University Court
Research Governance & Policy Sub-Committee: Annual Report

25 April 2023

Academic Year 2021/22

Introduction

1. The primary objective of the Research Governance & Policy Sub-Committee is to ensure that the governance and policy context for the undertaking of research within the University is optimal. More specifically, the Sub-Committee is responsible for:

   1.1 reviewing governance processes and associated research and related policy extant at both University and the local level, and identifying need for improvement and development including the involvement of external stakeholders;

   1.2 establishing systems which accommodate the needs of good institutional governance, that are externally accountable, and which take into account the diversity of the institution's research activities;

   1.3 ensuring that institutional research governance processes are transparent and inclusive and are well communicated throughout the University;

   1.4 promoting "buy-in" by facilitating dialogue and dissemination of good and consistent practice across the Schools;

   1.5 attempting to minimize the burden of governance and policy demands on research staff commensurate with achieving high levels of internal and external confidence in the University's processes.

2. In 2021, the Sub-Committee was chaired by Dr Beth Hannah, Convener of the University Research Ethics Committee, acting as Interim Convener after the previous long-standing Convener had stepped down. Professor Inke Näthke, Associate Dean for Professional Culture in the School of Life Sciences, took over as Convener in January 2022.

3. Membership of the Sub-Committee includes staff from across the Schools and the primary areas of research governance activity within the institution, including the Health, Safety and Welfare Committee, Tayside Medical Science Centre (TASC) Research Governance and Oversight Committee, the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) and the Welfare and Ethical Use of Animals Committee. The Sub-Committee normally meets three times during each academic year and reports to the University Research & Knowledge Exchange Committee (RKEC) with the minutes of its meetings included with RKEC papers.

4. This report summarises the actions and activities that support the University's commitment to the Concordat to Support Research Integrity and summarises annual reports from the areas of research governance across the University that report to the Sub-Committee.

REF:

Concordat to Support Research Integrity

5. The actions and activities reported below aim to facilitate the development of 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, consistent with the Concordat to Support Research Integrity.

6. **Researcher Training:** The University provides online research integrity training, *Responsible and Ethical Practice in Research and Publication*, for both staff and students. The training is mandatory for postgraduate researchers (PGRs) and their supervisors. The training was updated during the reporting period to complement the original pdf versions of the booklets included in the resource with professionally prepared accessible pdf and Word versions of the booklets. A number of other higher education institutions used the resource under license from the University of Dundee in 2021/22. British Sign Language versions of the videos included in the resources are planned for 2023.

7. The online training was supplemented by our second Research Integrity mini-conference in May 2022, to which we welcomed over one hundred PGRs from 13 Scottish institutions, with speakers from the universities of Dundee, St Andrews, and Edinburgh providing a series of interactive and engaging case studies to participants. Topics covered included working with different stakeholders and open research. Videos from the inaugural 2021 and May 2022 events have been posted on the University's Postgraduate Research Sharepoint site.

8. An additional online resource to support the professional development of researchers, aimed particularly at PGRs, was introduced by the Doctoral Academy in late 2021. The 'Thinking Forward' series, which includes information about the national research concordats, including specific videos on research integrity and open research, along with a progress tracker and activity sheets, is designed to introduce researchers to key information and encourage them to take ownership of their own professional development at every stage of their research career.

9. **Research Integrity Leads and Advisors:** At University-level, the named senior member of staff with responsibility for overseeing research integrity is the Convener of the Research Governance & Policy Sub-Committee. Contact details for research integrity and whistleblowing are provided on the University's [Concordat to Support Research Integrity](#) webpages.

10. At School level, [Research Integrity Leads and Advisors](#) play a key role in promoting a culture of research integrity, with larger Schools having Research Integrity Groups (RIGs), which meet regularly. Leads and Advisors provide independent impartial advice on the responsible conduct of research to staff and students, including those who may be considering making an allegation of research misconduct.

11. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Research Integrity Leads came together as a University-wide network about three to four times a year to discuss emerging issues, seek advice in confidence and share best practice. However, there were no network meetings in 2020 and 2021 as other challenges were prioritised. In January 2022, the Sub-Committee agreed that the network should be reconvened with an expanded membership of Research Integrity Leads, Deputies and Advisors to build resilience in this area. Recognising that an important feature of the network was allowing colleagues to discuss matters in a confidential and informal setting, it was agreed that the network would have a dotted reporting line to the Sub-Committee, allowing it to raise any issues or concerns without reporting to the Sub-Committee via a formal minute or report of network meetings. The first meeting of the reconstituted network took place in June 2022 with regular meetings to be scheduled from academic year 2022/23.

12. **Research Ethics Procedures:** The ethical review and approval of non-clinical research involving human participants proposed by staff and students is overseen by six School/joint Research Ethics Committees (SRECs), under the oversight of the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC). Further information on the activities of UREC during the reporting period can be found in paragraphs 23.4 to 23.6.

13. **Research Governance and Policy Webpages:** The University's [research governance and policy webpages](#) combine information on research governance and policy, including the Concordat to Support Research Integrity, in one place. The pages include a [Policy Roadmap](#) to assist researchers in identifying the policies relevant to their research. The Open Research Policy was updated during the reporting period to make it clear that, in addition to open access to outputs and data, researchers should consider the open sharing of software created during research activity.

14. **Postgraduate Research Experience Survey:** In the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey run by Advance HE (March to May 2022), 94% of students agreed that their understanding of 'research integrity' (e.g. rigour, ethics, transparency, attributing the contribution of others) has developed during their programme, 6% above the Global benchmark, whilst only 1% disagreed. This was in the context of a high response rate for the overall survey (54%, compared to an average response rate of 31% from the 62 participating institutions), reflecting the Doctoral Academy's successful promotion to Postgraduate Researchers of the opportunity to submit their views.

15. **Scottish Research Integrity Network (SRIN):** The University is a member of the Scottish Research Integrity Network, which it co-founded with the University of Edinburgh. The network had two half-day online meetings with invited speakers in the reporting period with topics including UK Research and Innovation's work on research integrity, the establishment of the UK Committee on Research Integrity, the UK Reproducibility Network, Scottish Funding Council activities, UKRIO's Self-Assessment Tool for The Concordat to Support Research Integrity, responding to issues raised anonymously, and research integrity training (the University is an active contributor to the SRIN research integrity training working group).

16. **UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO):** The University also subscribes to UKRIO, an independent charity, which provides a range of support and resources aimed at promoting integrity and high ethical standards in research. Since the start of the pandemic, in addition to their annual conference, UKRIO has provided regular webinars with expert speakers on a variety of topics, which are promoted to staff and students internally via the Research Integrity Leads and Advisors network and the Doctoral Academy, enabling a wide range of individuals to attend.

Clinical Governance and Reporting of Clinical Trials Results

17. The Clinical Research Governance Office (RGO) is part of the Joint R&D Office, which resides in the Tayside Academic Science Centre (TASC), a partnership between the University of Dundee and NHS Tayside. In October 2021, a member of the Sub-Committee (the Director of Research and Development, NHS Tayside, who is also the Director of TASC) raised concerns about the capacity and resilience of the RGO, given that governance support was provided not only to the School of Medicine, but increasingly to other Schools. The Sub-Committee agreed that there was a very strong case for an additional research governance post and supported the Director in taking the proposal to the University's Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee (RKEC). Following strong support from RKEC and the former Vice-Principal for Research and Knowledge Exchange, the University approved the appointment of a Clinical Research Governance Coordinator in January 2022.

18. The University has an ongoing target of 100% compliance with the requirement to report the results of clinical trials on the European Union Clinical Trials Register; the EU Trials Tracker shows that this target is consistently met.

San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment

19. As a signatory to the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA), the University has committed to the responsible use of research metrics in assessing research outputs and appointment and promotion decisions. Following a period during the pandemic when progress on implementation was limited, a DORA Working Group was convened in June 2022. Initial discussions focused on membership, remit and implementation of the DORA principles, including the need to review all relevant University policies and procedures to ensure they are aligned with the principles. The Group also agreed that a University statement on the responsible use of metrics was required. These actions are being taken forward in academic year 2022/23.

PubPeer

20. The University continues to subscribe to PubPeer, an online platform for post-publication peer review where comments are posted (usually anonymously) on the quality and integrity of published papers. Issues highlighted through PubPeer, which commonly relate to potential problems with images in journal articles reporting the results of biological and medical research, are followed up by the School of Life Sciences Research Integrity Group, alerting Research Integrity Leads in other Schools or external authors, as necessary. Where e-mails raising similar issues are received (usually from a person (or persons) using a pseudonym) they are relayed to the relevant Research Integrity Lead and followed up in a similar fashion. In the 2021/22 academic year there were 17 issues highlighted via these routes.

21. Examination of the potential problems raised can result in no action (e.g. where original data confirms there is no issue), a request to a journal for correction of honest errors, recommending that a journal considers publication of an editorial expression of concern, or (rarely) an investigation into potential research misconduct. Ultimately, the aim is to maintain the integrity of the scientific record but, given that the potential problems often relate to articles published 15-25 years ago, so that there is often limited or no availability of original data and some of the authors may not be contactable, reaching a definite conclusion is extremely time consuming (and in many cases may not even be possible). There is also considerable variation in the response of journals to requests for corrections or consideration of other actions such as publishing an expression of concern.

Research Misconduct

22. A formal investigation into potential research misconduct initiated towards the end of the 2020/21 academic year under the University's Code of Policy and Procedures for Investigating and Resolving Allegations of Misconduct in Research was concluded in the reporting period; a member of staff was found to have committed research misconduct involving plagiarism. Two preliminary investigations were also completed. Neither proceeded to a formal investigation by the University. No changes to the Code were made during the reporting period but a full review is planned after the release of the second edition of the UKRIO Procedure for the Investigation of Misconduct in Research in 2023.

Reporting to the Sub-Committee

23. The Sub-Committee's remit does not require it to capture detailed information on activities at the local level but rather to satisfy itself, by reviewing higher level evidence, that sufficient rigour exists in the

policies and processes operated by the institution. The Sub-Committee therefore receives and considers annual reports from the various areas of research governance operating across the University to ensure that the appropriate policies and processes are in place. Reports (both written and oral) for academic year 2021/22 were received from the University Health, Safety and Welfare Committee; Tayside Medical Science Centre (TASC) Research Governance and Oversight Committee; University Research Ethics Committee; and the Welfare and Ethical Use of Animals Committee. Brief summaries are provided below:

23.1 **Health, Safety and Welfare Committee**: As part of its remit, the Health, Safety and Welfare Committee covers health and safety issues arising from all research activities undertaken by the University and reports to the People and Organisational Development Committee, which approves any new policies. Following an action from the previous annual report, a quorum for the Committee had been formally agreed and implemented. Five individual policies had been retired as they had been incorporated into a new School & Directorate Health and Safety Management Policy. This consolidation aimed to streamline policies and simplify School and Directorate access to relevant policy information, to improve engagement and compliance. Three policies were updated during the reporting period including one covering personal protective equipment for work in biological laboratories. The Sub-Committee approved the annual report.

23.2 **Tayside Medical Science Centre (TASC) Research Governance and Oversight Committee**: The TASC Research Governance and Oversight Committee provides oversight of the systems and processes that exist in clinical research to ensure that the required standards are met. The Committee is responsible for providing assurance to the NHS Tayside Care Governance Committee that clinical research is undertaken in a manner that shows evidence of accountability, responsibility, compliance with standards and management of risk. The Director of Research and Development, NHS Tayside, and the Convener of the TASC Research Governance and Oversight Committee, are members of the Sub-Committee.

23.3 After a very challenging period, TASC had returned to normal working following the pandemic. As part of the rolling programme of policy review work, four TASC policies had been reviewed and updated during the reporting period, including the Policy on Clinical Research Projects Involving Human Tissue. No external audits, reviews or inspections of TASC had taken place during the reporting period but the TASC Quality Assurance Team carried out Good Clinical Practice (GCP) Study Specific audits, GCP Process and Facility audits, University Clinical Research Laboratories audits ('GCP for Labs') and Vendor Assessments. There were no major findings from these internal audits. The Sub-Committee approved the annual report.

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23.4 **University Research Ethics Committee (UREC)**: UREC is responsible for upholding the ethical standards of practice in non-clinical research involving human participants in the University in order to protect participants and researchers from harm, preserve participants' rights, and to provide reassurance to the public and funders regarding the ethical conduct of research at the University. It provides oversight, monitoring and guidance to the six School Research Ethics Committees (SRECs), three of which are joint committees covering more than one School, and acts as the first point of contact for the review and approval of proposals to access and use security-sensitive material.

23.5 There were some changes to the composition of UREC in the reporting period following SREC Conveners stepping down. The development and establishment of a new School of Humanities, Social Sciences and Law (formed from the Schools of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education

& Social Work) required a review of governance in relation to the SRECs affected by this change, after which UREC would move to fill the vacant Deputy Convener position. One outcome of the review was that the School of Business would establish its own SREC in academic year 2022/23 (rather than continuing in a joint SREC with Social Sciences and Humanities).

23.6 A working group led by the Convener of UREC had undertaken a root and branch review of the University of Dundee Code of Practice for Non-Clinical Research Ethics on Human Participants. The resultant draft Policy for Non-Clinical Research Involving Human Participants had been reviewed by members of UREC and Legal prior to discussion at Research Governance and Policy Sub-Committee. The Sub-Committee had commended the draft policy but agreed that the human tissue section would need to be updated once reinstated work on a draft human tissue policy was completed. An equality impact assessment on the Policy for Non-Clinical Research Involving Human Participants and updating of COVID-19 guidance was also completed in the reporting period. The Sub-Committee approved the annual report.

23.7 **Welfare and Ethical Use of Animals Committee**: The Welfare and Ethical Use of Animals Committee (WEAC) acts on behalf of the University Court in ensuring that the University meets its obligations under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 (amended 2012) to discharge the functions of an Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Body as required under that Act, and to determine policy on all matters relating to animals on University premises. The Committee reports to Court after each of its quarterly meetings.

23.8 A new Convener was appointed by the University Court after the former Convener stepped down. The WEAC's Terms of Reference were reviewed and updated during the reporting period and the University Policy for the Use of Animals in Teaching and Research was reviewed but no updates were required. There were no Home Office inspections/audits in the reporting period but it was anticipated that there would be at least one inspection in 2023 as some building work was being undertaken. Committee members continued to participate in a Scottish Animal Welfare Ethical Review Body Hub, which shares common experience and best practice, and includes among its members a member of the national Animals in Science Committee. The Sub-Committee approved the annual report.

Dr Clive Randall
Research Policy Manager
Professor Inke Näthke
Convener
17 April 2023