

Annual Report on Research Integrity

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Purpose of Report: To confirm to the RVC Council that the College complies with the Concordat to support Research Integrity.

Recommendation: Council notes the Report

Background

The Concordat to support Research Integrity was introduced in December 2012. A revised concordat was consulted on and updated and published on 26th October 2019. All UUK members are signatories of the Concordat and as part of our annual monitoring statement to UKRI/Office of Students we are required to confirm that we comply with the principles of the Concordat.

The College has a number of policies and codes of practice which guide its staff and students in research integrity namely: Policy on Good Research Practice; Guidance on Research with Integrity; Policy and Procedures for Dealing with Allegations of Research Misconduct. These documents are owned and regularly reviewed and updated by Research Strategy Committee which reports to Academic Board. Since I last reported to Council the Guidance on Research with Integrity (and its accompanying training materials) was updated in April 2020 to ensure it aligns with the updated version of the Concordat to support Research Integrity. The Policy and Procedure for Dealing with Allegations of Research Misconduct has also been revised and approved in its revised form by Research Strategy Committee at its meeting in July 2020 and at the time of writing is due to be presented for approval at Academic Board at the next meeting. Oversight and governance of the College's Ethical Review process for Research is provided by the College's Ethics and Welfare Committee which reports to Council and from July 2020 chaired by independent Council Member Suzy Lishman.

The College has training materials for Research with Integrity to ensure staff and research students stay up to date with developments and best practice in this area. These materials cover a number of scenarios which are tailored to the types of research our staff and students are involved in and have been reviewed by the UK Research Integrity Office. All new staff and PhD students are expected to undertake this training (and the associated quiz) within 3 months of joining the College. Established staff are expected to refresh this training every 4 years. We monitor whether they have done the quiz and remind them if this has not been undertaken. Staff and students are not eligible to apply for internal travel grants to present their research at meetings or submit applications for ethical approval if they are not up to date with this training. All PhD students are asked at their annual appraisal in the absence of their supervisors whether they have any concerns about research integrity relating to their

work and their response is noted on the appraisal document. Any issues would be notified to the Head of Academic Department and appropriate action taken.

All of the policies and guidance documents outlining our approach to compliance with the Concordat on Research Integrity are publically available (<https://www.rvc.ac.uk/research/about/research-integrity>). The Vice Principal for Research and Innovation is named as the senior member of the College responsible for this area and the contact person confidential liaison for whistleblowers or any other person wishing to raise concerns about the integrity of research being conducted at the College.

In June 2020, Vitae in collaboration with UKRIO and UKRN published a report entitled 'Research Integrity – a landscape study' (<https://www.vitae.ac.uk/vitae-publications/research-integrity-a-landscape-study>). The study involved a literature review, a survey involving over 1500 UK based researchers and interviews with representatives of 20 stakeholder organisations. This report was considered at the July meeting of Research Strategy Committee and was circulated to all academics, contract researchers and PhD students asking for suggestions to be presented at that meeting as what actions might be taken by the RVC to improve the research culture supporting integrity. This has led to the following actions being taken:

1. Provision of an anonymous comments box for feedback to the VPR-I's office on issues affecting research integrity
2. Invitation for all researchers to attend as observers at Research Strategy Committee to gain an insight into how the committee works and decisions taken. At the Research Strategy Committee meeting held in October, 7 observers attended. Having the meetings on line helps in the capacity to accommodate meeting observers
3. Adjustment of the expectations of numbers of publications required for progression through the individual career pathway process for probation and promotion to make it clear that quality of papers is considered as well as quantity and the numbers stated are indicative rather than proscriptive. This was considered and supported at the most recent Academic Probation, Progress and Promotion Committee held in October.
4. There needs to be more reinforcement of the principles of authorship, something not highlighted in the Vitae report but something which needed further discussion in the area of clinical research where contribution needs to be more than provision of cases to publications.

Other issues raised through publicising this report were discussed and it was thought that the RVC's active participation in the UK Research Integrity Network (see below) would have a positive benefit on the research culture.

As part of our strategy to improve transparency of the reporting of the research we undertake at the RVC we have joined the UK Reproducibility Network, a peer-led consortium that aims to ensure the UK retains its place as a centre for world-leading research, by investigating the factors that contribute to robust research, promoting training activities and disseminating best practice, and working with stakeholders to ensure coordination of efforts across the sector. Professor Dominic Wells is the College's senior academic with responsibility for research improvement and research integrity (e.g., promoting adoption of open research practices and other relevant initiatives). Professor Wells is a member of Research Strategy Committee and, in this role, reports directly to the Vice Principal for Research and Innovation. The RVC is one of the first seven HEIs to officially join this network and commit the time and resources to achieving its goals.

Since the last report, Professor Wells has attended four meetings of the UK Reproducibility (UKRN) Network and a bid has been placed with Research England to provide administrative support. Workshops on (i) experimental design and (ii) open research practices and publication have been presented by the NC3Rs and Wiley respectively. Professor Wells has taken part in a Virt2ue “Training the Trainers” course to develop additional methods for training staff and students in research integrity. Dr Charlotte Burn and Dr Eleanor Lynam have organised three ‘ReproducibiliTea’ events at RVC to date, which generated good discussions. The launch event was presented by Dr Charlotte Burn in July, and stimulated broad discussion about what the reproducibility crisis is, why it matters, and what causes it. The second event, presented by Dr Ellen Forty in September, was about the ARRIVE Guidelines and explored some of the challenges and solutions to implementing them. November’s event was presented by Dr Ruby Chang, and was about misunderstandings and misuse of P-values (statistics) in research, and the complex reasons why these occur.

In terms of our commitment to openness and transparency in ethical use of animals in research and investigating their replacement, the College applied for and was granted a Leadership in Openness Award (2019-2022). These awards are granted to organisations in recognition of their commitment of resource and energy to following best practice, embedding openness within their organisations, and making the aims of the Concordat on Openness in Research a reality. In addition, the College hosts (and part funds) an NC3Rs Programme Manager (Dr Ellen Forty) jointly with UCL and LSHTM. Dr Forty works with our researchers and animal care staff to ensure we are fully considering the 3Rs in the evaluation of the work we do that currently involves experimental animals in research. The continued efforts that the RVC makes to be open about research involving animals is being recognised and in 2020 the College was asked to submit a nomination for Understanding Animal Research’s Openness Awards citing the practice we have of publishing detailed minutes (with names anonymized) of our Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Body minutes on our external facing website – a practice we have undertaken since 2016.

Investigations into allegations of Research Misconduct 2019-20

Since I last reported to Council in November 2019 we have not received any allegations of research misconduct. The plagiarism misconduct case that had been appealed in 2019 was resolved in April 2020. An investigating panel of three independent senior RVC academics concluded that there was an insufficient body of evidence to support the allegation of plagiarism and thus concluded that there was not *prime facia* evidence of research misconduct. The panel made recommendations resulting from this case, one of which was acted upon in revising the Research Misconduct Policy (in clarifying the process for appeals).

Professor Jonathan Elliott
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