University of Exeter annual statement on research integrity

1.1   Section 1: Key contact information

Question	Response
1A. Name of organisation	University of Exeter
1B. Type of organisation: **higher education institution/industry/independent research performing organisation/other (please state)**	Higher education institution
1C. Date statement approved by governing body (DD/MM/YY)	
1D. Web address of organisation's research integrity page (if applicable)	https://www.exeter.ac.uk/departments/cgr/researchethics/integrity/
1E. Named senior member of staff to oversee research integrity	Name: Professor Krasimira Tsaneva-Atanasova, Vice-President and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Impact)
	Email address: dvc-research@exeter.ac.uk
1F. Named member of staff who will act as a first point of contact for anyone wanting more information on matters of research integrity	Name: Sean Jennings
	Email address: s.jennings@exeter.ac.uk

University of Exeter

Section 2: Promoting high standards of research integrity and positive research culture. Description of actions and activities undertaken

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2A. Description of current systems and culture

Please describe how the organisation maintains high standards of research integrity and promotes positive research culture. It should include information on the support provided to researchers to understand standards, values and behaviours, such as training, support and guidance for researchers at different career stages/ disciplines. You may find it helpful to consider the following broad headings:
Policies and systems
Communications and engagement
Culture, development and leadership
Monitoring and reporting

Policies and systems

The University of Exeter is committed to 'the highest standards of scientific, scholarly and professional integrity and to give due consideration to the ethical, social and environmental issues arising from its activities. The institutional [Strategy 2030](#) declares that 'Our research excellence will be underpinned and enhanced by an open, ethical and supportive research culture and environment'.

The University has established and continues to articulate its key standards for research integrity in three main documents:

1. *[The Code of Good Practice in the Conduct of Research](#)*

2. *[The Procedure for Investigating Allegations of Misconduct in Research](#)*

3. *[The Research Ethics Framework](#)*

Other related policies and processes include:

- the *[Dignity and Respect Policy](#)*

- the *[Public interest disclosure procedure](#)* ("Whistleblowing") & the *[Public interest disclosure policy](#)*

- the *[Conflict of Interest Policy](#)*

Institutional processes and systems specifically relating to research integrity are overseen by the Research Ethics, Governance and Compliance (REGC) Team who are part of Research Support within University Corporate Services.

The RECG team comprises of support for four broad functions across the entirety of the university:

Research ethics (human and animal)

Supported by:

- 3.71 Research Ethics Officers,

- a Senior Research Ethics Advisor (Home Office and AWERB)

Export Controls, sanctions and support for compliance with international research requirements

Supported by

- Export Controls & Trusted Research Specialist Advisor

- Research Governance and Compliance Administrator

Health and Social Care research support (including 'sponsorship')

Supported by:

- Senior Clinical Research Governance Manager,

- 1.5 Research Governance Officers,

- Research Governance Administrator

- a Research and Human Tissue Administrator

Research Integrity (including allegations of research misconduct)

The university has nine research ethics committees (RECs) predominantly for research with human participants and an Animal Welfare and Ethics Review Board (AWERB). These 10 groups report to the Research Executive and Impact Committee which is responsible for oversight of ethics review in accordance with the terms of the *Research Ethics Framework.*

The REGC team supports each REC, undertaking 'triage' to identify legal and research governance issues.

The Health and Social Care team provides in depth support to all researchers whose activities fall under the *UK Policy Framework for Health and Social Care* Research including CTIMPs (Clinical Trials of Investigational Medicinal Products) and regulated medical device studies.

The Export Controls & Trusted Research Specialist Advisor provides expert advice across the research community on risks associated with international partnerships and collaborations in specialist areas such as export controls, sanction checks and oversight of the requirements for the Nagoya Protocol and CITES.

The Head of Research Governance, Ethics and Integrity oversees the reporting, investigation and record keeping for research misconduct related issues.

Communications and engagement

The RECG team engages in training (formal and informal) across the academic year. Access to online Research Integrity training is available to academic staff and doctoral students through the LearnUpon online training portal.

Upon invitation for specific matters, the Head of Research Ethics, Governance and Compliance attends the Research and Impact Executive Committee (RIEC) that has statutory responsibility for research ethics and integrity. Occasional invitations are also extended from the Doctoral College Board as and when required.

The Head of Research Ethics, Governance and Compliance uses the University communication networks (for example the University Weekly Bulletin) to publicise training and updates across the Research Community.

Direct communication is also made with the Directors of Faculty Operations and case processes are used within the faculty.

The Head of Research Ethics, Governance and Compliance is a member of the University Compliance Committee, which oversees all compliance related matters in relation to research.

Culture, development and leadership

Beyond the REGC team, the University is committed to a range of activities and initiatives that contribute to the overall integrity of research through policies and support for Open Research (University Library); Reproducibility; and support for the career development of Early Careers Researchers (ECRs) (Doctoral College).

The details of activities undertaken in 2024-25 are given in section 2b below.

Monitoring and reporting

The terms of reference of the Research and Impact Executive Committee include oversight of research ethics and integrity.

Matters that relate to legislation and have formal regulatory and inspection regimes are monitored by the Compliance Committee.

2B. Changes and developments during the period under review

Please provide an update on any changes made during the period, such as new initiatives, training, developments, also ongoing changes that are still underway. Drawing on Commitment 3 of the Concordat, please note any new or revised policies, practices and procedures to support researchers; training on research ethics and research integrity; training and mentoring opportunities to support the development of researchers' skills throughout their careers.

The **Research Ethics, Governance and Compliance team** carried out a full review of activities in 2023/24 and developed a programme of work area for continual improvement, The following initiatives were pursued in 2024-25:

- Embedding and use of a new *Procedure for the Investigation of Allegations of Misconduct in Research* (see section 3A below)

- Embedding of the new Code of Good Practice in the Conduct of Research

- Addition of a new administrator post to the compliance team

- Embedding and operation of a new Sponsorship Oversight Group to give effective institutional ownership of clinical research governance to meet key external stakeholder expectations

- A total of nine training workshops in research ethics took place for doctoral students and Early Career Researchers across the 2024-25 academic year. Another two sessions took place on the core principles of research integrity. Ad hoc, bespoke training took place in the areas of sponsorship (clinical research) on request to support small cohorts with specific requirements.

The **Open Research team** in the library has provided on-going training, advocacy, and support for open access compliance to promote transparency and openness in research, contributing to a culture of research integrity. This has involved:

- The University's Institutional Repository (Open Research Exeter - ORE) has been migrated from DSpace to figshare. This should enable a better service with less downtime and better visibility and discoverability of all of our research outputs. It should also provide better functionality for non-textual outputs.

- An Open Research Manager (Dr Gareth Cole) has been appointed to develop the Library and Institutional support for open research.

- The Open Research Team continues to provide training, support and guidance on all areas of open research to enable academics and researchers to benefit from open.

- The Institutional Rights Retention Policy is now fully embedded in publishing workflows.

The **Researcher Development and Research Culture** team has led activities in support of the maintenance of the standards expected through the HR Excellence in Research Award. This has included:

- Ongoing support of Early Career Researcher (ECR) representation, including termly 'Town Hall' meetings where the community can liaise with ECR Representatives to Research and Impact Executive Committee, Professional Services support staff and ECR Network Leads;

- Updated New Starters Welcome Events for ECRs held in person termly on Exeter and Cornwall campuses as well as a termly online meeting for ECRs working off campus;

- The rollout of the Make Your Mark peer-to-peer researcher development sessions for researchers to share knowledge and expertise with researcher community;

- Ongoing raising of awareness of wellbeing and mental health for researchers, including workshops on health resilience for researchers, dealing with impostor syndrome, and emotional agility as a researcher;

- Places for Exeter researchers secured on Emotionally Challenging Research workshops being led by the University of Bath;

- Promoting and encouraging researcher participation in Wellbeing and Equality groups and Positive Working Environment activities, working with WICC to support the ECR community;

- Delivery of newly developed workshops on the Researcher Concordat and on Responsible Research Assessment

In the field of **responsible research metrics**, in 2024-25:

- Plans are being put in place to communicate UEB's agreement for the University to sign and join CoARA. Next steps are to sign the agreement and consider how we will develop our associated action plan.

- A rankings guide has been produced and will be discussed with the rankings working group. This is designed to help EEG colleagues understand what it means to use rankings responsibly in our communications.

- Work continues regarding the responsible use of metrics in recruitment and promotion. An Applicant Guide has been created which mirrors our Reviewer Guide which aims to ensure applicants and those reviewing applications understand how to write and assess an application responsibly. The expectation is that this will go-live shortly.

The Research Software and Analytics Team:

- Actively support the delivery of the university's Strategy 2030 commitment to research excellence through an open, ethical and supportive research culture

- Ensure the University's community is well-equipped to capitalize on the opportunities presented by technology, big data and artificial intelligence

- Offers hands-on courses, supplemented by freely available self-study materials, on programming and data science to all registered staff and students

- Guidance has also been developed for the Responsible Use of AI in Research.

2C. Reflections on progress and plans for future developments

This should include a reflection on the previous year's activity including a review of progress and impact of initiatives if known relating to activities referenced in the previous year's statement. Note any issues that have hindered progress, e.g. resourcing or other issues

The RECG team will see the following enhancements for the 2025-26 academic year:

- The post of Head of Research Governance, Ethics and Integrity was filled at the end of August 2025. The new manager will be completing a review of existing arrangements for research Governance, Ethics and Integrity at the University. A plan of action will be developed based on that review.

- A Trusted Research Framework (TRF) Assessment tool was launched to support researchers to identify and manage risks.

- A business case was developed and approved to support implementation of clinical governance mapping and tracking software (EDGE)

Key planned policy and processes include:

- A review of the Ethics Committee Structure was conducted in 2024-25, considering options to reform and reconfigure this with the aim of reducing variations in standards and expectations, enhancing the quality of review and minimise delays to researchers in setting up research studies. A proposed new Ethics Review Structure was consulted upon. In the 2025-26 year detailed implementation plans will be developed and structures put in place with the aim of commencing the new review process in the 2026-2027 academic year.

- Updates will be made to the Ethics Review Framework.

- Further scheduled training within research development training programmes to cover specialised areas of research governance and legislation – export controls and trusted research, clinical research governance and additional research ethics and research integrity courses will be developed.

3A. Statement on processes that the organisation has in place for dealing with allegations of misconduct

Please provide:

a brief summary of relevant organisation policies/ processes (e.g. research misconduct procedure, whistle-blowing policy, bullying/harassment policy; appointment of a third party to act as confidential liaison for persons wishing to raise concerns) and brief information on the periodic review of research misconduct processes (e.g. date of last review; any major changes during the period under review; date when processes will next be reviewed).

information on how the organisation creates and embeds a research environment in which all staff, researchers and students feel comfortable to report instances of misconduct (e.g. code of practice for research, whistle-blowing, research misconduct procedure, informal liaison process, website signposting for reporting systems, training, mentoring, reflection and evaluation of policies, practices and procedures).

anonymised key lessons learned from any investigations into allegations of misconduct which either identified opportunities for improvements in the organisation's investigation procedure and/or related policies / processes/ culture or which showed that they were working well.

A fully updated *Procedure for investigating allegations of misconduct in research* ('The Procedure') was launched following approval by RIEC, Senate and Council in January 2024.

The Procedure closely follows the model Procedure set out by the UK Research Integrity Office (UK RIO), namely a four-stage process – Receipt of Allegations, Initial Investigation, Full Investigation and Outcomes and Reporting. A further Appeals stage exists for claims where the specific criteria for an appeal against a decision have been met.

The Procedure permits Complainants to come forward anonymously if required (within the constraints of the specific allegations being raised).

At the receipt of allegations stage, an evaluation is undertaken to consider whether alternative institutional or external processes would be more appropriate (e.g. the Dignity and Respect Policy, direct referral to a disciplinary process or reporting to a regulator or the police).

The university has appointed the Vice-President and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Impact), Professor Krasimira Tsaneva-Atanasova as the institutional 'Named Person' who has responsibility for the oversight of actions taken under the Procedure, assisted by the Head of Research Ethics, Governance and Compliance who acts as the 'Research Integrity Officer'. The Human Resources division provides administrative support for individual cases as and when they arise.

The Procedure will next be reviewed in 2026.

The Dignity & Respect Policy addresses all forms of bullying, harassment or victimisation of staff or students within the university. Staff or students may use the staff Grievance Procedure or the Student Complaints Procedure. Alternatively, mechanisms exist to report

informally, or anonymously using 'Exeter Speaks Out'. This includes reporting from 'by standers' who have witnessed harassment, bullying, intimidation or discrimination.

The Public Interest Disclosure Procedure allows members of the university to make disclosures in the public interest and to raise concerns at a high-level or to disclose information which the employee believes shows malpractice or impropriety. Disclosures are made to the Registrar and Secretary in their capacity as the University Secretary and 'designated person'. Upon receipt of a disclosure under this Procedure, the 'designated person' will immediately inform the Vice-Chancellor and Chair of the Council in writing. A panel may be convened if required to consider the matter raised. Depending on the nature of the disclosure, an upheld outcome may require referral to a disciplinary procedure, referral to the police, a disclosure to a funder or regulator or a recommendation or instruction to a manager.

Several complaints of misconduct were received in the academic year that are still in process in addition to the cases reported below. As these cases progress and are resolved The Head of Research Governance, Ethics and Compliance will consult with the Legal and Human Resources teams to consider whether and how the process can be made fairer, quicker and more efficient.

3B. Information on investigations of research misconduct that have been undertaken

*Please complete the table on the number of **formal investigations completed during the period under review** (including investigations which completed during this period but started in a previous academic year). Information from ongoing investigations should not be submitted.*

An organisation's procedure may include an initial, preliminary, or screening stage to determine whether a formal investigation needs to be completed. These allegations should be included in the first column but only those that proceeded past this stage, to formal investigations, should be included in the second column.

Type of allegation	Number of allegations			
	Number of allegations reported to the organisation	Number of formal investigations	Number upheld in part after formal investigation	Number upheld in full after formal investigation
Fabrication	0	0	0	0
Falsification	0	0	0	0
Plagiarism	2	1	1	0
Failure to meet legal, ethical and professional obligations	2	1	0	0
Misrepresentation (e.g. data; involvement; interests; qualification; and/or publication history)	1	1	0	0
Improper dealing with allegations of misconduct	0	0	0	0
Multiple areas of concern (when received in a single allegation)	4	1	0	0
Other*	2	0	0	0
Total:	**11**	**4**	**1**	**0**

*If you listed any allegations under the 'Other' category, please give a brief, high-level summary of their type here. Do not give any identifying or confidential information when responding.

Concern about reporting of research outcomes in the media, complaint about unauthorized use of samples, complaint about targeting of whistleblower.