

# **Plymouth University: Assurance statement on compliance with the Concordat to Support Research Integrity 2016/17**

## **Background**

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 three headings detailed above.

## **1. 0 2016/17 Actions and Activities to Support Research Integrity:**

### **1.1 Staff development**

The six-year evaluation of the HR Excellence in Research Award was submitted to the UK Vitae panel for renewal in September 2017 by the HR Excellence in Research Steering Group. The Steering Group assessed progress against the action plan as well as planning commitments for 2017 – 2019. The evaluation considered data and views from: the Researcher Forum; CROS (Careers in Research Online Survey); and PIRLS (Principal Investigators and Research Leaders Survey).

Key Achievements and progress include:

#### ***Recruitment and Selection***

- CROS 2017 reported that 89% of University of Plymouth respondents had received details of the 'transferable', 'personal' or 'management' skills required of the post-holder compared to a sector average of 76%.

### ***Recognition and Value***

- Since 2016 the University of Plymouth has doubled its representation of research staff on decision making bodies. Research staff representatives now work with the R&I Committee and newly established Senate, as well as the Researcher Forum and, HR Excellence in Research Steering Group to provide representation, feedback and consultation with the wider research staff community.
- CROS 2017 identified that 82% of the respondents were satisfied with their work/life balance while 80% of those who completed PIRLS 2017 reported job satisfaction.
- The refreshed Research & Innovation Strategy 2017-2022 includes, as a key priority, 'Staff recruitment, retention and development'.

### ***Support and Career Development***

- CROS 2017 noted that 83% of respondents at the University accessed two or more days of training or other CPD during the past 12 months which is higher than the sector average (77%).
- The Research Support Programme saw a 12% increase in staff attendance in 2016/17 compared to 2015/2016.
- The Researcher Forum continues to show successful engagement with staff across the University campuses and has now been designated the Early Career Researchers (ECR) Committee in recognition of its focus and appropriate new terms of reference developed. The ECR Committee reports directly to the University Research and Innovation Committee.

### ***Researchers' Responsibilities***

- Research governance and quality training opportunities have continued to increase, with 168 staff/PGRs attending the twenty-five sessions that were available. Topics included; Introductory and advanced research ethics; Working with human tissue under licence; Advice sessions on insurance and submitting ethical review applications; Research integrity and achieving high quality research.
- CROS 2017 indicates that of the thirteen sector-led Research Development initiatives, University of Plymouth respondents had a greater knowledge or understanding of twelve of these initiatives compared to the sector average.
- The refreshed Research & Innovation Strategy 2017-2022 includes 'Research integrity and Governance' as a key priority of the University.

### ***Diversity and Equality***

- The undertaking of e learning training courses on Equality & Diversity and Unconscious Bias continues to be mandated for all staff.

- The refreshed Research & Innovation Strategy 2017-2022 includes ‘The creation of a research ecosystem that values diversity, collaboration and interdisciplinarity, removes barriers, creates opportunities and expects delivery’ as a key priority.

## **1.2 Regulatory assurances**

The Research Governance Officer has continued to support researchers in maintaining US assurance registrations; the Federal Wide Assurance (FWA) for the Protection of Human Subjects (Department of Health and Human Services- DHHS) and the Assurance on Animal Welfare (National Institutes of Health – NIH). These assurances demonstrate on-going compliance with appropriate standards. Project staff have completed specific training to meet with these regulations and complied with Institutional Review Board requirements and monitoring.

## **1.3 Staff resources**

The role of the named officer for safeguarding in relationship to research has been reviewed and approved by University Research Ethics Committee. The officer will deliver an approved programme of training for UREC members during 2017/18.

## **1.4 Reviews**

The review of the University’s research governance structures, policies, systems and processes carried out in 2015/16 by Research Governance Refresh Task and Finish Group identified a number of agreed actions. In addition to the work of the Task and Finish Group, the Research Support and Development unit undertook a review of our current state and anticipated near future state (following Task and Finish Group review) in relation to UUK’s *The Concordat to Support Research Integrity: a Progress Report* (23 November 2016). In all but two cases the expectations highlighted in the report are either already in place or will be in place during the beginning of the academic year 2017-18 as a consequence of the Task and Finish Group reviews. In the two outstanding cases, remedial actions have been identified and are scheduled to be carried out.

The actions from the Task and Finish group are detailed below.

Action	Implementation
<p>An Integrated 'cradle to grave' approach to grant application and management.</p>	<p>Online ethics application and compliance system reviewed. (Completed April 2017)</p> <p>Infonetica System identified as most suitable option. Approved by University Research and Ethics Committee (UREC) and agreed as part of R&amp;I business planning cycle. (Completed June 2017)</p> <p>Infonetica System purchased and implemented (September 2017)</p> <p>Infonetica System to be reviewed in terms of suitability for grant application review. (October 2017)</p>
<p>New Research Integrity and Governance architecture.</p>	<p>New committee structure for research governance developed to include Research Integrity and approved by UREC May 2017. Implementation of new structure will be completed by November 2017.</p> <p>Research Ethics Policy reviewed/rewritten and will be approved at November 2017 University Research Ethics and Integrity Committee (UREIC).</p> <p>Standalone Research Code of Conduct developed (September 2017) which will be approved at November 2017 UREIC.</p>
<p>Establishment of a new Research Register</p>	<p>To be established as part of Infonetica System. (October/November 2017)</p>
<p>A programme of awareness raising and training relating to new structures policies and tools.</p> <p>Make learning materials related to research integrity aimed at staff available on the web</p>	<p>Integrated information and improved information signposting relating to research integrity and governance created on R&amp;I web page. (Completed June 2017)</p> <p>Staff development and training relating to research integrity reviewed and improved. (September 2017)</p>

## **2.0 Research misconduct**

2.1 There is policy guidance in place that gives complete coverage for staff, postgraduate research and postgraduate taught students on matters of research misconduct and the processes therein remain appropriate for the organisation.

## **3.0 Formal investigations**

3.1 There have been no formal investigations into research misconduct involving staff or postgraduate researchers during the last year.