

Template: annual statement on research integrity

If you have any questions about this template, please contact:
RIsecretariat@universitiesuk.ac.uk.

Section 1: Key contact information

Question	Response
1A. Name of organisation	Robert Gordon University
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)	12/12/24
1D. Web address of organisation's research integrity page (if applicable)	Research Integrity and Ethics Research Governance RGU
1E. Named senior member of staff to oversee research integrity	Name: Professor Nick Fyfe
	Email address: n.fyfe3@rgu.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: Dr Rebecca Rogan
	Email address: research-integrity@rgu.ac.uk

Section 2: Promoting high standards of research integrity and positive research culture.

Description of actions and activities undertaken

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

Over the past reporting year [November 2023-September 2024], the university has reviewed current policies specifically relating to research integrity and ethics. This has resulted in a new policy and associated process for dealing with allegations of research misconduct. Ongoing activity includes the revision of the research ethics policy and appraisal of the research ethics review process. The review of these areas has been initiated to provide further guidance and robust processes to support researchers at all levels across the university.

• Communications and engagement

The university has many established communication streams for targeting the RGU research population on matters relating to research integrity and ethics including through the Graduate School, Research Integrity and Ethics Sub-Committee, communications team and more recently via a new internal Sharepoint site.

The university engages with various external networks including SRIN, UKRIO and ARMA. This engagement has helped shape policy and guidance to support researchers.

- **Culture, development and leadership**

The People, Culture and Environment working group has a dedicated remit to explore research culture within RGU. The group engages in sector wide topics including areas such as REF and research integrity.

The Research Integrity Officer is now the lead contact for research integrity and ethics, and this has enhanced leadership of this area within the university. The Research Integrity and Ethics Sub-Committee (RIESc) meet quarterly and play an important strategic role in relation to research ethics and integrity.

- **Monitoring and reporting**

A research culture survey was created by members of the People, Culture and Environment working group and circulated to all staff and postgraduate researchers within the university. Questions were included on research integrity and provide a benchmark for evaluating ongoing activity. The survey will be circulated every two years. However, it is acknowledged that the feedback is limited through this mechanism and further, more qualitative approaches will be explored for engaging with the RGU community.

In association with the new research integrity and misconduct policy, a new process has also been introduced for monitoring allegations of research misconduct. This will enable future monitoring of types of allegations raised and the outcomes.

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.

One of the significant changes during the 2023-24 period was the creation of the research integrity and misconduct policy, superseding the research governance and integrity policy. The new policy has resulted in a change of the process for reporting allegations of research misconduct and process for handling such allegations. Further detail regarding these changes is provided in section 3A.

At the beginning of the reporting period RGU became a subscriber of UKRIO. This

has increased access to level of support and resources relating to research good practice.

Another significant area of activity is the development of the internal SharePoint site on research ethics and integrity. This new site provides an institutional platform for staff and students to access information on policies, links to training, guidance relating to good research practice and contact details pertaining to research integrity and ethics.

One area RGU has sought to enhance is the provision of research ethics and integrity training. As subscribers to UKRIO, RGU participated in the UKRIO pilot training course 'An introduction to Research Integrity'. This was introduced in the spring of 2024 and the course was made available to staff and PhD students. In November 2023, the Research Integrity and Ethics Sub-Committee undertook training on 'Research Ethics'- this was organised through UKRIO. A group has also been established (consisting of library and research colleagues) to explore deploying games as a form of training. This has resulted in consideration of more innovative ways of engagement of the subject area. In addition, in 2024, a new module was introduced to support staff who are new to research. Within this module, a session was delivered on research ethics and integrity.

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.

- **Reflections on progress**

Following the employment of the Research Integrity Officer in June 2023, there has been considerable advancement of initiatives and revision of policy, much of which activity has taken place over the course of the reporting year. Through dedicated engagement with stakeholders within the university and externally, the Research Integrity Officer has highlighted and taken forward areas of development in relation to research integrity and ethics. Following a review of the employer commitments outlined within the Concordat to Support Research Integrity, a number of key areas of development were identified to enhance RGU's support for researchers. This has formed the basis of activity over the past year, including a review of the training provision and communication of training opportunities,

revision of the research integrity policy and process for handling and processing allegations of research misconduct, and identification of areas where further guidance and support is required such as safeguarding guidance and Artificial Intelligence (AI) and research.

During this annual reporting period, there has been a period of change within RGU. Primarily, the reconfiguration of academic Schools and professional support departments. The university has also undergone a period of Voluntary Severance which has led to staff changes. The future developments will therefore be driven forward within the context of these changes.

- **Plans for future development**

An initial review of the research ethics policy and structure of the review process began during this reporting period initiated by the need for more inclusivity of the process for all researchers across the university and to account more for interdisciplinary research. The need to review the current process was catalysed by the changes to the university structure. Proposals are currently being considered with regards to exploring a more streamlined, centralised process to review the ethics of postgraduate research and staff research projects. As such, the composition of the ethics review panel structure and process is being explored. The aim of this review and implementation of a new approach is to ensure a more robust ethics review process that is consistent institutionally and more inclusive. The research ethics policy will be revised alongside changes to the institutional structure of ethics review.

Aligned with this review, there will be continued consideration of internal processes relating to ethics approval for research involving the NHS. There has been engagement with internal and external stakeholders in relation to current internal processes for seeking ethics approval and how to adapt administrative practices to be more streamlined whilst meeting external requirements.

Building on the training offered over the past reporting year, further training will be offered over the next year. The sessions will be particularly important for highlighting new processes related to the revised policy on research integrity and misconduct. Working with the Graduate School, sessions on research ethics and integrity within established seminar programmes have been organised to target a range of audiences. Games- based activities will also continue to be considered with plans to host sessions covering areas related to research good practice in the next reporting period.

One of the reflections from the past year was the challenge of engaging with staff

and students in the uptake of training offered. This was highlighted when the UKRIO training was made available to PhD students and staff. As such, one area of focus over the next year will be to understand how to increase the level of engagement and uptake of training. In line with 'commitment 3: embedding a culture of research integrity' of the Concordat to Support Research Integrity, we will endeavour not only to provide training but "encourage their uptake".

From attending sector wide events, it is understood that AI and research is a key issue, and we will continue to seek to develop internal guidance while engaging with the sector on this matter. An 'AI in research' working group has recently been established within RGU and over the next year the expectation is that this group will meet regularly and advance with guidance over the next reporting period.

Much of the focus over the past year has been reviewing and developing our support and requirements in terms of our role as an employer. Over the next year, there will be continued focus on this and further emphasis placed on ensuring that researchers are aware of the Concordat and their responsibilities. This will be done through various established communication streams and consideration will also be given to whether there are potentially more effective forms of engagement.

The initial creation of the Research Integrity and Ethics SharePoint site is an important development for supporting researchers. Going forward, there are plans to develop this internal site further. This is being led by the Research Integrity Officer who through internal and external networks will continue to establish guidance to support researchers.

2D. Case study on good practice (optional)

Please describe an anonymised brief, exemplar case study that can be shared as good practice with other organisations. A wide range of case studies are valuable, including small, local implementations. Case studies may also include the impact of implementations or lessons learned.

N/A

Section 3: Addressing research misconduct

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.

Following a review of processes relating to research misconduct, a revised policy and process was introduced at the end of this reporting period. The Research Integrity and Misconduct policy supersedes the 2016 research governance and integrity policy. The UKRIO 'Procedure for the Investigation of Misconduct in Research' was used as the template for the new policy with adjustments made to reflect RGU's structure and policies.

Following consultation with various stakeholders including the Research Integrity and Ethics Sub-Committee (RIESc), Research Committee, HR and policy team, the policy received Board approval in June 2024. In addition to new procedures for reporting and handling allegations of research misconduct, the new policy sets out further detail on considerations relating to research integrity, includes a named contact and an email address for raising research integrity concerns (research-integrity@rgu.ac.uk). There is also a new process for the named contact to log research integrity queries and outcomes at an institutional level for monitoring and

reporting purposes. The policy will be reviewed every three years as per RGU policy but after one year the RIESC will complete a review to establish whether amendments to the policy are required within the three-year review.

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				
Falsification				
Plagiarism				
Failure to meet legal, ethical and professional obligations				
Misrepresentation (eg data; involvement; interests; qualification; and/or publication history)				
Improper dealing with allegations of misconduct				
Multiple areas of concern (when received in a single allegation)				
<i>Other*</i>				
Total:	0	0	0	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.**

N/A