University of Plymouth

Board of Governors

Assurance statement on compliance with the Concordat to Support Research Integrity 2017/18

In 2012 Universities UK published the Concordat to Support Research Integrity. As a signatory, the University of Plymouth is committed to maintain and promote the highest standards of integrity and probity in scientific research. This activity is implemented by the Research Support and Development team and progress is reported to the Research and Innovation Committee. As a condition of funding, HEFCE require that as a signatory the University demonstrates compliance in the form of an annual assurance statement, which is subject to audit.

One of the requirements of the Concordat is a short annual statement to the Board of Governors that:

- provides a summary of actions and activities that have been undertaken to support and strengthen understanding and application of research integrity issues;
- provides assurances that the processes in place for dealing with allegations of misconduct are transparent, robust and fair, and continue to be appropriate to the needs of the organisation;
- provides a high-level statement on any formal investigations of research misconduct that have been undertaken.

This is that statement, and it is structured under the Concordat commitments:

Commitment #1: We are committed to maintaining the highest standards of rigour and integrity in all aspects of research.

- The University Research and Innovation Strategy 2017-22 sets out research integrity as one of the key priorities with revised governance structures around ethics, conduct and integrity to ensure value-added compliance with all relevant concordats and legislation to do with researcher development, conduct and integrity.

Commitment #2: We are committed to ensuring that research is conducted according to appropriate ethical, legal and professional frameworks, obligations and standards.

- The University Ethics and Integrity Committee (UREIC) reviewed and updated the Research Ethics Policy and the Code of Good Research Practice. In comparison to the previous version, the Code of Good Research Practices is constructed as an independent policy from the Research Ethics Policy, emphasising the principles that define the criteria for maintaining research integrity.
- The new Research Data Policy was approved by the UREIC and by the R&I committee. This policy outlines good practice in research data management and open-access to research data as integral to high-quality research.

- The University introduced the mandatory GDPR compliance training for all staff via the Organisational Development programme. The Equality & Diversity and Unconscious Bias training continues to be mandated for all staff.

Commitment #3: We are committed to supporting a research environment that is underpinned by a culture of integrity and based on good governance, best practice and support for the development of researchers.

- A new structure of Research Governance webpages was introduced with emphasis on the user-oriented approach to the research integrity and ethics information.
- The University continuously provides and develops training programmes for Post-Graduate Researchers and staff. There were a number of research integrity, ethics and governance sessions delivered with the Research Support Programme as either sessions or Research Support Surgeries, as well as with the Researcher Development Programme.
- The University implements the new Terms of Reference and Membership for the UREIC and FREIC committees that emphasise the committees' obligations related to the research excellence and integrity compliance.
- Online ethics application and compliance system: an integrated system approach has been selected for the implementation of the costing pricing and on-line ethics approval for all research projects (non-funded and funded).
- The University holds a register of independently ethically reviewed studies.
- A new template of the FREIC's Annual Report, (which includes sections on research training, data management and integrity issues) will be implemented in 2018/19.

Commitment #4: We are committed to using transparent, robust and fair processes to deal with allegations of research misconduct should they arise.

- The new Code of Good Research Practice updates and clarifies the process of reporting and dealing with allegations of research misconduct.
- A dedicated Research Misconduct webpage explains the procedure of raising concern at the University.
- The UREIC Secretary maintains a register of all raised allegations of research misconduct.
- There has been one informal investigation into research misconduct involving a staff member and one formal investigation into research misconduct involving a postgraduate researcher during the last year.

Commitment #5: We are committed to working together to strengthen the integrity of research and to reviewing progress regularly and openly.

- In 2017-2018 the University HR Excellence in Research Award was renewed as part of the 6 year renewal process. The University submission was approved in February 2018. The submission documents are available at the following link and towards the end of the webpage: https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/research/support/development/implementing-the-concordat.
- An improved process for reviewing and monitoring Health Research Authority sponsored research studies has been implemented.