

# Annual statement on research integrity 2023/2024

The University's annual statement sets out our actions and initiatives to sustain and enhance the integrity of our research for the 2023/24 academic year.

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Factsheet

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## Promoting high standards of research integrity and positive research culture

### 1. Policies and systems

1.1. The University of Bath is a leading research institution committed to maintaining the highest standards of research excellence and integrity. This is the 7th University statement setting out the actions and initiatives we have undertaken to sustain and further enhance the integrity of our research.

1.2. The University of Bath fully upholds the principles outlined in the updated version of [The Concordat to Support Research Integrity](#) (Universities UK, October 2019).

1.3. We have a long-standing commitment to high standards in research ethics and integrity, which is reflected in our [University Strategy](#) and [Code of Ethics](#). As a part of our commitment we have drawn upon the [Leiden Manifesto](#) and the [Metric Tide](#) to develop our own [set of principles](#) outlining our approach to research assessment and management, including the responsible use of quantitative indicators.

1.4. The current [University Strategy 2021-26](#) includes a key objective: *'actively engaging locally, regionally, nationally and internationally to help to build towards our strategic objectives, serving to strengthen our culture of research integrity, and enabling our researchers to deliver their full potential'*.

1.5. We are committed to providing an appropriate framework to support a research culture that is underpinned by research integrity. This involves, in part, providing clear guidance about policies, procedures and responsibilities, training and supporting researchers according to their responsibilities, and monitoring the implementation of relevant policies and procedures. There is a dedicated page containing information and news about all [research policy and governance](#) matters.

1.6. A new approach to the [ethics review process](#) was launched in April 2023 which includes a new online system for submitting and reviewing research ethics applications.

### 2. Culture, development and leadership

2.1. The University of Bath has a long standing commitment to supporting the development of a good [research culture](#). Research integrity and ethics is one of the [research culture pillars](#) alongside career development, collegiality, open research, research design and research recognition.

2.2. At our University, the [Academic Ethics and Integrity Committee](#) advises Senate on the development, implementation and review of procedures and guidelines relating to academic ethical and integrity issues.

2.3. The [Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee](#) is responsible to Senate for the development of strategies to assist the University in meeting its research objectives.

2.4. The [University Research Ethics Committees](#), all reporting into the Academic Ethics and Integrity Committee, have been set up to consider applications, provide robust and proportionate advice on the ethical implications of projects, and liaise directly with researchers in a supportive and constructive way.

2.5. The [Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor \(Research\)](#) supports the [Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research](#) to ensure that the research related actions in the [University Strategy](#) are fully realised. The Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research) has particular responsibility for embedding principles of good research culture, integrity and ethics so as to enable growth of new and existing research governance activities.

2.6. The [Research Governance and Compliance team](#), established in November 2022, is responsible for managing the Institutional-wide ethical review processes purposely designed to facilitate and enable research with due regard for the dignity, rights, health, safety and privacy of those involved. This team is also responsible for developing and delivering training to all researchers (staff and students) across the University in research governance, ethics and integrity matters. The team has strategic oversight of research governance policies and processes and monitor compliance with relevant frameworks to ensure that research carried out with or by the University is ethical, lawful and of the highest standards of integrity and rigour. The Head of the team supports the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research) in carrying investigations into alleged research misconduct.

2.7. At a School/Department level the [DREOs](#) (Departmental Research Ethics Officers) provide help and advice on specific projects. The Deans of each Faculty or School work with the Heads of Department/Division and have the overall responsibility for the performance of academics and researchers in their respective Faculties/School.

2.8. The [Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research](#) is the contact for any research integrity queries including research misconduct. The [Director of Finance](#) is the confidential liaison for whistle-blowers or any other person wishing to raise concerns about research integrity.

### 3. Communications and engagement

3.1. We have continued to improve our research culture to support our staff and students by providing guidance and tools to ensure compliance and facilitate informed decisions. These included:

- the establishment of a monthly research ethics newsletter for staff and students
- establishing the Open Research Steering Group to provide leadership and monitor the delivery against the open research workplan in partnership with UKRN
- establishing the Research Governance Steering Group to facilitate cross-institution discussions that support research integrity and ethical practices
- the design of a research project to investigate the challenges and enablers to research integrity and ethics at Bath
- delivery of a pilot research project to develop a conflict of interest training aimed at researchers (staff and students) to raise awareness of undue influence
- invited oral presentation at the 8th World Conference on Research Integrity on 'Enriching engagement with ethical review processes'
- invited poster presentation titled 'One year of managing a Data and Digital Sciences Research Ethics Committee' at the ARMA2024 conference
- invited poster presentation titled 'Bath research ethics system' at the ARMA2024 conference
- contribution to UK CORI's commissioned report 'Enablers and inhibitors of research integrity'
- a series of AI talks, hosted by the Department of Computer Science, that explain, explore and demystify machine learning
- hosting AWERB's annual lecture entitled 'Animal Research at the UK Dementia Research Unit: Maximising the patient benefit of our science' on 15th November 2023 given by Dr Frances Wiseman from the UK Dementia Research Unit at UCL
- hosting monthly research ethics 'Open Houses' to focus discussion on ethical matters, research governance and best practice
- a continuous improvement of our website resulting in better sign posting, information about events/training available, guidance, FAQs and case studies
- embedding of the new approach to training committee members, setting up an induction session for lay members and refreshed training sessions for Departmental Research Ethics Officers
- with support from Research England's Enhancing Research Culture Fund Bath is planning to host the 'Beyond Ethics Committees: A Cross-Disciplinary PGR event'
- a 'Qualitative Research Symposium' hosted by the Centre for Qualitative Research
- participation in the UK CORI research integrity indicators workshop
- upon request delivering bespoke research ethics training sessions for Doctoral and Master Students in Departments
- upon request delivering bespoke training sessions on export control and NSI Act for Departments
- participating in the UKRIO pilot course on research integrity since May 2024

### 4. Monitoring and reporting

4.1. We continue to monitor compliance and are committed to carrying out the following annual audits:

- management of human tissue samples
- Department Research Ethics Officer survey to monitor issues, identify training needs and encourage discussions at Departmental level
- compliance with our ethics process

4.2. We continue to monitor and demonstrating progress, against our workplan to ensure compliance with the Concordat to Support Research Integrity.

### 5. Investment on resource

5.1. The 'Research Governance and Compliance' Team was established in November 2022. This investment by the University to support researchers, staff and students to deliver high quality research underpinned by good governance, integrity and ethical approaches is indicative of the Institutional-level commitment to research integrity and ethics. Reporting to the Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research, the Research Governance and Compliance Team comprises 5.6FTE. These include the Head of Team (1FTE), the Trusted Research Manager (1FTE), the Research Ethics Officers (1.6FTE), the Research Integrity Manager (1FTE) and the Governance and Assurance Manager for Research in Health and Social Care (1FTE). This represents an increase of 0.6FTE since the last period.

### 6. Ethics@Bath system

6.1. The digital system Ethics@Bath was successfully launched on 3 April 2023 enabling staff and doctoral students to raise ethics applications for their projects. This system has been designed so as to support the researcher (staff and students) in considering the ethical implications of their research but also to assist reviewers with enabling and facilitating research whilst upholding the highest standards of research integrity. The new ethics form includes sections pertaining to research ethics but also to research integrity, trusted research, PREVENT duty, Nagoya protocol and other legislative requirements. The system can be accessed by any member of staff or student and supports all parts of the life-cycle of the project from its inception to closure. It accommodates applications which require internal review but also those which require external consideration (e.g. Home Office or NHS REC) or those that have already received an ethics opinion require confirmation that they aligned with the values we wish to uphold. The system is, therefore, agnostic to the type of research, researcher or funding received as it is also mandatory for internally funded (also known as unfunded) research. The system is fully operational, also allowing for amendments to be processed.

6.2. An internal audit inspection, carried out 6-months post-launch considered that **Reasonable Assurance** could be given with respect to the adequacy and effectiveness of the Research Ethics System and associated processes. We were pleased to confirm that of the 11 audit actions none of them were classed as 'very important' and 3 were classed as 'desirable'. Furthermore, all of the actions highlighted in the report were already planned as we continue to develop the Ethics@Bath system and associated governance processes in a prioritised way.

### 7. Improved engagement with users

7.1. A monthly Ethics@Bath newsletter is now issued to all staff and students to highlight best practice, share events, draw attention to processes and procedures and share resources to aid the teaching of ethics at Bath.

### 8. Standard Operating Procedures

8.1. Standard Operating Procedures specific for research governance have been developed. These are due to be published in the next coming months. These will allow for standardization of our processes thus increasing efficiency and effectiveness of our work. Once established they will provide a foundation to enable quality assurance.

### 9. Research Participatory Scheme

9.1. In collaboration with the Research Ethics Committees and the Department of Psychology we carried out an evaluation of the research participation scheme. Fruitful discussions have led to positive developments and the consequent adjustment to the administration of the scheme have reinforced its appropriateness and pedagogic value.

### 10. Progress and plans for future developments

10.1. Over the summer, we will carry out our post-launch 12-month evaluation of the Ethics@Bath system and associated governance processes. We will draw on a series of key data sets to assess how we are progressing towards our aims:

- have institutional level oversight of compliance with ethical frameworks which is aligned with best practice
- support and enable a culture that embraces ethical review as an enriching and positive experience for all participants – staff and students – and reviewers – expert/lay members, DREOs and professional services)
- achieve these through efficient and effective use of University resources

10.2. Once data is gathered and analysed, a report will be proposed summarising our findings and identifying the next steps to improve/support the development of ethical researchers.

10.3. We will apply MINDSPACE which is underpinned by the '6Es': enhance, encourage, engage, exemplify, evaluate, and explore. By using MINDSPACE we will seek to:

- understand how our current attempts to change behaviour could be improved
- identify gaps and/or understand what needs to be introduced
- understand unintended consequences

10.4. We will continue to develop and monitor progress towards the delivery against approved workplans for the Concordat to Support Research Integrity, Trusted Research and Open Research. Opportunities to engage more pro-actively with the Departmental Research Ethics Officers will also be created to help develop the role in light of the new system and the opportunities it brings.

### 11. Addressing research misconduct

11.1. Our research misconduct processes were reviewed in the academic year 21/22. The University has the following mechanisms to manage allegations of research misconduct:

- [Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research](#) is the contact for any research integrity queries including research misconduct and dignity and respect issues relating to research
- [Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor \(Research\)](#) is responsible for embedding principles of good research culture and enabling the growth of new and existing research governance activities
- [Director of Finance](#) is the primary confidential liaison for whistle-blowers or any other person wishing to raise concerns about research integrity
- [Allegations of misconduct in research policy](#)
- [Dignity and Respect policy](#)
- [Public Interest Disclosure \(Whistleblowing\) Policy](#)
- a [Senior Independent Director](#) who can be contacted as an independent person
- an [online form](#) to facilitate the raising of concerns relating to serious wrong doing
- a dedicated e-mail: [whistleblowing@bath.ac.uk](mailto:whistleblowing@bath.ac.uk)

11.2. [Mandatory training](#) for staff includes: diversity in the workplace, unconscious bias, bribery act, data protection, research integrity and how to tackle harassment.

11.3. The [Code of good practice in research integrity](#) which was revised this year sets out the principles and standards that everyone must adhere to if they are involved in research at the University of Bath.

11.4. Our approach to investigations of allegations of research misconduct was revised in 2022 and implemented last year. By introducing a triage step we have been able to constructively address poor-practice and resolve issues of poor judgement or established bad practices with good outcomes. The clearly articulated steps for investigation of allegations of research misconduct have allowed our researchers, and responding parties, to understand our processes. We have received good feedback on our approach even though the subject is often very personal and sensitive.

11.5 The revised procedure allows for a joint investigation into allegations of research misconduct which contains aspects of bullying and harassment. By allowing for allegations to be jointly investigated under 2 policies (dignity & respect as well as misconduct) we are able to run a single process, one set of interviews etc which is less stressful for all involved and allows for more efficient conduct of the investigation.

### 12. Allegations of research misconduct

12.1. Each year the University receives details of a range of concerns relating to research integrity. During this academic year the PVC(R) received 10 complaints regarding research integrity, which included:

- 1 case of alleged plagiarism
- 1 case of failure to meet legal, ethical and professional obligations which was upheld after formal investigation
- 2 cases of misrepresentation (e.g. data involvement, interests, qualification and/or publication history)
- 1 case with multiple areas of concern (when received in a single allegation)

12.2 During this academic year, we have received correspondence from members of the public asking for clarification or raising an issue with the way a certain research project is being carried out. Whilst this type of concern does not actually amount to an allegation of research misconduct we believe that these 'complaints' are worth recording as they demonstrate a type of public scrutiny that we have not seen before. From the 4 received in total, 1 lead to a change in recruitment practices via the 'gatekeeper' and another was from an aggrieved participant who did not meet the inclusion criteria and as such could not be included in the study. The last 2 were from participants with feedback on certain aspects of research design. These comments were passed on to the researchers for their information.

12.3 Our work to review our processes and system relating to research ethics resulted in a heightened awareness of best practice. This has led to researchers, both staff and students, to come forward and report instances where they have not observed best practice or established protocol in the work they have either carried out or are still working on. In these instances we work with researchers to ensure that remedial action is taken so as to align the conduct of the project with the standards we wish to uphold. This is done in line with the process articulated in Appendix II, retrospective review, of our Policy to manage research misconduct. From the 3 requested this year, 1 is still under consideration, 1 was confirmed as having been carried out ethically and the data collected in the remaining one was embargoed because the committee was unable to issue a favourable review.

Approved by Council 8 July 2024

Previous annual statements

UNIVERSITY'S PREVIOUS STATEMENTS ON RESEARCH INTEGRITY

