



ANNUAL STATEMENT TO COURT FOR 2016/17 ON ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN TO STRENGTHEN THE UNIVERSITY'S RESEARCH GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

The University of Aberdeen seeks to achieve the highest standards in its research governance arrangements, recognising both the importance and centrality of rigour and integrity to high quality research performance. The University recognises that research integrity is a primary concern of all those involved with research, and that it is vital to have in place robust and effective processes for dealing with allegations of misconduct.

The University is committed to full compliance with all areas of the UUK Concordat to Support Research Integrity, which was first published in July 2012. It is an expectation of the SFC, RCUK and the Wellcome Trust, and therefore a requirement of funding, that all Universities comply with the guidance and commitments outlined in the Concordat. The University is required, under Commitment 5 of the Concordat, to submit an annual statement to its governing body (University Court) which summarises the actions and activities undertaken by the University to support and strengthen its research governance arrangements. The statement should also provide high level comment on any formal research misconduct investigations which may have been undertaken over the course of the previous year.

Statement of Compliance

This statement outlines steps the University has taken, and measures it has put in place, for compliance with the UUK Concordat to Support Research Integrity, as outlined in the Concordat under Commitment 5:

- Supporting and Strengthening Research Integrity: the University has taken a number of steps this year to strengthen its research governance arrangements.

The University revised the institutional Research Governance Handbook which sets out institutional policies and processes in relation to research governance and integrity, and governs the ethical and financial approval processes for research applications. The Handbook was updated in the light of organisational change (removal of Colleges), and to reflect developments in the external operating environment.

The revised handbook, along with the updated webpages relating to ethical approval are available on Staffnet: <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/research/research-governance-304.php>

The Handbook was amended as to reflect the following:

- Changes in organisational structure – devolution of budgetary control to School and abolition of Colleges
- Changes in the structures that provide ethical approval of grant applications
- Changes to peer review and grants approval processes
- Establishment of the Grants Academy as the framework through which Schools and Professional Services deliver project development and grant writing support

- Introduction of the Nagoya Protocol governing the use of genetic resources in research (2014)
- Introduction of institutional requirements and duties under the Counterterrorism and Security Act 2015
- Introduction of an Open Access Policy for Outputs (2012) and an institutional policy on Research Data Management (2014)

The Research Policy Committee agreed transitional arrangements for ethical approval after the removal of the Colleges. Support for ethical approval and the relevant committees within Physical Sciences and Engineering and Arts and Social Sciences has transferred to Research & Innovation. It has further agreed to explore harmonisation of processes and systems across internal ethics boards and committees. The aim is to provide an online application and approval system that will meet the needs of a wide variety of disciplines, providing consistent and robust reporting and monitoring of activity and enabling informed decisions on training requirements

- Implementation and Monitoring of Compliance: The Research Policy Committee has assumed oversight of School Research Governance Health Checks. This is a rolling programme of self-assessment on how research governance structures and processes are implemented and monitored at School level. Schools are invited to undertake a self-audit which is then discussed by the Chairs of the current Ethics Boards and the Research Policy Committee. Schools receive detailed feedback and recommendations for change and improvement. The current programme foresees that health checks will take place in each School on a biennial basis.
- Research Misconduct – Systems and Incidents: the University has in place a robust system for dealing with allegations or incidents of research misconduct. These are outlined in detail in Section 4 of the University Research Governance Handbook. The University is satisfied that the systems in place provide comprehensive mechanisms for dealing with research misconduct, and that staff are provided with an appropriate range of options for reporting allegations of research misconduct. There are a number of different parties to whom an allegation can be reported, and in each case, the allegation will be taken in complete confidence.

The University did not undertake any formal research misconduct investigations or consider any case over academic year 2016/17; no formal complaints were made. There have been several cases of minor infringements or potential near misses of governance arrangements which were resolved at School level by clarifying correct processes and/or additional supervision and training for individual researchers. We remain alert to infringements and near misses so that we can engender a culture of learning and continuous improvement.

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