



ANNUAL STATEMENT TO COURT FOR 2017/18 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 the 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.

Research Governance Framework

At its meeting in November 2017, the Research Policy Committee received and approved the revised institutional Research Governance Framework which was updated to take account of changes in the organisational and committee structure, and to reflect changes in the external research environment, such as the Nagoya Protocol on the exploitation of biological samples. The annual review of the Framework is currently underway and will be presented to the Research Policy Committee by the end of the year.

As part of its internal research governance processes, a review of the research ethics application processes in use across the University was undertaken during 17/18. The aim of the review was to introduce a single, standardised application process to replace those currently used by the Ethics Committees in Arts, Social Sciences & Business, Physical Sciences & Engineering, Psychology, the Rowett Institute and Life Sciences and Medicine (CERB).

The outcome of the review will lead to improved efficiency of the application process, enable appropriate institutional oversight of the centralised process, enhance its reporting capabilities and will ensure the system is designed and maintained using current technology.

The recommendations arising from the review will be presented to the Research Policy Committee for approval and implementation in session 2018/19.

General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)

The General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) came into force in May 2018. We have raised awareness of the new regulations and their implications for researchers through face to face workshops and webinars, as well as providing guidance online. In particular, we have worked to ensure that consent forms and processes, data storage and participants' information sheets are in compliance with the new regulations.

School Ethics Health Checks

We have continued to undertake School Ethics Health Checks throughout the year. These are self-assessments which ensure that Schools are aware of their ethics and governance responsibilities, and that processes at School or discipline level and their interfaces with institutional processes are checked and, where necessary, improved regularly. The completed health checks are assessed by the Chairs of the institutional ethics committees who make detailed recommendations. The Research Policy Committee, chaired by the Vice Principal for

Research oversees the process. Feedback from Schools is that this is a useful process which reminds researchers and professional services staff of their responsibilities and obligations under the Research Governance Framework and prompts improvements in School based ethics and governance processes.

House of Commons Science and Technology Committee Report on Research Integrity

The House of Commons Science and Technology Committee sought evidence from research institutions on research integrity arrangements, and published its report with recommendations in June 2018. The University of Aberdeen has established a short term working group under the leadership of the Dean of Research for Life Sciences and Medicine, Professor Gary Macfarlane, to consider the report and its recommendations and to develop an institutional response. The working group is expected to complete its work later this year, having considered the June report as well as a further report on research integrity in clinical trials which will be published shortly.

Research misconduct

The University has in place a robust system for dealing with allegations or incidents of research misconduct. These are outlined in section 4 of the University Research Governance Framework. These will be reviewed in the light of the recommendations of the House of Commons Science and Technology Report on Research Integrity.

During 2017/18, the University formally investigated and concluded a case of plagiarism in a research application. The potential funder was aware of the case, and the outcome was reported back to the funder. The allegation was upheld and disciplinary action was taken against the individual.

In this academic year a case of alleged inappropriate research conduct was informally investigated by the University, but no formal proceedings were brought as the investigation did not provide any evidence of wrongdoing. The funder of this research project was notified of the issues which had been raised but no further action was taken.

A case of failure of acknowledge authorship was investigated in the case of two publications by a postgraduate student. This was resolved in arbitration, and in the event the relevant publications were withdrawn.

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