



## **Annual Report and Statement on Research Integrity 2020/21**

As an outstanding UK research-intensive university, the University of Exeter recognises that the highest standards of scientific, scholarly and professional integrity must be maintained and promoted. We aim to give due consideration to the ethical, social and environmental issues arising from our activities and are actively working to ensure that research integrity is embedded in the University's research culture and environment.

We are committed to acting in accordance with the principles described in the Concordat to Support Research Integrity and have developed a policy framework which aims to maintain the safety, rights, welfare and dignity of all members of the University and their research participants, and to maintain public trust. Policies include:

- Ethics Policy
- Research Ethics Framework
- Policy on working with animals
- Code of Good Practice in the Conduct of Research
- Misconduct in Research
- Codes of Conduct
- Public Interest Disclosure Policy

In 2020/21, actions undertaken to promote and embed research integrity included the following:

- The substantially revised University Research Ethics Framework was published<sup>1</sup> and in June 2021 a new Institution-wide online ethics application and review system was implemented. The framework revision and use of an institution-wide system is intended to further strengthen common standards and to provide additional assurance on the high quality of ethical review.
- Regular training sessions for research and CPD students, early career researchers, Research Ethics Committee members, academic and professional services staff were developed and delivered, alongside introductory online training modules and bespoke teaching for groups of undergraduate and masters students.
- Guidance and support for researchers and research ethics committees was developed and provided as quickly as possible during the pandemic and suspension of some research. This included regularly updated guidance on human participant research, online research and international fieldwork. Ethical implications have been considered carefully throughout the research restart process. We continue to work to ensure that ethical and regulatory implications are addressed in the current circumstances.
- Active involvement in national networks and events to share best practice and promote research integrity, for example as part of the Russell Group research integrity forum and UUK groups.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.exeter.ac.uk/cgr/researchethics/codesandpolicies/>

- The University agreed to become an institutional supporter of the UK Reproducibility Network; the appointment of an academic lead is underway and a local group of researchers continued to work on related initiatives. A group of postgraduate research students received funding for and delivered a conference on research ethics (REC2021) in June 2021.
- University groups on the responsible use of metrics (the University of Exeter is a signatory to DORA), researcher development and open research continue to develop proposals to enhance the research culture at the University. The leads on research culture and research integrity work closely together to prioritise and develop plans on embedding a positive research culture.
- A research data management roadmap was developed and is in implementation. More options for data storage and management have been introduced, along with additional guidance for researchers. Further work on archiving and on possible mechanisms for data audits (such as the 3-3-3 model) is underway.
- Preparation for the REF submission encouraged broader discussions on research integrity and recognised the contribution of individuals and researcher-led initiatives in promoting research integrity and, for example, reproducibility and open research. 99.8% of REF submission staff were ORCID registered.
- The University Ethics Committee and the Dual Assurance portfolio on Research Integrity, Ethics and Governance continues to provide oversight of activities and assurance for the University's governing body.
- Ongoing implementation of improved research governance and regulatory compliance processes, particularly on health research sponsorship, clinical trials, human tissue and animal research.
- A new policy on Export Controls was introduced and a number of training sessions provided. Work continues to raise awareness of these controls and on other aspects of the Trusted Research agenda, including cybersecurity.
- The Research Ethics and Governance Team continue to work with colleagues across multiple departments and teams on, for example, compliance, quality assurance frameworks and data management.
- Resource for research governance and compliance is provided on a recurrent basis

The University Ethics Committee and the Dual Assurance portfolio on Research Integrity, Ethics and Governance continues to provide oversight of activities and assurance for the University's governing body. During the 2020/21 year, both groups regularly considered a risk register and associated planned actions, received updates on the actions described above and approved policies where required. The groups also received annual reports from the University's Research Ethics Committees and reports in relation to regulatory compliance.

During the year, a second review of the circumstances surrounding a correction to a published paper took place; no further action will be taken. A preliminary review was undertaken in response to a complaint about an online survey; no evidence of research misconduct was found and no formal investigation commissioned but a lessons learned exercise was undertaken with the relevant research ethics committee.

Advice and support has been provided in response to a number of researcher queries, for example in relation to authorship practice. Varied routes for researchers to seek advice and for reporting concerns are promoted although this will be a focus for further work in 2021/22.

The procedures for investigating and reporting misconduct are considered to be transparent and generally appropriate to the needs of the organisation. The Universities Code of Good Practice in the Conduct of Research and the Misconduct in Research process is under review (summer 2021) in order to ensure that it continues to meet the requirements of the revised Concordat to Support Research Integrity and reflects lessons learned. This includes, for example, ensuring that any informal action taken at a departmental level to provide mentoring and development for researchers in response to concerns on research practice is recorded and monitored.

A programme of ongoing improvement is in place to ensure that continued progress towards our all our goals is maintained.

For further information on research integrity at the University of Exeter, please contact the [Research Ethics and Governance Team](#)

GMS v1.0 16<sup>th</sup> June 2021

Approved by: University of Exeter Council 8<sup>th</sup> July 2021