

Annual statement on research integrity 2024-25

Section 1: Key contact information

Question	Response
1A. Name of organisation	University of Aberdeen
1B. Type of organisation: higher education institution/industry/independent research performing organisation/other (please state)	Higher Education Institution
1C. Date statement approved by governing body (DD/MM/YY)	30/09/25, University Court
1D. Web address of organisation's research integrity page (if applicable)	https://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/research/support/research-support/research-governance/
1E. Named senior member of staff to oversee research integrity	Name: Professor Nicholas Forsyth, Vice Principal (Research)
	Email address: nicholas.forsyth@abdn.ac.uk
1F. Named member of staff who will act as a first point of contact for anyone wanting more information on matters of research integrity	Name: Dr John Wrighton, Head of Research Strategy & Policy and REF Manager
	Email address: john.wrighton@abdn.ac.uk

Section 2: Promoting high standards of research integrity and positive research culture.

Description of actions and activities undertaken

2A. Description of current systems and culture

The University of Aberdeen maintains high standards of research integrity through clear governance, visible leadership, and a focus on research culture. The University acknowledges its responsibilities under the Concordat to Support Research Integrity and remains committed to upholding the highest standards in research integrity, noting the essential role of rigour and good research governance in delivering excellence in research. We recognise that maintaining research integrity is a core responsibility shared by everyone engaged in research activities.

Strategic oversight sits with the Vice-Principal (Research) through the University Research Committee (URC). Operational oversight and implementation are led by the Directorate of Research and Innovation and includes the Ethics Advisory Group (EAG) and six discipline-based ethics boards, to ensure coherent policy, processes, and timely advice across Schools.

The University's Research Cultures Strategy sets a clear vision for embedding integrity, openness, and accountability in research practice, articulated through four shared Ways of Working. Leadership for culture, development, and integrity is provided by the Vice-Principal (Research) and the Dean for Research Culture, ensuring a consistent institutional vision aligned to the Aberdeen 2040 strategy.

Oversight and coordination of support for research integrity and culture sits with the Directorate of Research & Innovation (R&I), working in close partnership with other professional services teams across the University. R&I provides strategic leadership on research governance, policy, funding, and researcher development, ensuring alignment with the University's Research Cultures Strategy and the Aberdeen 2040 vision. Externally, R&I leads on our sector engagement with UKRIO and the Scottish Research Integrity Network. This coordinated approach ensures that policies, training, resources and advice are coherent, complementary and accessible to researchers at all career stages. Expertise is drawn from across the University, including Digital and Information Services (DDIS) and Organisational Development and Human Resources (HR), to deliver high-quality support in areas such as open research, equality, diversity and inclusion, academic leadership, and leadership and management.

R&I works in close partnership with other Professional Services teams, including:

- ***Directorate of Digital and Information Services (DDIS):*** lead on open research policy and infrastructure, including open access publishing, research data management, and compliance with funder mandates in these areas. Activities include providing advice on copyright, licensing, and research outputs. DDIS also represents the University in the UK Reproducibility Network (UKRN) and participates in the ORCA Open Research Programme (ORP), supporting the embedding of open research practices across the institution.
- ***Organisational Development and Human Resources (HR):*** lead the development and delivery of EDI policy and initiatives, including mandatory training on EDI principles, recruitment and selection, unconscious bias, and leadership and management development for academic and professional services staff.

Policies and Systems

The University Strategy (Aberdeen 2040) and our Research Cultures strategy make explicit our commitment to producing globally excellent research, and the importance of equipping our researchers with the environment and skills required to develop their expertise and support them in engaging with future challenges.

Research Integrity is a fundamental aspect of the University's Research Governance Framework, as summarised in our Research Governance Handbook. This commitment is supported by a suite of institutional policies that promote responsible research practice, including:

Research Integrity & Ethics

- *Policy and Guidelines on Good Research Conduct & Statement on Handling Allegations of Research Misconduct*
- *Research Data Management Policy & Guidance*
- *Research Involving the Use of Animals – University Position Statement*
- *Research Ethics Applications – Policy & Procedure on Appeals*
- *Statement of Compliance on Trusted Research*
- *Records Management Policy*
- *Trusted Research/Export Control Guidance*
- *Guidance for the responsible use of AI in Research (including PGR guidance)*

People, Wellbeing and Safeguarding

- *Policy and Procedure on Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblowing)*
- *Code of Practice – Safeguarding in Research & Innovation*

- Dignity at Work and Study Toolkit (and related policies, guidance and legislation)
- Risk Assessment Policy

Information and Intellectual Property

- Code of Practice on Conflicts of Interest in Research & Commercialisation
- Data Protection Policy
- Information Security Policy
- Copyright Policy
- Intellectual Property, Equity and Revenue Sharing Policy

Guidance on research ethics and the process for obtaining ethical approval is made available to the University's research community via the Research Governance Handbook and dedicated Research Ethics webpages. Additional documentation tailored to the specific requirements of our ethics application process (Worktribe Ethics) and our individual Ethics Boards (e.g. participant information sheets and consent forms) is accessible via the Research Ethics webpages. These resources are subject to annual review to ensure alignment with current best practices, particularly in areas such as data protection and research data management.

Training and Development

Support for research integrity is delivered through a coordinated programme of training and development, led by the Directorate of R&I working in partnership with other Professional Services teams. This ensures that training is aligned with institutional policies, sector expectations and is underpinned by mandatory online courses on Research Integrity (required for all researchers) and Research Ethics & Governance (required for those seeking ethical approval), ensuring consistent understanding of core standards across the University.

R&I delivers core training on research ethics, research integrity, safeguarding, trusted research, knowledge exchange, public engagement, entrepreneurship and academic leadership which are accessible to all staff and postgraduate researchers. This is complemented by PORTAL, the University's researcher development hub (see section 2B), which provides on-demand resources on topics including research integrity, ethics, open research, trusted research, and career development. The Postgraduate Research College delivers PGR-specific training and supports supervisors to embed responsible research practice into supervision and student projects.

Specialist training and resources are provided by colleagues across the University:

Digital Information Services: lead training on open research, data management, data protection, information security, copyright and the responsible use of

generative AI

Human Resources and Organisational Development: provide training on equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) and leadership and management.

Training is delivered through a combination of mandatory online modules, live workshops, and discipline-specific sessions within Schools, alongside active engagement with the wider sector. Through our membership of the UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO) researchers can access webinars on topics such as research culture, artificial intelligence, and research misconduct. This blended model ensures that researchers at every career stage can access the knowledge, skills, and guidance needed to uphold the highest standards of research integrity, align their practice with the University's governance framework.

Communications and Engagement

Our standards for research integrity are outlined in the 'Policy and Guidelines on Good Research Conduct', which are incorporated within the Research Governance Handbook. The handbook is shared with all research staff and postgraduate students during local induction sessions. The handbook is subject to annual revision and all updates approved by the URC. Once approved, the updated version is published on our website and circulated to academic Schools via their Directors of Research.

Staff from Research & Innovation are regularly invited to contribute to School meeting and forums. Their input covers not only research ethics and integrity, but also topics such as building research networks, connecting with funding bodies, and engaging with industry partners.

We maintain strong links with national networks to ensure our policies and governance remain aligned with sector best practice. As members of the UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO) and the Scottish Research Integrity Network (SRIN), we contribute to and benefit from ongoing sector-wide discussions on emerging issues in research integrity, governance, and culture. These memberships provide access to expert advice, case studies, and specialist forums, enabling the Directorate of Research & Innovation and governance bodies such as the University Research Committee and Ethics Advisory Group to draw on the latest thinking when reviewing or developing institutional policies, guidance, and procedures.

We are committed to open research, recently appointing an Open Research Champion (ORCA) through our partnership with the UK Reproducibility Network (UKRN) helping to promote transparency, reproducibility, and accessibility in

research outputs. Our Research Publications Policy (2022) further supports open access by requiring scholarly articles to be accessible via a repository, using Creative Commons licenses, maximising accessibility and compliance with funder requirements and helping to promote public and civic engagement with our outputs.

Culture, Development and Leadership

Published in March 2025, the University's Research Cultures Strategy provides a shared vision for creating a vibrant, inclusive and forward-looking research environment. Developed collaboratively during AY 2024/25, it sets out four "Ways of Working" (Shared Standards of Excellence, Collective Problem Solving, Recognising Contributions and Supporting Career Development, and Evidence-Informed Culture Change) that translate our values into everyday practice, fostering collaboration, recognising contributions, and embedding integrity, transparency and openness in all research activity. Through our strategy we position ourselves to tackle complex global challenges, support ambitious research initiatives, and attract and retain world-class talent, driving meaningful impact locally, nationally, and globally.

Monitoring and Reporting

All queries, allegations and investigations regarding potential misconduct in research by staff members are overseen by the Research Strategy and Policy team within R&I, with support from HR, and managed in accordance with our 'Statement on Handling Allegations of Unacceptable Research Misconduct'. Matters involving postgraduate misconduct in research are addressed by the Academic Services team, following the University's Code of Practice on Student Discipline (Academic). Any investigations linked to funded research projects are reported to the appropriate funding body in line with their policies and procedures.

2B. Changes and developments during the period under review

Research Cultures Strategy: During AY 2024/25, we developed and published our Research Cultures Strategy (March 2025), setting out a clear, institution-wide vision for a vibrant, inclusive and forward-looking research environment. Centred around the four "Ways of Working" the strategy embeds integrity, openness, and accountability in research practice, and provides a framework for aligning policies, training, and development opportunities with our institutional values. Launching the strategy represents a significant step in fulfilling Commitment 3 of the Concordat,

ensuring that support for researchers, including training on research ethics, research integrity, and responsible research practice, is integrated with wider initiatives on collaboration, recognition, and career development.

Research integrity is integral to the strategy with “Shared Standards of Excellence” (Way of Working 1) embedding integrity, transparency, and openness in all research practices. This focus reflects our belief that excellence in research is intrinsically linked to the conditions and values under which it is produced. By promoting ethical, inclusive, and accessible research environments, we aim to foster mutual trust, accountability, and respect across all parts of the research community. Through this approach, research integrity is an intrinsic part of how we do research at Aberdeen - shaping behaviours, supporting decision-making, and enabling responsible innovation.

Introduction of Expanded Research Ethics and Compliance Role: The appointment of a **Research Ethics & Compliance Officer** during 2024/25 has expanded the remit of the previous research ethics-focussed role to encompass responsibility for supporting compliance activities in relation to Trusted Research and UK Export Control legislation. This role supports researchers by providing guidance and delivering training on the principles of Trusted Research, including how to identify and manage potential risks. It also raises awareness across the University, including among staff based in joint research institutes. In addition, the role supports compliance with Export Control regulations, particularly in the context of international collaboration and research involving sensitive technologies or partnerships with national security implications.

Embedding Research Integrity in expectations for the Management of Researchers: We have introduced an updated Code of Practice for the Management of Researchers and Managers of Research Fellows (approved by URC). The revisions align with the new Research Cultures Strategy and our institutional obligations under the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers. The Code sets clear expectations for “Shared Standards of Excellence” and “Good Practice in Employment,” embedding integrity, transparency, and openness as core principles in the management of research careers. These standards reinforce our commitment to the highest levels of professionalism and ethical conduct, ensuring that practices are ethical, accessible, and open to scrutiny. The updated Code also reaffirms our endorsement of responsible research assessment through the adoption of the DORA principles, linking research excellence directly to the integrity of research processes and researcher development.

Leadership Development: During 2025, we introduced three new leadership development programmes (May-September), coordinated by the Research Cultures and Development team, to support the embedding of responsible and inclusive

leadership across the research community. Developed in response to the Research Cultures Strategy and the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, these programmes were designed to address the needs of staff at key career stages - early career, mid-career, and new or aspiring principal investigators. Each programme aims to equip participants with the skills, confidence, and reflective practices needed to lead research teams and projects in ways that foster positive, collaborative, and ethical research environments. Co-created with participants through stakeholder engagement, they emphasise career development, inclusive leadership, and responsible research practice, and will provide resources including toolkits, reflection templates, and a co-designed "Guide to Being a Researcher at the University of Aberdeen" to support ongoing individual and institutional learning. A planned evaluation of the programmes will take place in October and a new update will be provided in future institutional statements.

Guidelines on the Responsible Use of Generative AI in Research: We have taken a proactive and responsible approach to the use of generative AI in research, reflecting our wider commitment to building a research culture that is both forward-looking and guided by principles of integrity and responsibility. Recognising both the opportunities and risks these tools present, in AY 2024/25, we established a Task and Finish Group to co-develop institutional guidance on the responsible use of generative AI in research. The resulting framework draws on the European Commission's sector-leading guidance and sets clear expectations for ethical, transparent, and secure practice, supporting compliance with sector and funder requirements and complementing existing academic integrity policies. These principles are being embedded through the development of specific guidance and training for postgraduate researchers, including clear expectations around disclosure and authorship, and support for supervisors to navigate appropriate use. PGRs are additionally required to declare any use of generative AI in their thesis originality statement. This work directly supports the first Way of Working (Shared Standards of Excellence) within the Research Cultures Strategy by promoting integrity, openness, and responsible innovation in an evolving research landscape.

Technician's Commitment: The University retained its status as a signatory to the Technicians Commitment, which ensures the visibility, recognition, career development and sustainability of the roles for technicians working in higher education and research and demonstrates the value and importance of our technician community in undertaking research activity on behalf of the University.

Ethics Chair Training: The Ethics Chairs and Deputy Chairs from our six internal Ethics Boards/Committees participated in a bespoke training session from UKRIO (UK Research Integrity Office) on the role and responsibilities of the Ethics Chair. The course considered current challenges for researchers, and opportunities for the ethical review process to facilitate and promote ethical research practice. It also

covered the role of the research ethics committee in the context of the wider governance landscape.

2C. Reflections on progress and plans for future developments

Pilot of the UKRIO Introduction to Research Integrity online training course: The University participated in the pilot in session 2024/25 and will be adopting this course in session 2025/26 to complement our existing training programme for researchers. Adoption of this training course will ensure that the University's researcher community benefits from UKRIO's associated subject expertise and its commitment to ensuring that their training package will remain compliant with ongoing developments in ethical practice in research and associated changes to legislation and funder requirements.

Standardised appointment process for the Chairs for our ethics committees and boards: The URC approved the introduction of a standardised appointment process to ensure that a fair and transparent recruitment procedure is adopted for these roles. This was successfully utilised for the appointment of new Ethics Chairs for the Committee for Research Ethics & Governance in Arts, Social Sciences & Business, and for the Physical Sciences & Engineering Ethics Board.

Scottish Research Cultures Collaboration Manager: The University of Aberdeen hosts Dr Frances Medaney, the Scottish Research Cultures Collaboration Manager, funded by the Scottish Funding Council and hosted by Aberdeen on behalf of the Scottish HEI sector. This position aims to promote good practice and advocate for a collaborative vision of research culture, ensuring Scotland remains a leader in research and innovation. In March 2026, Frances will support the delivery of a Scotland wide Research Integrity and Culture Week (RI&C) (building on previous events led by the University of Strathclyde in partnership with Heriot Watt, Queen Margaret University and Dundee) to create a national platform to showcase, share and celebrate research integrity and culture activities. The University of Aberdeen will be a partner organisation and will be involved in delivering events within Aberdeen and across Scotland for researchers around research integrity.

PORTAL: As noted in section 2A, PORTAL (our repository of resources and information in relation to researcher training and career development) was launched in session 2024/25. PORTAL is a collaboratively developed hub for research training and career development, supporting researchers and research-enabling staff, including technicians. Resources are organised around core research activities, such as responsible research, open research, funding, project delivery,

stakeholder engagement, and team leadership, making it easy for users to find what's relevant to them at any point in their career. Content can be navigated by career stage, job role, or topic, recognising that development is non-linear and context-specific.

A key feature is the Development Pathways, which guide users through opportunities in a structured way, helping them plan towards longer-term goals. Developed in partnership between academic and professional services, PORTAL consolidates opportunities in one accessible platform, structured around the research process rather than institutional boundaries. It supports more inclusive and connected research cultures by recognising diverse roles, promoting self-directed learning, and shifting from fragmented, one-off training towards collaborative, shared responsibility for enabling research to thrive.

Since its launch, there have been over 5000 interactions with the platform and the pages and content within. In addition, the impact of PORTAL is already extending beyond the institution. Several other universities within the UK and internationally are keen to understand how we designed and structured the resource, with a view to developing similar frameworks. This interest reflects PORTAL's adaptability: although grounded in the University of Aberdeen's strategy and context, its principles and design can readily be applied elsewhere.

Training for designated School Safeguarding in Research Officers: Plans to roll out further were paused due to resourcing issues. Following the recent appointment of our new Head of Research Strategy & Policy, this activity will now be addressed during session 2025/26.

Review of Worktribe: Following the introduction of the **Worktribe Projects** package in 2020-21 (in support of pre- and post-awards) followed by **Worktribe Ethics** (to replace previous ethical application processes) in 2022-23, a student intern was appointed during summer 2025 to undertake a survey and follow-up interviews with all Worktribe users, aimed at obtaining in-depth information on the user experience of Worktribe. A management report will be submitted to summarise the findings of the evaluation, and this will be considered by the Directorate of Research and Innovation. The report will be used as a basis for the development of a future workplan to address the issues identified by introducing improvements to the pre- and post-award process and also the ethics review process.

Training and awareness for Trusted Research and International Research Oversight: We have developed new on-demand Trusted Research training resources, comprising two courses: 'Introduction to Trusted Research – security in international collaboration' and a more advanced 'Fundamentals of Trusted Research (including export control compliance)'. These resources will be launched in October 2025 and will provide accessible, practical guidance for staff and students

across all disciplines, with tailored content for researchers working in higher-risk areas. Alongside this, we have established an International Research Oversight Group (IROG), chaired by the Dean for Research Performance, to oversee the University's approach to Trusted Research and compliance with export controls. The Group ensures that risk-based decisions are informed by both policy and subject-matter knowledge, and that the University remains compliant with national legislation in its international research activities.

Sustainable Research & Innovation Practice: *To demonstrate our support for responsible research and innovation, and in the context of the University's overarching commitments to sustainability in our Aberdeen 2040 strategy, the University will be embarking on a number of activities in session 2025/26 to support the environmental sustainability of our research practices. These include becoming a signatory on the Concordat for the Environmental Sustainability of Research and Innovation Practice; the adoption of the Laboratory Efficiency Assessment Framework (LEAF) as a vehicle for encouraging improvements in the sustainability of our lab practices; and the development of an interim policy on offsetting business travel for our research grants. These activities will build upon the work undertaken to develop our first Net Zero Strategy, which was approved by University Court in 2024, and will embed environmental sustainability within our research culture.*

2D. Case study on good practice (optional)

The University has developed a robust digital infrastructure to support compliance with the Trusted Research agenda and export control legislation, while upholding the highest standards of research integrity. A dedicated SharePoint repository has been established to manage Trusted Research cases, ensuring that preliminary risk assessment data captured through Microsoft Forms is automatically logged, case reference folders are created, and key details are recorded in a structured and auditable manner. This approach enables a transparent record of decision-making and consistent oversight of international research activities.

A centralised SharePoint list has been introduced to record all Standard Individual Export Licences (SIELs) granted to the University and all Open General Export Licences (OGELs) in use, strengthening institutional monitoring and ensuring that licence conditions are recorded and adhered to across projects.

To complement this, private Microsoft Teams channels have been implemented for each licensed case. Each channel is assigned a unique email address, which researchers can copy into correspondence with international collaborators. This

creates a secure, accessible archive of communications and export activity, ensuring compliance with licence conditions and institutional oversight.

Together, these systems exemplify good practice in integrating research integrity principles into day-to-day research management. By combining automation, transparency, and secure record-keeping, the University has developed a sustainable model that reduces administrative burden while ensuring compliance with national legislation and Trusted Research obligations.

Section 3: Addressing research misconduct

3A. Statement on processes that the organisation has in place for dealing with allegations of misconduct

As a signatory to the Universities UK Concordat to Support Research Integrity, we are committed to nurturing a research culture based on openness, transparency and accountability in the investigation of potential misconduct in research. Our aim is to ensure that all members of our researcher community remain confident in our procedures and fully supported throughout any investigations they may be involved in.

Our approach to research misconduct is explain in the 'Statement on Handling Allegations of Unacceptable Research Conduct' within section 4.2 of our published Research Governance Handbook. This framework is reinforced by a suite of related policies (explain in section 2A of this statement), which have been designed to create a safe and encouraging environment in which to raise any concerns regarding the conduct of our research.

We continue to place a strong emphasis on training and fostering widespread awareness of research ethics. Within the University, ongoing initiatives continue to enhance our researchers' understanding of these essential issues. The implementation of the Worktribe Ethics application process and associated training and guidance on University policies and procedures has increased awareness around key aspects of ethical research conduct.

In terms of lessons learned from issues that arose during session 2024/25, the 'near miss' reported in section 3B below has identified a gap in understanding with regards to the difference between evaluation activity and research activity, and associated requirements for ethical approval of this activity. This will be addressed in session 2025/26 via the preparation of further guidance for researchers on this issue.

3B. Information on investigations of research misconduct that have been undertaken				
Type of allegation	Number of allegations			
	Number of allegations reported to the organisation	Number of formal investigations	Number upheld in part after formal investigation	Number upheld in full after formal investigation
Fabrication				
Falsification				
Plagiarism	3	3	0	3
Failure to meet legal, ethical and professional obligations				
Misrepresentation (eg data; involvement; interests; qualification; and/or publication history)				
Improper dealing with allegations of misconduct				
Multiple areas of concern (when received in a single allegation)				
<i>Other*</i>	1	0	0	0
Total:	4	3	0	3
<p>*If you listed any allegations under the ‘Other’ category, please give a brief, high-level summary of their type here. Do not give any identifying or confidential information when responding.</p> <p><i>One ‘near miss’ was identified in relation to a potential ethical breach resulting from an enquiry regarding ethical approval of a teaching workshop and publication of the associated evaluation. Following an initial stage investigation, it was confirmed that the activity in question was not research, hence did not require ethical approval. However advice was provided to the researcher in relation to careful use of language in order to ensure clarity when describing what is teaching evaluation activity, and what would be deemed as research activity (which does require ethical approval where this involves human participants). This situation has</i></p>				

identified a lack of clarity amongst some researchers of the boundaries between research activity and evaluation and audit, and further guidance is currently being developed on this issue.