

Annual Research Integrity Statement 1st August 2021 – 31st July 2022

Background

1. Aberystwyth University is firmly committed to the principles found within the [Concordat to Support Research Integrity](#). To improve accountability and provide assurances that measures are being taken to support high standards of research integrity, the Concordat advises that employers of researchers should produce an annual statement to be presented to their own governing body which provides:
 - A summary of actions and activities that have been undertaken to support and strengthen understanding and the application of research integrity issues.
 - A statement to provide assurance that the processes the institution has in place for dealing with allegations of misconduct are transparent, timely, robust and fair, and that they continue to be appropriate to the needs of the organisation.
 - A high-level statement on any formal investigations of research misconduct that have been undertaken.
 - A statement on what the institution has learned from any formal investigations of research misconduct that have been undertaken.
 - A statement on how the institution creates and embeds a research environment in which all staff, researchers and students feel comfortable to report instances of misconduct.

A. Purpose and Context

2. This is the University's Annual Statement on Research Integrity ("Annual Statement"). This annual statement sets out the University's position in relation to research integrity, including what actions are undertaken to achieve compliance, as well as assurances of the process for and full disclosure of any allegations of research misconduct. This statement has been approved by the University's Research Ethics Committee, Executive and Senate and will be made publicly available through the Aberystwyth University website, as recommended by the Concordat.

3. This public statement concerns research undertaken by academic staff and postgraduate research students. Research undertaken by undergraduate and taught postgraduate students is administered by the Academic Registry.
4. Research is an integral part of Aberystwyth University's mission and work. As a recipient of public funding, the University recognises the need to be innovative and ambitious yet responsible and professional. This is encapsulated in the **University Strategic Plan 2018-23**.
5. 98% of the research activity submitted to REF2021 by Aberystwyth University is of an internationally recognised standard or higher. In order to maintain and build upon the University's successful research portfolio, it is important that we are committed to maintaining the highest standards in our research, from design through to dissemination, by demonstrating openness, rigour and integrity in all of our research activity.
6. We achieve this through underpinning our research with a number of quality processes and by providing relevant support, policies and guidance in a widely-accessible format.

B. Period covered by this Annual Statement

7. This Annual Statement reports the actions and activities undertaken during the 2021/2022 Academic Year. This report also provides the required statement on research misconduct for the same time period.

C. Policies and procedures

8. The University hosts a number of [policies and procedures](#) to not only ensure that research is conducted appropriately, but to also ensure that effective mechanisms exist for the reporting of any concerns or queries. These policies are regularly reviewed and monitored by the appropriate [University Governance](#) committee:
 - [Research Ethics Framework](#)
 - [Sensitive Research Policy](#)
 - [Procedure for the Investigation of Misconduct in Research](#)
 - [Public Interest Disclosure \(Whistleblowing\) Policy](#)

- [Professional Integrity Protocol](#)
- [Data Protection, Processing & Retention Policies](#)
- [Research Data Management Policy](#)

AU's Sensitive Research Policy (related to Prevent Duty)

9. Researchers considering or undertaking research on sensitive topics, which may include areas associated with the Prevent Duty <https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/hse/proc-prac/prevent/> , must ensure that the appropriate ethics requirements have been considered and satisfied, and consult the University's Sensitive Research Policy and Procedure.
<https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/media/departmental/healthsafetyenvironment/Sensitive-Research-Policy-and-Procedure.pdf>
10. The University acknowledges that academic freedom is key in relation to its research activities. However, the University also has a duty to ensure that research, particularly research that is sensitive in nature, is conducted ethically and appropriately.
11. The University has produced a Sensitive Research Policy Procedure which all researchers (both staff and students) need to follow if they are using sensitive data. Compliance with this policy allows the University to demonstrate to external authorities that any use of such material forms part of legitimate research. Although, we cannot guarantee that this will provide protection from any investigation by such authorities, should the situation ever arise.

D. Actions and Activities in 2021-2022 undertaken to support and strengthen understanding and the application of research integrity issues

Ethical Review System

12. Work has commenced during this period to develop a new online ethics assessment form. The current online ethics review system was developed in-house in 2014. To ensure that we maintain best practice and a high standard of ethical review of research applications a review of the current system has been in progress. Work is ongoing to develop an enhanced and “fit for purpose” system of review to integrate review of both human and animal research projects. A project working group has been established to develop and implement the new system on APEX over the next academic year.

Research Ethics and Integrity Training

13. The University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) have discussed the requirement to ensure that training and development for staff and students within the University is reviewed and adapted to include new and emerging ethical issues such as online participant research and the challenges posed by the Open Science agenda. UREC recommends that all researchers within the University undertake a universal level of training regularly throughout their career. In order to continually promote best practice and ensure all researchers are aware of the University's responsibilities under the Concordat updated training is essential. UREC is currently exploring different training platforms which can be adopted available from both internal and external providers.

Research Governance

14. UREC is currently reviewing systems for both ethics and governance within the University and will recommend changes during session 2022/3. The University is committed to ensuring that processes are in place and strategies have been developed to successfully manage ethics and governance issues.

Animal Research

15. The Institute of Biological, Environmental and Rural Sciences has started to return to normal after the covid pandemic. During the pandemic animal welfare took priority. For farm livestock (which most of the University's animal work is based on), they were either cared for by farm staff, or by research technicians. Measures were put in place both on the farm and at other locations to ensure people worked in isolation, or in bubbles, as needed. This was the same system used for aquatic and mouse work.

Nagoya Protocol

16. ['The Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilization to the Convention on Biological Diversity is an international agreement which aims at sharing the benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources in a fair and equitable way.'](#)

Following an audit in the previous academic year. The University has established a working group who are responsible for developing a policy and procedure to ensure the University is compliant with the Nagoya Protocol.

E. Policy Reviews

17. UREC has reviewed and updated policies relating to Research Integrity as outlined below.

Research Ethics Panel Appeals Policy

18. Aberystwyth University's Research Ethics Panel Appeals Policy was reviewed and approved in July 2021. This policy ensures researchers have a fair and transparent route to appeal an Unfavourable Ethical Opinion provided by the Research Ethics Panel.

Coronavirus Policy

18. The University has worked to ensure that all staff, students and participants in research were able to work safely during the coronavirus pandemic. The University has continued to work within the UREC approved a 'Research Ethics Guidance Policy for Covid19' which was developed to advise researchers on how to manage their projects during the Covid19 pandemic.

19. The University has always operated alongside Welsh Government Guidelines and has been able to advise researchers that they are able to resume

Training

20. Training and awareness raising in the areas of ethics and integrity plays an important role in facilitating good research practice. Training and awareness raising events at Aberystwyth are aimed at all levels of researchers and are delivered in a variety of formats.

21. After successfully maintaining the delivery of all of the current training and development sessions offered throughout the pandemic by offering training online. The University is pleased to be able to resume offering sessions both in person and online.

22. At an UG and PGT level, module co-ordinators and other departmental staff are encouraged to embed the appropriate University processes and procedures into the delivery of their teaching. Undergraduate training on research ethics is organised on a departmental level. At a PGR level, RBI delivers the '*Ethics, Plagiarism and Academic Practice*' module, which is facilitated by the Graduate School. This module is compulsory for all new research students (PhD & MPhil). This module must be passed in order for the student to progress on to study year two. This module is run every September and January. The content of these modules was reviewed and developed during the reporting period and the assessment which students undertake after completion of these module was rewritten to ensure students better understood the contents of these sessions and could successfully write an in depth ethics application for their research project.

23. AU recognises the need to ensure that student and early career researchers are aware of their responsibilities towards maintaining the highest ethical standards when undertaking their research. Early career researchers and newly-appointed academic staff are invited and encouraged to attend a number of sessions which are tailored and delivered throughout the academic year. Existing research staff members are also able to attend any of the available sessions. We continue to participate in the rolling program of AU-wide *Research Good Practice* sessions facilitated by RB&I, which were delivered to a range of new and existing research staff. These Research Good Practice sessions are delivered throughout the academic year and a different session is delivered every two weeks from September to May of each academic year.

24. The University will continue to develop and refine its training offering ready for the 2022/23 academic year, linked to the development of a wider programme or researcher development undertaken as part of AUs commitment to the Concordat for Researcher Development.

F. Planned Activity

Review of the University's performance against the revised Concordat

25. Following publication in September 2021 of UKRIO's self-assessment tool, UREC will be overseeing a detailed review of the University's research ethics and integrity practices and policies to identify areas which may need revision or enhancement to ensure on-going compliance with the Concordat.

Policy and Procedure Reviews

26. There are a number of policies and procedures relating to research integrity which are due to be reviewed:

Research Ethics Panel terms of reference

27. The Universities Terms of Reference for the Research Ethics Panel are due to be reviewed in October 2022

UREC terms of reference

28. The Universities Terms of Reference for the University Research Ethics Committee are due to be reviewed in October 2022

Sensitive Security Policy

29. The University's Sensitive Security Policy is due for review in December 2022

Procedure for the Investigation of Misconduct in Research Policy

30. The University Research Ethics Committee has discussed the requirement for an extensive review of the Universities Procedure for the Investigation of Misconduct in Research Policy.

G. External Memberships

31. RBI continues to actively participate in the [Association of Research Managers and Administrators](#) (ARMA).

32. The University is a member of the [UK Research Integrity Office](#) (UKRIO). This has enabled the University to receive support in matters of research integrity and misconduct, consistent with the principles and expectations found within the Concordat to Support Research Integrity.

H. Procedure for the Investigation of Misconduct in Research

33. The University can provide assurance that the processes the institution has in place for dealing with allegations of misconduct are transparent, timely, robust and fair, and that they continue to be appropriate to the needs of the organisation

- i) The University takes all allegations of misconduct in research seriously and has developed a procedure to facilitate full exploration of potentially complex matters in research that can arise in situations where misconduct may have taken place.
- ii) This procedure follows the guidelines for a Procedure for the Investigation of Misconduct in Research issued by the UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO) in August 2008 and in accordance with guidelines from the Concordat. Its objectives are to ensure that issues of misconduct in research may be addressed appropriately and investigated effectively and to enable an independent panel to produce a report on the basis of which the University may initiate appropriate action.
- iii) The use of this Procedure *will* be informed by the principles of Fairness, Confidentiality, Integrity, Prevention of Detriment, and Balance.

34. There are three stages to the procedure for the investigation of misconduct in research. Any complaints of misconduct in research must be made in writing.

- A preliminary stage is held where the allegation of misconduct is formally acknowledged and the nature of the allegations are reviewed. If the allegations of misconduct cannot be entirely discounted at this point then the second stage will commence.
- A screening stage is then undertaken and a Screening Panel will be convened (comprised of the relevant Institute Director and two senior members of academic staff at least one of whom should be from the same Faculty as the Respondent) to determine whether the allegations of misconduct in research require formal investigation. This is completed within thirty working days. The Chair will provide a report of the Screening Panels' findings to the on whether a formal investigation is required.
- The Formal Investigation Stage is held where a Formal Investigation Panel is appointed. The Formal Investigation Panel will comprise a Pro Vice-Chancellor (normally the PVC with responsibility for Research) in the Chair and two senior members of academic staff from the same Faculty as the Respondent. The panel should be appointed within thirty working days of the receipt of the Screening Panels' report recommending a formal investigation. The panel will examine the evidence collected and undertake any further investigations necessary and interview the respondent and the complainant. There is no time limit set for this stage and it will be completed as soon as possible.

35. The University strives to maintain a culture which promotes good practice and encourages honest and ethical research. Researchers have a responsibility to report any allegations of research misconduct and the University has created a procedure which not only facilitates the investigation of research misconduct but also allows people to feel comfortable in reporting any allegations. The University offers an informal process of managing such allegations to alleviate the worry some may feel if making a complaint. A complainant has three other options other than a formal complaint:

- A) Approaching the individual and seeking jointly to find a way to resolve the matter
- B) Approaching the Faculty PVC/Head of Service Department and requesting that he/she acts as intermediary between the two parties in resolving the issue;
- C) Seeking mediation through an ACAS trained mediator at the University or at a sister university.

36. However, if a researcher felt they had no option but to report an allegation of research misconduct then the University has developed procedures as previously discussed, which not only provides a mechanism to investigate the allegation but to also support the staff involved.

I. Statement on formal investigations of Academic Research Misconduct

37. Based on the [Procedure for the Investigation of Misconduct in Research](#), the University can report that for 2020-21 there have been **two separate cases of alleged** research misconduct that have been taken forward to formal investigation. The University investigated the following allegations and processed the cases in accordance with its procedures for the investigation of misconduct in on Research .

31. Year	Allegation	Nature of Alleged Misconduct	Outcome
2021	1	Misrepresentation	Investigation Panel Established. Ongoing.
2021	1	Collecting data without ethical approval. Breach of duty of care.	Investigation Panel Established. Ongoing.

Lessons learned from formal investigations of research misconduct that have been undertaken

38. A full review of the lessons learned from the separate cases that are currently under formal investigation will be conducted and reported once each case has concluded.

J. Embedding a research environment that encourages openness and willingness to report instances of misconduct

39. The University is committed to maintaining the highest ethical and professional standards in our research, from design to dissemination. It is expected that researcher's always act with integrity, accountability, honesty, openness and demonstrate levels of sensitivity to all cultures and environments. The University has developed multiple ways of encouraging researchers to act with integrity and provide open and confidential routes to report instances of misconduct. Offering training from student researchers through to staff level, ethics training and support for supervisors. Individuals are made aware that they can contact the Research Ethics and Integrity Officer in confidence should they have any concerns where they feel instances of misconduct may have occurred whether they can discuss their concerns openly and seek advice. The University has a public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblowing) Policy which is available online for all students and staff to read.

K. Preparation of this statement.

40. This statement was prepared and coordinated by Lisa Fisher, Research Ethics and Integrity Officer (Research, Business and Innovation) and Jennifer Deaville, Research Development Manager.

41. This statement was presented and approved by the University Research Ethics Committee on 20th October 2022, the University Executive on (.....) and Senate on (.....)

42. All queries relating to this statement or any of the University's activities undertaken in relation to the Concordat should be directed to one of the following contacts:

[Professor Colin McInnes](#) – Pro Vice Chancellor for Research, Innovation and Knowledge Exchange, Chair of the University Research Ethics Committee

[Lisa Fisher](#) – Research Ethics and Integrity Officer, Research, Business & Innovation

[Dr Jennifer Deaville](#) – Research Development Manager, Research, Business & Innovation

43. If anyone reading this document has concerns relating to the conduct of an Aberystwyth University researcher, they should first consult the appropriate policy and procedure. If you are unsure which policy applies or if you are a participant in a research project, please contact the Research Ethics team who will be able to advise:

✉ ethics@aber.ac.uk

October 2022