FINAL

Staffordshire University annual statement on research integrity 2018/19, and 2019/20 to date[1]

1. Background

Staffordshire University expects high standards in the conduct of research undertaken by staff, students, visiting honorary and emeritus titleholders, associates and consultants. The University aims to uphold the commitments outlined in the Concordat to support research integrity first published in 2012 and revised in October 2019, which provides a national framework for high standards of research conduct and its governance. As per the Concordat, Staffordshire University is committed to:

- upholding the highest standards of rigour and integrity in all aspects of research
- ensuring that research is conducted according to appropriate ethical, legal and professional frameworks, obligations and standards
- 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
- using transparent, timely, robust and fair processes to deal with allegations of research misconduct should they arise
- working together to strengthen the integrity of research and to review progress regularly and openly.

In compliance with the Concordat, the University is publishing a Statement on Research Integrity on an annual basis, which is to be presented to its governing bodies (Academic Board and the Board of Governors).

This statement covers the academic year 2018-19, along with an interim report for the academic year 2019-20 to date. A report on the complete academic year 2019-20 will be presented to Academic Board in autumn 2020. In future years, the annual statement will be presented to each autumn meeting of Academic Board. For completeness and transparency, this report also provides data and reflections on investigations into research misconduct in the academic years 2017-18.

This statement outlines the actions and activities undertaken, and the frameworks in place, to foster and strengthen a culture of research integrity in line with the expectations within the Concordat. It also provides a high-level summary of investigations of research misconduct that have been undertaken by the University.

2. Named contacts for research integrity matters, in accordance with the Concordat

Research Integrity at Staffordshire University is overseen by Deputy Vice Chancellor, Professor Martin Jones (martin.jones@staffs.ac.uk). The University's first point of contact, should anyone require more information on matters of research integrity, is Research Policy and Governance Manager, Dr Cathal Rogers (cathal.rogers@staffs.ac.uk). Should any person wish to raise concerns about the integrity of research being conducted under the auspices of Staffordshire University, they can contact, in confidence, the Head of Research Environment and Development, Mrs Emma Davies (E.J.Davies@staffs.ac.uk).

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[1] The academic year 2018-19 and 2019-20 to date (22nd May 2020) is covered in the present report. This is an interim measure to report on progress to the summer meetings of the Research and Innovation Committee and Academic Board. In future years (beginning with autumn 2020), the annual statement for the complete academic year will be submitted to the autumn meeting of Academic Board.

In accordance with the Concordat on Research Integrity, the contact details for the above points of contact are kept up to date and are publicly available on Staffordshire University's website:

https://www.staffs.ac.uk/research/opportunities-for-academics/research-governance/research-integrity

3. Governance and Policies

The governance of research at Staffordshire University is overseen by the Research and Innovation Committee, chaired by the Deputy Vice Chancellor, and reporting directly into Academic Board. The Research and Innovation Committee's terms of reference include the "development and implementation of institutional policy, procedure and guidance in respect of Research Governance, Environment, Ethics [and integrity]". Research Ethics at Staffordshire University is overseen by the University Research Ethics Committee, which reports to the Research and Innovation Committee.

The main policies governing research integrity, and research ethics, are:

- Staffordshire University Research Ethical Review Policy - revised September 2019, due for review September 2022
- Staffordshire University Code of Practice for Research – revised June 2018, due for review June 2020
- The University's Research Misconduct Policy is embedded in the Code of Practice for Research (section 13). The process for investigating allegation of Research Misconduct forms section 14 of this Policy.

All of the above policies are publicly available on the University's website: https://www.staffs.ac.uk/research/opportunities-for-academics/research-governance/research-integrity

4. Summary of actions and activities undertaken to support and strengthen understanding and the application of research integrity issues

In the period under review, Staffordshire University has undertaken several actions and activities to support and strengthen understanding and the application of research integrity issues. These include:

Actions undertaken to strengthen research integrity

- The Code of Practice for Research, which is the University's policy and guidelines on research integrity matters, was revised in June 2018. It is currently under review and will be revised and submitted for re-approval in autumn 2020.
- The Research Misconduct Policy, embedded in the Code of Practice, was also reviewed in June 2018 and is under review now, as per the two-year cycle. This policy is being revised against updated best practice in the sector, and in line with the updated and revised guidance for Research Misconduct in the Concordat on Research Integrity (2019).
- A gap analysis has been undertaken (April 2020) mapping Staffordshire University's policies and practices against the revised Concordat on Research Integrity (2019). The action plan for addressing and strengthening our provision will be considered by the Research and Innovation Committee in June 2020.
- As a result of the integrity gap analysis, a detailed communications plan has been developed for spring and summer 2020, to refresh and update knowledge of staff (academic and

- support), and PGRs around matters of integrity, their commitments and the support and resources available.
- In summer 2020, the University is launching CEDARS (Culture, Employment and Development in Academic Research Survey) for the first time. This will provide us with a baseline understanding of staff knowledge and awareness of matters of research integrity, and where the gaps in knowledge are that require addressing.
- The existing provision for online ethics awareness training, previously advisory for academic staff, has been made mandatory from January 2020. Ahead of this re-launch, its content has been revised and updated and now covers matters of research integrity.
- The University's annual research development and training programme is currently undergoing review, for the 2020-21 academic year. The revised programme for 2020-21 will include training and awareness raising on matters of research integrity, and developing a culture of research integrity, particularly around important issues of the reproducibility of results and transparency.

Actions undertaken to strengthen research ethics

In addition to the above listed actions to strengthen research integrity, the University has undertaken considerable work to strengthen the processes and awareness around research ethics in the period under review. While distinct from research integrity, we feel these actions warrant mention here as important aspects in the development of our research environment and culture of research integrity.

- As mentioned above, online ethics awareness training is now mandatory for all academic staff.
- The IPR (Independent Peer Review) process for NHS ethics is currently under review, and revisions reflect external changes that are being considered by the University Research Ethics Committee.
- Staffordshire University Research Ethics Policy underwent a detailed review and the revised policy was approved by Academic Board in June 2019.
- Face-to-face training (or virtually delivered or recorded training session if face-to-face is not possible) is mandatory for all members of the Schools' Panels of Ethics Reviewers. This training is led by a senior academic experienced in matters relating to research ethics and runs several times per academic year. Ethics 101 training sessions form part of the PGR training programme, which is also open to staff.
- Online ethics training, and training for ethics reviewers has been developed and will be available to academic staff from June 2020.
- The University undertook its first annual Ethics audit in 2019-20, in line with the revised Ethics Policy.
- As per the revised ethics policy, an annual institution publication audit was undertaken for the first time in March 2020 (reviewing publications produced in the calendar year 2019), to ensure publications produced under the auspices of Staffordshire University have undergone appropriate ethical review.
- The University Research Ethics Committee added a PGR representative to its composition and membership in 2019-20.
- The University introduced the position of Human Tissue Advisor in 2018 and have a named contact for any queries of training regarding matters pertaining to the Human Tissue Act.

- An online ethics approval system had been developed and will launch in 2020, replacing the current paper-based system. This online system will significantly strengthen the efficiency and robustness of the ethics approval process.
- Since 2018, proof of ethical approval has been required upon submission of a PhD thesis. The Graduate School administrators will not proceed to make viva arrangements until proof of this approval is received.
- The submission of evidence of appropriate ethical approval is mandatory at the early and late stage reviews for PhD students, and assessors are required to check this as part of their review.
- High-level details of the numbers of ethics applications received, per School, and per type of form (e.g. full ethics, proportionate), are presented at each meeting of the Research and Innovation Committee.

5. **Research Misconduct**

The University's Research Misconduct Policy, and processes for investigating potential cases of misconduct, are embedded in the Code of Practice for Research. The processes in place are transparent, timely, robust and fair. The procedures adopted by the University draw on the principles set out in the UK Research Integrity Office's Procedure for the Investigation of Misconduct in Research.

The policy is publicly accessible on the University's external facing website, aiding transparency. Where a formal investigation into allegations of research misconduct is undertaken, the investigation panel's report will be provided to the complainant and the respondent, who will have the opportunity to request amendment of any factual errors. The outcome of any investigation of research misconduct will be reported by the Deputy Vice Chancellor to the Research and Innovation Committee and the University Research Ethics Committee, ensuring transparency.

The investigation process is timely, with the subject(s) of an allegation being given a written response to the allegation(s) within ten working days. The policy stipulated that a formal investigation should take no longer than thirty working days.

Fairness and robustness are ensured at several stages of the process. The Deputy Vice Chancellor may seek the advice or views of external experts to ensure independent, expert input into the investigation, ensuring robustness. The policy provides for allegations that have some substance but are capable of being resolved without further investigation to be resolved as such. The investigation panel, where one is needed, is composed of individuals not drawn from the same School as the complainant or respondent, to ensure impartiality and robustness of the investigation. The respondent will be interviewed by the investigation panel, to allow them to respond in person to the claims. Similarly, the complainant will be interviewed by the panel, for robustness.

The Research Misconduct Policy, and the Code of Practice for Research in which it is situated, was last revised in June 2018. It is due for a scheduled review in June 2020. Preparatory work has been done to map this Policy against the revised and updated best practice as outlined in the 2019 Concordat, and best practice in the sector. Whist this document is under review, we are confident

that the current (2018) Research Misconduct Policy remains robust and appropriate to the needs of the organisation.

6. Formal investigations of Research Misconduct

Where concerns are noted, these can often be addressed and dealt with via competency, education, and training mechanisms. Some concerns fall outside of the scope of research misconduct, as outlined in our Research Misconduct Policy and are dealt with according to the relevant HR procedure, or via academic misconduct (in the case of a PGR).

Where there is an accusation or suspicion of research misconduct, these are addressed through the research misconduct policy, and an investigation is instigated, led by the Deputy Vice Chancellor. The instances of each category of research misconduct investigated, per academic year, are indicated in the below table.

	Number of initial investigations completed			Number of formal investigations completed			Number of allegations upheld (in whole or in part)		
Academic Year	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Fabrication	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Falsification	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Plagiarism	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Failure to meet obligations (e.g. legal, ethical and professional obligations)	0	1a	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Misrepresentation (e.g. of data, results, interpretation)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Improper dealing with allegations of misconduct	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

1a – The University received in June 2019 an accusation that a researcher(s) failed to meet appropriate obligations. As per Misconduct Policy, after an initial investigation, it was deemed that there was no evidence to support the allegation and the allegation was not upheld and did not proceed to a full formal investigation.

7. Reflection on misconduct investigations

The institution has received only one formal accusation of research misconduct in the last three academic years. This application was not upheld. The investigation process demonstrated that the University's misconduct policy and investigation processes are fit for purpose, robust, and worked well. The investigation was completed without issue.

On reflection, the University will consider whether appropriate support is in place for both parties (complainant and respondent) and this will form part of the scheduled review of the policy which is currently being undertaken. We reflect that signposting to available wellbeing support and guidance

should be made available to all parties, as a matter of course. This could include, for example the confidential institutional Employee Assistance Programme.

8. Embedding a supportive environment for reporting potential misconduct

The University is committed to maintaining and strengthening a research environment in which all staff, researchers and students feel comfortable to report instances of misconduct. Staffordshire University's Research, Innovation and Impact Strategy includes an ongoing commitment to ensure all researchers have an awareness of matters of research integrity and adhere to their commitments as outlined in the Concordat. This includes awareness of what constitutes research misconduct and how this can be reported in confidence. The Misconduct Policy makes clear that the identity of a complainant will not be disclosed at any stage during any misconduct investigation.

Through the central Research Innovation and Impact Services (RIIS), the University seeks to ensure that all researchers receive appropriate training and development opportunities in order to enable them to conduct research to the highest standards. This includes both mandatory and additional optional training on matters of research integrity, as well as research ethics. Our training programme is reviewed annually, to reflect and build upon the provision offered. The annual review of our training programme has included the review of the training provision around research integrity matters, and an additional session will be added in to the 2020-21 programme.

As well as this central support, the School-based Associate Deans for Research and Enterprise (ADRE) have within their remit the development and fostering of an environment and culture of research integrity in their Schools and offer relevant discipline-specific training where appropriate. ADREs offer local support to ensure researchers in the Schools are aware of the policies and reporting mechanisms if research misconduct is suspected. Again, the culture in Schools is one where staff, researchers and students are assured that an allegation of misconduct will be handled in confidence.

Moreover, these ADREs sit on the University Research and Innovation Committee, which has overall governance of matters of research integrity. This ensures that consistent messaging on this matter is disseminated to the Schools.

In reviewing our provision, we have changed (in May 2020) the contact for confidential whistle-blowers to Mrs Emma Davies, Head of Research Environment and Development. This senior position affords a good knowledge and understanding of matters of research integrity, in order to properly understand the matters at hand, without being directly involved in the development and implementation of relevant policies and processes. Previously, the Research Policy and Governance Manager was listed as both the first point of contact for queries and the whistle-blower contact to raise concerns. Due to the detailed involvement of this post in the development and implementation of the Research Code of Conduct, and the Research Ethics Policy (and membership of the University Research Ethic Committee), we felt nominating a contact independent from the operational detail would aid transparency and give confidence to any potential whistle-blowers.

Through mapping our practices against the revised Concordat, we have identified that the correct policies and processes are in place regarding reporting misconduct, however the University could do more on communicating this to staff. A communications plan for spring and summer 2020 has been developed to address this. This will include a full communication plan once the scheduled review of the research misconduct policy has been undertaken, to ensure that there is an understanding of what constitutes research misconduct, and how this should be reported and investigated, amongst

both academic and professional support staff (e.g. staff in HR). This will be communicated centrally, and at School-level through the ADREs.

9. Approval of annual statement

Approving Committee	Date of approval
Research and Innovation Committee	Approved 03/06/2020
Academic Board	Approved 17/06/2020
Board of Governors	Approved 24/06/2020

Dr Cathal Rogers, Research Policy and Governance Manager, May 2020