

University of Birmingham

Research Integrity Statement 2021 – 2022

1. Introduction

The University is committed to fostering a positive culture of research integrity for all of our researchers, and we therefore welcome the opportunity provided by the Annual Statement to review progress and to share this with the wider sector and other interested stakeholders.

This is the University of Birmingham's ninth annual summary statement on research integrity and covers the period 2021 - 2022.

2. Institutional governance

The University has a well-established internal research ethics and governance structure, that supports a positive culture of research integrity at all levels, with active engagement at a College and School / Institute level by Directors of Research, Research Ethics Committee Co-Chairs and Reviewers, and institutional oversight being delivered by the Clinical Trials Oversight Committee (CTOC), the Human Tissue Oversight Committee (HTOC), and the Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Body (AWERB), all of which report into the Research Governance, Ethics and Integrity Committee (RGEIC), which oversees and coordinates research integrity activities on behalf of the University. During the reporting period the RGEIC has been chaired by Professor Heather Widdows, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research and Knowledge Transfer) and UEB 'research integrity' sponsor.

Dedicated expert support for all matters relating to research integrity is provided by the Research Ethics & Governance Team (REGT), which works in close collaboration with other expert teams from across the research life-cycle, including for example the Clinical Research Compliance Team (CRCT), colleagues from Library Services, Legal Services and HR, to provide proactive support to the University, its individual researchers, funders and partners.

This support environment has been further strengthened during the reporting period by the University's decision to establish the new Research Strategy & Services Division, bringing together the Professional Services support for research into one new integrated eco-system, providing increased opportunity to embed principles of research integrity across the pathway from initial idea to project completion. In recognition of the importance of research integrity to the University's research environment, the Head of Research Governance & Integrity is a member of the Senior Leadership Group of the new Division, providing an opportunity to build on the excellent work in this area to date.

3. Research Integrity Activities 2021 - 2022

3.1 New research ethics review system: Ethics Review Manager (ERM)

As part of the University's ongoing commitment to continually strengthen our approach to research governance and integrity, a major project has been progressed during the review period, to procure and embed a new research ethics review system, the 'Ethics Review Manager' (ERM). This will provide significant benefits for both ethics applicants and reviewers, with the former benefiting from a 'one stop shop' application portal into which they can submit and track the progress of their application, and with reviewers now able to communicate and share best practice across their network in a more agile and responsive manner.

The process of implementing the new system facilitated some new thinking around our ethics review processes, including the introduction of a new lighter touch review pathway for

low risk projects involving human participants, and a campaign to increase the numbers of research ethics committee members. Full training in the system has been provided to all reviewers and going forward will form part of our embedded reviewer / Co-Chair induction processes.

Going forward, it is anticipated that the ERM and the related process improvements will further improve turn-around-times to the academy, and this will be measured in an iterative process of review and improvement during the 22 / 23 period.

3.2 Training and Development

A wide range of research integrity training and development activities have been delivered during 2021 / 2022, including: comprehensive online training courses that are free at the point of use for all University staff and students, providing an introduction into research ethics, integrity, and good research conduct. This provision is proactively communicated to the research community and utilised for research induction and ongoing development. During the reporting period, the University further strengthened its online training provision via the purchase of the updated Epigeum Research Integrity modules.

Face to face training is also provided to staff and student researchers by the central REGT in collaboration with other Professional Services teams, including for example courses on research ethics and integrity, including good practice requirements in line with our Code of Practice for Research, animal research training provisions, research data management courses, research methodology and research skills training.

This complements the institutional mandatory (all staff) provision that is available for audiences across campus: Data protection and GDPR, Information Security, Health & Safety, Equality, Diversity & Inclusion and fire safety.

At a more informal level, there is a provision within the Schools / Colleges for more informal 1-1 and small group sessions for research staff and students to seek guidance and support on issues pertinent to their research. During the reporting period this training has included a tailored session for colleagues in the University's new Dubai campus, and development and support to MSc students and PGRs in the Medical School and MRes and PGR students from the Schools of Psychology and Biosciences.

3.3 Quality Assurance and Risk Management

The University has a well-established Quality Assurance and Risk Management framework, including with regards to research ethics and governance review, that is overseen at an institutional level by the central REGT, with specific attention being provided to studies that involve human participants, their data and/or tissue. A close liaison with researchers, administrators, collaborators and regulatory bodies fosters a positive culture of research integrity as encouraged by the Concordat to Support Research Integrity. During the 2021 / 2022 period 1,778 applications were made to the University's Research Ethics Committee, with Table One below demonstrating how this compares with previous years.

Applications made to the University Research Ethics Committee (PGR / Staff research)

	2021	2020	2019	2018
Self-Assessment not requiring full UoB	1,075	1,238	1,192	1,314

research ethics committee review				
Full UoB research ethics applications / amendments	703	613	756	810
CoSS	211	193	195	243
CAL	105	96	119	106
EPS	25	22	41	37
LES	228	195	267	277
MDS	124	102	124	147
Other	10	5	10	0
Total number of projects submitted for research ethics review*	1,778	1,851	1,948	2,124

Projects submitted for Health Research Authority Approval (including NHS Research Ethics Committee) review

	2021	2020	2019	2018
Studies reviewed for Sponsorship and HRA Approval	86	85 (this includes 4 where UoB is the National Coordinating Centre)	88 (this includes 5 where UoB is the National Co-ordinating Centre)	67
Amendments processed	176	228	244	206

*In addition, the University managed research that involved animals in line with Home Office Regulations and ARRIVE guidelines.

3.4 Clinical e-pathway development

During this period, the Clinical Trials Oversight Committee has progressed a project to develop a multi-professional interactive electronic research pathway to support UoB researchers and their collaborators in the Midlands, UK and overseas.

The pathway will provide researchers with access to all aspects of research ethics, governance and quality assurance via an easy to navigate online tool that will provide greater reliability of governance processes, improved researcher satisfaction, reduced set-up times and enhanced productivity and efficiency, ultimately increased impact of clinical research on health, well-being and other key social and economic outcomes.

3.5 Speak Up Initiative

The College of Medical and Dental Sciences has adopted the National Guardian Office version of the Freedom to Speak Up scheme to enhance established initiatives in support of wellbeing and engagement. Speak Up Guardians and Champions have been trained to meet with staff and discuss any issues that they may wish to discuss.

3.6 Sector wide knowledge sharing

EDIS is a Wellcome-hosted coalition that brings together funding bodies, learned societies, commercial partners and research institutes to drive sector-wide change in research design and delivery as well as equal access and success for those working within the sector. The College of Medical and Dental Sciences joined the group in March 2022 as one of the first universities to do so. Membership provides opportunities to learn from others and share our experiences and good practice and be part of a group that is positioned to have influence over research strategy.

The University is a member of the UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO) and an active contributor to meetings of Russell Group Universities and takes seriously its responsibility to develop strong sector-wide approaches to research integrity. The Head of Research Governance & Integrity supports the Health Research Authority non-commercial Sponsor Reference Group, the NHS R&D Forum and is a member of the NIHR CRN Programme Board and Birmingham Health Partners Working Groups.

4. **Allegations of Potential Research Misconduct**

In the period October 2021 to September 2022, four allegations of potential research misconduct were received and addressed in accordance with the Code of Practice for Research, and in each case, consideration was given to any required changes to institutional policies and procedures.

5. **Research Integrity Statement**

The next annual statement will be published in November 2023.

Further Information

Further information on research integrity at the University is available from Dr Birgit Whitman.