



## Annual statement on research integrity 2023-2024

<b>Section 1: Key Contact Information</b>	
<b>Name of organisation</b>	Ulster University
<b>Type of organisation:</b>	Higher Education Institution
<b>Reporting Period</b>	September 2023-August 2024
<b>Date statement approved by governing body</b>	25/06/2025
<b>Date statement made publicly available</b>	05/08/2025
<b>Web address of organisation's research integrity page (including access to previous statements)</b>	<a href="https://www.ulster.ac.uk/research/our-research/research-integrity">https://www.ulster.ac.uk/research/our-research/research-integrity</a>
<b>Named senior member of staff to oversee research integrity</b>	Prof Liam Maguire
	lp.maguire@ulster.ac.uk
<b>Named member of staff who will act as a first point of contact for anyone wanting more information on matters of research integrity</b>	Dr Julie McCarroll
	j.mccarroll@ulster.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**

**Please describe how the organisation maintains high standards of research integrity and promotes positive research culture. It should include information on the support provided to researchers to understand standards, values and behaviours, such as training, support and guidance for researchers at different career stages/ disciplines. You may find it helpful to consider the following broad headings:**

- **Policies and systems**
- **Communications and engagement**
- **Culture, development and leadership**
- **Monitoring and reporting**

**Policies and Systems**

Operationally, Ulster University has in place a suite of policies, procedures and guidelines to ensure that research is appropriately governed. These are hosted on the Research Governance and Ethics web pages, accessible via the Resources for Researchers internal web pages which also include links to related policies such as the Research Data Management Policy.

The University's *Code of Practice for Professional Integrity in the Conduct of Research* (reviewed 2021) is the central document which details the standards to which all university staff and students involved in the research process are expected to work. This document addresses the required precepts and commitments of the Concordat to Support Research Integrity, clearly referencing other policies, procedures and guidance in place to support researchers and to underpin the good conduct of research.

The Code of Practice for Professional Integrity in the Conduct of Research includes the University's definition of misconduct in research and details the procedures which will apply in the event of a suspected misconduct in research. Other related policies, some of which are the responsibility of multiple directorates, are detailed at Appendix A, and include policies regulating the areas of human tissue, animal research and human participants.

Supporting the Code of Practice for Professional Integrity in the Conduct of Research is a Research Integrity training course which must be completed by all university staff and

students who conduct research. Publication practices are further supported by the university's guidance on authorship.

PURE is used to managed research outputs, outcomes and impacts, facilitating transparency around the University's research activities and collaborations. Where required to do so by funders, researchers also report impacts and outputs of funded research via ResearchFish. Where it is required by the Health Research Authority (HRA), studies are registered on public databases, and the university is fully supportive of the HRA's transparency strategy.

### **Communication and engagement**

Digital communication is managed via various tools, primarily the University's outward-facing web pages, intranet and Microsoft tools such as Sharepoint and Engage. Content and links are kept up to date through regular review and revision in conjunction with a Marketing and Communications Business Partner; other significant changes are timetabled by the Research Governance team in collaboration with Marketing and Communications. Research governance, ethics and integrity resources are primarily accessed through the Research Governance and Ethics web pages. Engagement and dissemination of information regarding resources, training, development and events are managed via Sharepoint sites, Engage and email.

Events are held over Teams and in-person at University, Faculty and School level throughout the year.

### **Culture, Development and Leadership**

Ulster University's overarching strategy, People, Place and Partnership, has at its core the University's values of Enhancing Potential, Inclusion, Integrity and Collaboration; it aims to create the conditions, frameworks and approaches to enable staff to achieve and exceed in an environment of academic and operational excellence, whilst enabling access to transformative university experiences for a diversity of students. Action and implementation plans drive advancement in areas that cross-cut the strategic values, such as the Technician Commitment, and the Concordat for the Career Development of Researchers.

Research and innovation remain key to the overall strategic direction of the University, and the commitments outlined in the corporate strategy are further underpinned by the Ulster University Research Strategy 2023-2028: A Strategy for Research Excellence, Inclusion and Impact. Launched in October 2023, it builds on Ulster University's highest ever Research Excellence Framework (REF) performance in 2021, and aims to advance the vision for research excellence with transformative impact. Development of our researchers, research community and the promotion of an open, diverse, supportive and sustainable research culture are key elements of the four strategic goals. With a commitment to maintaining the highest standards of rigour and integrity in all aspects of research, and promoting a positive culture of research excellence, the university has a robust framework and strategic commitment to support research governance and integrity.

During 2023/24, the university completed its Valuing Voices survey, open to all staff, and developed a follow-up action plan through further staff engagement. This action plan focuses on six key areas including people development and employee wellbeing.

The latest Advance HE's Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES 2023) placed Ulster University 4th in the UK for postgraduate researcher satisfaction. The national benchmarking exercise surveyed postgraduate research students from 105 universities across the UK about their postgraduate research experience, giving postgraduate research students the opportunity to give feedback on their learning experience, supervision and research environment, informing activities to enhance their experience.

Other developments during the reporting period in terms of Research Culture include Research Culture NI – a two-year programme aiming to foster collaboration across the research and innovation community and promoting an open, diverse, supportive and sustainable research culture. A collaborative project led by Ulster University and Queen's University Belfast (QUB) and supported through funding from the Wellcome Trust, Research Culture NI launched in April 2024, with a Research Culture Manager appointed in UU in July 2024 to support this and other research culture activities. This initiative aims to deliver on five key workstreams:

1. Understanding the current research community and culture
2. Enabling researcher career development and alternative career exploration
3. Strengthening capacity and networks for research professionals
4. Enabling excellence in "Practice as Research" in Northern Ireland
5. Programme evaluation

As part of this work, a Northern Ireland Research Professionals Network (NIRPN) has been established with a programme of regular themed events planned. The university is also involved in a number of other external networks such as the All-Island Research Culture Network and the Vitae Peer Mentoring Circles Steering Group which will further examine and develop research culture across institutions and research-active organisations on the island of Ireland.

## **Training and Development**

All research-active staff and students are required to complete the University's own Research Integrity course. Based on the *Code of Practice* referred to above, this course supports researchers from all disciplines in understanding the key issues that need to be considered when planning, conducting and reporting research. Completion by all PhD researchers is required within 100 days of first registration and prior to the first formal review of their progress. Academic staff and contract researchers are required to complete within a reasonable timeframe, and course completion by all researchers named on an ethics application forms part of the application validation check.

An online introductory course on research ethics and governance is provided by the Doctoral College and delivered by the Research Governance Team within the Research Development Programme. Staff may join these events and seminars where capacity allows.

There is also provision for online training on research and consent under the Human Tissue Act (HTA) (2004) and this is mandatory for staff and students on HTA-regulated studies.

Training and development events continue to be delivered on topics such as PPI in research, and media training, writing retreats, inclusion hour and PhD researcher coffee mornings are regularly scheduled throughout the year. Staff and students conducting research involving animals receive an induction once they have completed their mandatory Home Office/Department of Health NI training. AWERB members and Project/Personal Licence Holders attend educational and networking events such as Culture of Care Days and Animal Welfare Research Network events.

### **Monitoring and Reporting**

The Research Governance Steering Committee (RGSC) has responsibility for developing, keeping under review and revising policies and guidance in relation to research governance, integrity and ethics. Groups and committees specifically dedicated to the management of individual regulatory areas (animal welfare, use of radiation, human tissue) and human research ethics report to the RGSC. The RGSC reports and makes recommendations on national and local legislation, policy and practice as appropriate to the Research & Innovation Committee (RIC), which is chaired by the Pro Vice Chancellor for Research. RIC reports directly to the university's Senate and has responsibility for providing leadership and approving policies, including those which promote research integrity.

This reporting structure ensures that issues or developments requiring a strategic response or input are considered at the appropriate level. The University Senate and Council are ultimately responsible for oversight and policy-setting. Policies are reviewed in line with a University schedule and are subject to public consultation and consultation across the institution, including with staff, students and the unions.

Ulster University has robust governance and reporting structures in place to ensure that research integrity is maintained at the highest levels. Audits are undertaken, for example, in the area of compliance with Human Tissue Act (HTA) regulations. All audit findings and any other significant updates are reported through the appropriate governance structures. HTA Self-Assessments are also conducted.

Course completion rates for the Research Integrity training course are monitored by the Research Governance team, and course completion is a standing item on the Research Governance Steering Committee agenda. All researchers involved in an application to the university research ethics committees must have completed the Research Integrity training course for favourable ethical opinion to be granted. Any study which requires NHS research

ethics or NHS R&D approval requires 100% completion of the research integrity course by institutional team members before study Sponsorship will be granted.

## **2B Changes and developments during the period under review**

**Please provide an update on any changes made during the period, such as new initiatives, training, developments, also ongoing changes that are still underway. Drawing on Commitment 3 of the Concordat, please note any new or revised policies, practices and procedures to support researchers; training on research ethics and research integrity; training and mentoring opportunities to support the development of researchers' skills throughout their careers.**

### **Strategy**

Ulster University's Research & Impact Strategy 2017-2022 delivered unprecedented growth in research and innovation performance, with an 85% increase in research grants awarded and a 20% increase in staff submitted to REF2021. The Ulster University Research Strategy 2023-2028: A Strategy for Research Excellence, Inclusion and Impact, launched in October 2023, aims to build further on this success. Developed during the course of 2022 and 2023 and involving multiple events to facilitate the input of staff, PhD researchers and other stakeholders, the strategy describes the university's continued ambitions for an open, diverse, supportive and sustainable research culture, with a focus on the advancement of research integrity across the whole research lifecycle.

### **Policies**

During the reporting period, the Policy for Research Involving Human Tissue has been subject to a process of revision through the university's governance structures.

### **Training and Development**

To strengthen the university's commitment to the Researcher Development Concordat, a Research Staff Development Officer post was created in 2022. This role is pivotal in implementing the University's Researcher Development Concordat Action Plan, which focuses on creating a supportive, inclusive, and equitable research culture. The Officer works closely with the Research and Innovation Directorate as well as with People and

Culture, and is responsible for coordinating initiatives that address core priorities, such as improving the researcher experience.

A new Sharepoint site to share Research & Innovation events and training is planned for launch during the next reporting period. This will be a single source for training, events and useful links and will be open to all staff and postgraduate students in the University.

Due to staffing shortages, the Research Governance and Integrity team was unable to commit to the UKRIO Research Integrity training course pilot exercise. It is hoped that this course can be introduced for some or all eligible staff and students in the University once the course is launched.

It is hoped that new training and guidance materials on ethics and governance processes will be developed during the next reporting period.

### **Research Leadership**

A **Deputy Director of Research** was appointed in April 2024. This role provides strategic support for the Director of Research and Innovation in the delivery of the research strategy and engagement with internal and external stakeholders. The role also has direct responsibility for the development of research proposals and the management of research awards made to the university, providing an additional level of leadership and oversight.

A new **Head of Research Governance and Integrity** was appointed in April 2024 after retirement of the Head of Research Governance in November 2023.

A **Research Culture Manager** was appointed in July 2024 to take forward work on a Research Culture Action Plan, Research Culture NI and other initiatives.

## **2C. Reflections on progress and plans for future developments**

**This should include a reflection on the previous year's activity including a review of progress and impact of initiatives if known relating to activities referenced in the previous year's statement. Note any issues that have hindered progress, e.g. resourcing or other issues.**

### **Reflections on progress and plans for future developments**

Plans to digitise the PhD Research Governance and Ethics Introductory training are in place for the future reporting period. It is also hoped to resume face-to-face delivery of this training across all three campuses, and to increase availability of this course for staff.

The internal systems and processes create challenges with monitoring research integrity course completion rates in so much as significant manual monitoring is required. Options for improvement in course delivery mechanisms and monitoring of completion rates have been considered, particularly in the context of the pilot of the UK Research and Integrity Office's (UKRIO) training course. Delivery and monitoring mechanisms for research integrity training will be a focus for the Research Governance and Integrity Team during the next reporting period.

The benefits and risks of Artificial Intelligence in the context of research integrity will be key considerations during future reporting periods.

A Research Culture Steering Committee will be established in late 2024 with a remit to development a Research Culture Action Plan for delivery over the following years.

## ***Addressing research misconduct***

### **Section 3: Addressing research misconduct**

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

- **a brief summary of relevant organisation policies/ processes (e.g. research misconduct procedure, whistle-blowing policy, bullying/harassment policy; appointment of a third party to act as confidential liaison for persons wishing to raise concerns) and brief information on the periodic review of research misconduct**



**processes (e.g. date of last review; any major changes during the period under review; date when processes will next be reviewed).**

- **information on how the organisation creates and embeds a research environment in which all staff, researchers and students feel comfortable to report instances of misconduct (e.g. code of practice for research, whistleblowing, research misconduct procedure, informal liaison process, website signposting for reporting systems, training, mentoring, reflection and evaluation of policies, practices and procedures).**

- **anonymised key lessons learned from any investigations into allegations of misconduct which either identified opportunities for improvements in the organisation's investigation procedure and/or related policies / processes/ culture or which showed that they were working well.**

The University has a specific process for addressing allegations of research misconduct, as is required by the Concordat to Support Research Integrity. This has been in place for more than a decade and was reviewed in 2021. The contact point for advice is the Head of Research Governance and Integrity, and the contact point for those wishing to make a formal allegation is a senior officer of the University (Deputy Vice Chancellor) who sits outside the research management structure.

The appointment of a senior officer out with the research management structure is to ensure that those making allegations have an independent point of contact and someone with sufficient seniority to drive the process forward when necessary.

The University's procedures in this and associated areas (whistleblowing, public interest etc) are intended to ensure that those who make allegations can do so in the knowledge that their reports will be taken seriously and handled fairly. However, it is clearly a significant and uncomfortable undertaking for a researcher or academic (particularly one in a relatively junior position) to take such a step, and we must recognise that reality. The University continues to take steps to update its strategies, policies, procedures and guidance to place emphasis on integrity and the responsibilities around best practice, and to focus on people and their place in the organisation rather than on the importance of the organisation itself, with a view to promoting improvements in the research culture.

During this reporting period, no investigations into allegations of research misconduct were initiated or completed. One concern was raised; an update on the management of which will be reported in the subsequent annual statement.

<b>Information on investigations of research misconduct that have been undertaken</b>				
<b>Type of allegation</b>	<b>Number of allegations</b>			
	<b>Number of allegations reported to the organisation</b>	<b>Number of formal investigations</b>	<b>Number upheld in part after formal investigation</b>	<b>Number upheld in full after formal investigation</b>
Fabrication	0			
Falsification	0			
Plagiarism	0			
Failure to meet legal, ethical and professional obligations	0			
Misrepresentation (e.g. data; involvement; interests; qualification; and/or publication history)	0			
Improper dealing with allegations of misconduct	0			
Multiple areas of concern (when received in a single allegation)	0			
<i>Other</i>	0			
<b>Total:</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

## APPENDIX A

### Policies related to research integrity

- Policy for the Governance of research involving Human Participants
- Policy on research involving Human Tissue
- Guidelines on Acceptable sources of external funding for research
- Research Study Volunteer Complaints Procedure
- Procedures for the Investigation of Allegations of Research Misconduct
- Policies relating to GDPR and the use of personal data including Data Protection Policy
- Intellectual Property Policy and Procedures
- Research Data Management Policy
- Intellectual Property Policy and Procedures
- Provisional Open Research Position Statement
- Open Access and PURE Policy
- Raising Concerns (Whistleblowing) Policy
- Equality Scheme
- Bullying & Harassment (Dignity at Work and Study) Policy