internally facing, time limited, Research Ethics and Responsible Innovation Task & Finish group during the reporting period. The group also input into, and informed recommendations to, the Business Project Board in relation to ethics questions in grant funding applications.

### **Understanding Animal Research and the Concordat on Openness on Animal Research**

UKRI signed up to [Understanding Animal Research](#)<sup>6</sup> as a single organisation in December 2020 and became a signatory of the [Concordat on Openness on Animal Research in the UK](#)<sup>7</sup>.

### **Résumé for Research and Innovation**

The Résumé for Research and Innovation (R4RI) is an evolved version of the Royal Society's Résumé for Researchers (R4R) narrative CV. R4RI is a content-rich alternative to a traditional academic CV which enables applicants to better demonstrate their wider contributions to research and innovation, teams and wider society and to broaden what is visible and valued. UKRI is currently piloting the format in a number of funding opportunities and developing support materials. It is hoped that R4RI will strengthen the integrity of research and innovation by sending a clear indication that UKRI values the full range of contributions necessary for excellent high integrity research, including contributions to people development, contributions to the generation of knowledge and contributions to the wider research and innovation community.

### **Internally facing activities to support UKRI staff, strategy, and processes**

#### **NERC Culture Forum**

NERC established the internal NERC Culture Forum which consists of staff representatives from their Centres and Capability Partners. The forum is an informal group for knowledge

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ukrn.org/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ukri.org/about-us/policies-standards-and-data/good-research-resource-hub/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.understandinganimalresearch.org.uk/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://concordatopenness.org.uk/>



sharing and celebrating best practice relating to research culture and integrity across NERC's Centres and Capability Partners.

### **Research and Innovation Culture Network**

In June 2020, the UKRI Research Culture Strategy and Policy team launched the internal Research and Innovation Culture Network for UKRI employees. Members receive quarterly newsletters highlighting important research culture and interrelated initiatives taking place across the organisation that contribute to UKRI's ambition to create the best environment in which research and innovation can thrive. The network also hosts regular culture-focused webinars for members of staff.

### **ii) UKRI response to Coronavirus pandemic**

UKRI responded to the significant disruptions to research in 2020/21 with measures to support the research community. These are detailed in the UKRI Annual Report and Accounts 2020-21<sup>8</sup>. Although few of these programmes referenced research integrity specifically, by sustaining the grant funded activity, research skills and capability of UK organisations, high standards of research could be better upheld during this challenging time. The independent process review of UKRI's research and innovation response to COVID-19 (published in September 2021) provides further detail of UKRI's COVID-19 response, much of which took place during this reporting period. The review report also provides data on the protected characteristics of applicants at this time, which were, and continue to be, closely monitored to ascertain the impact of COVID-19 on particular groups. UKRI has apologised for a lapse in the collection of these data for early phases of our rapid response call for research to address the COVID pandemic. Examples of UKRI leadership during this time include:

- UKRI committed to the rapid sharing of COVID-19 data by becoming a signatory to a [joint statement](#)<sup>9</sup>, signed by 160 organisations. In signing, UKRI pledged that all peer-reviewed research publications relevant to the outbreak would be available via open access and research findings would be shared with World Health Organisation upon journal submission.
- NC3Rs published guidance on the [3Rs during COVID-19](#)<sup>10</sup>. [As well as including information about NC3Rs' activities relating to the pandemic, this included practical resources to help ensure that the 3Rs were considered and kept a priority throughout lockdowns and other disruptions presented by the pandemic.](#)

### **iii) Information relating to Research Integrity collected by the UKRI Funding Assurance Programme<sup>11</sup> of Research Organisations**

In 2020-21, as part of normal business as usual, the UKRI Research Integrity Strategy and Policy team collaborated with Funding Assurance colleagues to scope and plan enhancements to questions relating to research integrity in the Funding Assurance self-assessment questionnaire. These changes were implemented in 2021-22.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/UKRI-200721-AnnualReport2020-2021.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> <https://wellcome.org/press-release/sharing-research-data-and-findings-relevant-novel-coronavirus-ncov-outbreak>

<sup>10</sup> <https://nc3rs.org.uk/3rs-resources/nc3rs-and-3rs-during-covid-19>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.ukri.org/about-us/policies-standards-and-data/funding-assurance-programme/>



During Financial Year 2020-21, 32 Research Organisations (listed at **Annex 2**) were subject to a Funding Assurance review covering research integrity and ethics in terms of adherence to UKRI terms and conditions. Overall, a high level of compliance was identified, although at this stage scrutiny remained high level only. The 2020-21 Funding Assurance workplan encompassed a mixture of Higher-Education Institutions, Independent Research Organisations and Research Institutes across the UK and one international Research Organisation in Canada.

Assurance activity for Research Organisations is significantly informed by the value of Research Council funding they receive. Those which feature in the top 40-funded Research Organisations are subject to an assurance assignment every three years; those in the top 40-100 on a five-to-six-year cycle. Research Organisations with lower volumes of funding are approached on a risk basis.

Where Research Organisations were found to not have suitable policies and processes in place covering research integrity and ethics, appropriate recommendations were raised in their Funding Assurance report outlining how they should address the gaps identified. UKRI Funding Assurance follow-up on any recommendations raised in 2021-22 to ensure they have been addressed.

**iv) Records of research misconduct allegations, as reported to UKRI (including research misconduct allegations reported in organisations that are a legal part of UKRI)**

Summary information for allegations reported to the research councils is given in **Annex 1** for Financial Year 2020-2021<sup>12</sup>. It should be noted that any discernable upward trend in numbers of cases may reflect increased awareness of UKRI policy requirements and better reporting.

UKRI does not investigate allegations of research misconduct in the research performing organisations that we fund, unless those organisations are part of UKRI in legal terms<sup>13</sup>. For the latter, there has been one allegation of research misconduct relating to a researcher employed by UKRI (specifically, at STFC). This allegation was not upheld and is included in the data reported in **Annex 1**.

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<sup>12</sup> It should be noted that some cases may be duplicated, where reported to more than one research council. The councils are working towards eliminating such 'double counting'.

<sup>13</sup> This refers to UKRI owned Centres, Institutes and Units where we employ researchers including MRC institutes such as MRC London Institute of Medical Sciences, NERC's British Antarctic Survey and STFC labs (non-exhaustive list).

**MISCONDUCT ALLEGATIONS INFORMATION HELD BY THE RESEARCH COUNCILS AND RESEARCH ENGLAND<sup>14</sup>**

Financial Year 2020-21.

Records of misconduct allegations information held by the research councils from Financial Years 2015-16 to 2019-20<sup>15</sup> are available on the UKRI website<sup>16</sup>.

Table 1 details all cases of research misconduct allegations reported during this reporting period to UKRI by institutions in receipt of UKRI funding, in line with the [UKRI fEC grants standard terms and conditions of grant<sup>17</sup>](#).

For completeness, Table 2 details all cases of research misconduct allegations that were reported to UKRI by institutions in receipt of UKRI funding, in line with UKRI terms and conditions, prior to this reporting period, but which were ongoing at the time of the publication of the previous annual narrative statement and have concluded during the reporting period of this statement.

**Definitions of unacceptable research conduct****Fabrication**

This comprises the creation of false data or other aspects of research, including documentation and participant consent.

**Falsification**

This comprises the inappropriate manipulation and/or selection of data, imagery and/or consents.

**Plagiarism**

This comprises the misappropriation or use of others' ideas, intellectual property or work (written or otherwise), without acknowledgement or permission.

**Misrepresentation, including:**

- Misrepresentation of data, for example suppression of relevant findings and/or data, or knowingly, recklessly or by gross negligence, presenting a flawed interpretation of data
- Undisclosed duplication of publication, including undisclosed duplicate submission of manuscripts for publication
- Misrepresentation of interests, including failure to declare material interests either of the researcher or of the funders of the research
- Misrepresentation of qualifications and/or experience, including claiming or implying qualifications or experience which are not held
- Misrepresentation of involvement, such as inappropriate claims to authorship and/or attribution of work where there has been no significant contribution, or the denial of

<sup>14</sup> Please note that this report covers research activities and as such the activities of Innovate UK are currently out of scope.

<sup>15</sup> Research England records of misconduct allegation information are included in reports from Financial Year 2019-20 on the UKRI website.

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.ukri.org/about-us/policies-and-standards/research-integrity/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/UKRI-170821-FullEconomicCostingGrantTermsConditions-Aug2021.pdf>

authorship where an author has made a significant contribution

**Breach of duty of care**, whether deliberately, recklessly or by gross negligence:

- Disclosing improperly the identity of individuals or groups involved in research without their consent, or other breach of confidentiality
- Placing any of those involved in research in danger, whether as subjects, participants or associated individuals, without their prior consent, and without appropriate safeguards even with consent, this includes reputational danger where that can be anticipated
- Not taking all reasonable care to ensure that the risks and dangers, the broad objectives and the sponsors of the research are known to participants or their legal representatives, to ensure appropriate informed consent is obtained properly, explicitly, and transparently
- Not observing legal and reasonable ethical requirements or obligations of care for animal subjects, human organs or tissue used in research, or for the protection of the environment
- Improper conduct in peer review of research proposals or results (including manuscripts submitted for publication); this includes 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 peer review purposes

**Improper dealing with allegations of misconduct:**

- Failing to address possible infringements including attempts to cover up misconduct or reprisals against whistle-blowers
- Failing to deal appropriately with malicious allegations, which should be handled formally as breaches of good conduct

<b>Table 1 – Records of research misconduct allegations information first reported to UKRI in Financial Year 2020-21</b>				
<b>Research council / Research England</b>	<b>Type of misconduct<sup>18</sup></b>	<b>Date first informed</b>	<b>Allegation proceeded to formal investigation?</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
AHRC	Falsification	02/07/2020	Yes	Allegation upheld
	Misrepresentation	03/08/2020	Yes	Ongoing
BBSRC	Fabrication	13/10/2020	No	Allegation not upheld
	Other	14/01/2021	No	Allegation not upheld
	Breach of duty of care	06/10/2020	No	Allegation not upheld
	Misrepresentation	06/10/2020	No	Allegation not upheld
EPSRC	Falsification	17/04/2020	Yes	Allegation upheld
	Other	04/05/2020	No	Allegation not upheld
	Falsification	05/05/2020	No	Allegation not

<sup>18</sup> Classified according to the categories of research misconduct set out in the UKRI Policy and Guidelines on Governance of Good Research Conduct.

				upheld
	Plagiarism	30/07/2020	No	Allegation not upheld
	Plagiarism	10/08/2020	No	Allegation not upheld
	Other	11/08/2020	No	Allegation not upheld
	Other	27/08/2020	No	Allegation not upheld
	Plagiarism	15/09/2020	No	Allegation not upheld
	Plagiarism	03/11/2020	No	Allegation not upheld
	Plagiarism	18/03/2021	No	Allegation not upheld
	Falsification	24/03/2021	-	Ongoing
ESRC	Undisclosed	21/10/2020	Yes	Ongoing
	Other	21/08/2020	No	Allegation not upheld
MRC	Misrepresentation	07/04/2020	Yes	Ongoing
	Falsification	24/09/2020	Yes	Ongoing
	Breach of duty of care	06/10/2020	No	Allegation not upheld
	Misrepresentation	06/10/2020	No	Allegation not upheld
	Other	20/10/2020	No	Allegation not upheld
	Fabrication	11/05/2020	Yes	Allegation upheld
	Plagiarism	04/12/2020	No	Allegation not upheld
	Other	23/06/2020	Yes	Allegation upheld
	Falsification	25/03/2021	Yes	Ongoing
	Plagiarism	14/02/2021	No	Allegation not upheld
	Misrepresentation	26/03/2021	No	Allegation not upheld
NERC	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
RE	Breach of duty of care	03/03/2021	Yes	Ongoing
STFC	Misrepresentation	15/01/2021	Yes	Allegation not upheld

**Table 2 – Investigations into Research Misconduct cases which were ongoing during previous statements, but concluded during Financial Year 2020-21**

Research council / Research England	Type of misconduct	Date first informed	Allegation proceeded to formal investigation?	Outcome
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AHRC	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
BBSRC	Misrepresentation	03/06/2019	Yes	Allegation not upheld
	Falsification	26/09/2019	No	Allegation not upheld
	Misrepresentation	14/10/2019	Yes	Allegation not upheld
	Falsification	28/10/2019	No	Allegation not upheld
EPSRC	Plagiarism	03/04/2019	No	Allegation not upheld
ESRC	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
MRC	Other	30/08/2017	Yes	Allegation upheld
	Falsification	19/08/2018	-	No outcome <sup>19</sup>
	Falsification	09/11/2018	Yes	Allegation upheld in part
	Plagiarism	30/11/2018	Yes	Allegation upheld
	Plagiarism	03/04/2019	Yes	Allegation not upheld
	Breach of duty of care	28/01/2019	Yes	Allegation not upheld
	Falsification	28/01/2019	No	Allegation not upheld
	Falsification	19/07/2019	No	Allegation upheld in part <sup>20</sup>
	Falsification	20/07/2019	No	Allegation not upheld
	Misrepresentation	28/01/2020	No	Allegation not upheld
NERC	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
RE	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
STFC	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil

**NOTE:**

In accordance with UK data protection legislation, we would not normally disclose the identity of any individuals involved in any research misconduct allegations reported to UKRI. Information relating to the amount of funding in **Tables 1 & 2** also cannot be provided, as to do so may result in individual award holders being identified.

<sup>19</sup> Due to a lack of response from an overseas Research Organisation, UKRI has been unable to obtain an outcome for this case.

<sup>20</sup> Conclusions of paper unchanged so formal investigation not warranted.

**FUNDING ASSURANCE QUESTIONNAIRE RETURNS, 2020-21**

Questionnaires were received from the following 32 organisations for 2020-21:

Research Organisation
Birkbeck College
Coventry University
Cranfield University
Faraday Institution
Goldsmiths College, University of London
John Innes Centre
Lancaster University
London School of Economics and Political Science
London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine
McMaster University
Natural History Museum
Nottingham Trent University
Oxford Brookes University
Quadram Institute Bioscience
Queen's University Belfast
Royal Veterinary College
St George's University, London
Swansea University
University of Bath
University of Bradford
University of Essex
University of Kent
University of Leeds
University of Oxford
University of Reading
University of Southampton
University of Strathclyde
University of Surrey
University of The Arts, London
University of Ulster
University of Westminster
University of York