

# Coventry University Group

## Annual Statement on Research Integrity

### Section 1: Key Contact Information:

Question	Response
<b>1A. Name of organisation</b>	Coventry University Group
<b>1B. Type of organisation</b>	Higher Education Institution
<b>1C. Date statement approved by governing body</b>	4 December 2024
<b>1D. Web address of organisation's research integrity page</b>	<a href="https://www.coventry.ac.uk/research/about-us/research-governance-culture/">https://www.coventry.ac.uk/research/about-us/research-governance-culture/</a>
<b>1E. Named senior member of staff to oversee research integrity</b>	Name: Prof Nigel Berkeley, Associate Pro-Vice Chancellor for Research Governance
	Email address: nigel.berkeley@coventry.ac.uk
<b>1F. Named member of staff who will act as a first point of contact for anyone wanting more information on matters of research integrity</b>	Name: Sophie Krumins, Research Ethics and Integrity Manager
	Email address: sophie.krumins@coventry.ac.uk

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

### **2a: Description of current systems and culture:**

The Annual Statement on Research Integrity is applicable to Coventry University Higher Education Corporation and all its sister companies (the Group). It covers the academic year of 2023/24 [*1<sup>st</sup> August 2023-31<sup>st</sup> July 2024*].

The Group is committed to fulfilling the principles of the UUK Concordat to Support Research Integrity (2019) and to embedding research integrity within its research culture. This statement details the actions and activities undertaken throughout the course of the academic year and the frameworks in place to foster and strengthen a culture of research integrity in line with the Concordat expectations.

The Annual Statement for 2023/24 is based on the template developed by the UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO) with the Research Integrity Concordat Signatories Group.

### **Culture, development and leadership:**

The standards and organisational structures and processes are set and maintained by a Senior Research Leadership Team (SRLT), led by the Deputy Vice Chancellor (DVC) for Research and supported by five Associate Pro-Vice Chancellor for Research (APVCR, each with specific responsibilities for staff development in thematic and functional areas. The APVCR Governance works within the SRLT, and the wider Group, to ensure the efficacy of research ethics and integrity policies and governance structures with support from a dedicated Research Ethics and Integrity team within Research Services.

Recognising the growing need around compliance which underpins a healthy and thriving research culture, the Group has established a dedicated Research Governance Team. The team was established in June 2024 to bring together and strengthen the strategic and operational support for governance policies, standards, procedures to aid ethics and integrity, trusted research and export control, due diligence and research contract management and compliance. This approach to governance enables a holistic oversight across the Group.

Training and support across all levels of academic career stages is provided. All Group staff are required to complete mandatory e-learning modules via 'Coventry Essentials' covering key modules including data protection, information security and diversity and inclusion. These ensure all staff are informed about individual and organisational responsibilities set out via legislation and governing bodies.

The CU Research Integrity and Ethics Training and Development Framework enables researchers to develop the skills to conduct research to the required standards. The central framework consists of

online self-study courses including modules hosted by Epigeum, workshops on managing risk and research data management and webinars under the Research Ethics and Integrity Webinar Series. The most recent webinar invited UKRIO to talk on handling research misconduct. Research Centre staff and students receive local tailored ethics training by Ethics Leads. The Research Ethics and Integrity Team offer bespoke training and support, such as co-delivering Travel Safety and Ethics Workshops with the Head of Health and Safety.

In addition, specific research focused training and development for research staff is available. There is a wide ranging and comprehensive suite of training provided and co-ordinated out of Research Services. Induction sessions for new staff to inform and discuss the support available across the Group with in-person introductions and discussions with support staff from the following teams Research Funding, Development and Governance, Research Management, Administration and Projects and Research Excellence, Impact and Culture. In addition to the support and training provided, the Group is a subscriber to UKRIO. This subscription gives staff across the Group access to research integrity courses, webinars and training material.

Significant time and resource has been invested into two flagship programmes that support the training and development of our research staff:

- Academic Support Programme in Research Excellence (ASPiRE) is designed to form a structure pathway for academic teaching staff to engage with research centres with the aim of providing those with strong research promise to become independent researchers. The programme guarantees research time, provides mentoring support and ensures a tailored programme of research and career development.
- Academic Support Programme in Research Excellence Plus (ASPiRE+) is designed to support the mid-career research cohort of Assistant Professors in further developing their research capabilities. The programme provides a flexible framework of training and mentoring by aligning capabilities against sector standards, identifying areas for development and providing training and development opportunities to match these needs.

Leadership Horizons is a specific course for senior level academic posts to help build on the key capabilities for effective leadership. Core modules include leading with purpose, leadership accountability, how to be a more inclusive leader, creating a safe environment and resilience and wellbeing. All modules are supplemented by action learning sets, business projects and a coaching and mentoring framework.

Oversight and maintenance of standards is supported via biannual 'Research Excellence Checkpoints' chaired by the DVC for Research and supported by the APVCR for Excellence, these are an opportunity for each of the 18 research centres to have a deep dive into the underpinning structures and support around research to ensure standards and best practices are being upheld and developed.

### **Policies:**

The Group has two key documents that underpin research integrity that are available to Researchers, PGRs and Professional Services colleagues who provide support for research. These are:

1. The 'Research Integrity Assurance Standard', published July 2024, which is applicable to all engaged with research across the Group. It sets out the standards of research conduct and responsibilities expected of those engaged in research.
2. The 'Group Research Ethics and Conduct Policy' which recognises the risks arising from the Group's research and conduct activity and sets out the controls in place to manage / mitigate those risks. Through implementing this policy, the Group aims to achieve a culture of high integrity and ethical standards in research.

Both documents, alongside all supporting documents for research integrity and ethics, are circulated to the research community when published and each time updates are made. They are also available to research staff on an internal SharePoint page 'Research Ethics and Integrity hub'.

### **Systems:**

CU Ethics Online is the Group's ethics application and authorisation system where staff and students apply for ethics review and approval for research projects. The review of ethics applications on CU Ethics Online depends on:

- Risk – the system will categorise the level of risk depending on how questions are answered in the application.
- Applicant level – the system will send an application through the appropriate review process, based on the risk and if the applicant is a taught student, PGR student or member of staff.
- Area – the system will send an application to the appropriate reviewer(s) based on the risk, applicant level and where the applicant is based e.g. research centre.

As part of the CU Ethics Online review process the system has automatic flags on certain questions to bring in 'specialist reviewers' if they are required to comment or provide advice to applicants and/or reviewers. For example, if the application has outlined the use of drones in the research project, the

UAS Safety Officer specialist reviewer will be notified and asked to review, in addition to the local review set up automatically on the system.

Any changes to a research project that has obtained ethics approval will require an amendment submission. Applicants can apply for amendments to an approved ethics application on CU Ethics Online. This process was moved from e-mail to the online system in April 2024.

CU Ethics Online has bespoke reporting functions that facilitates effective monitoring and audit reporting. The Research Ethics and Integrity team can utilise the system for reporting to the University Group Research Ethics Committee and local reporting. Ethics Leads and Module Leaders can also extract local reports as and when required.

#### **Communications and engagement:**

A Research Governance and Culture page on Coventry University's website has been created with links to research ethics and integrity documents, including a suite of guidance and standards documents, video resources, annual statements and contact details for the named person receiving allegations of misconduct. All documents relating to research ethics and integrity are co-created between the Research Governance Team, colleagues from Research Services, academics and members of the University Group Research Ethics Committee. This approach allows an input across all disciplines.

The Group is a subscriber to UKRIO and staff, including the Research Ethics and Integrity Team, have attended their regular webinars, roundtables and annual conference in the reporting year to ensure that guidance remains relevant, and the Group remains up to date with the sector.

#### **Monitoring and reporting:**

A dedicated Research Ethics and Integrity team has five members of staff supporting research ethics and integrity across the Group. The team is responsible for coordinating, supporting and promoting ethical practice, processes and integrity, and managing the Group's ethics system at a local level. Following a restructure of Research Services in Spring 2024 the team are now placed within the wider Research Funding, Development and Governance Team, in a specialist Research Governance Team led by a new post of 'Head of Research Governance' who is responsible for ensuring the University's research activities align with relevant governance standards through robust management, monitoring and mitigation of risk.

Utilising the functionality within CU Ethics Online, annual audits of research ethics applications (across all levels e.g. taught, PGR and staff) are conducted across the Group. The audits ensure compliance with the ethics review and approval process. A summary of key findings from the audits is shared with

local Ethics Leads within Schools, Campuses and Research Centres. The feedback identifies training needs, areas where guidance needs to be developed, system improvements, or a process streamlined.

An Internal compliance report was carried out in May 2024, which followed on from a similar exercise conducted in October 2020. The report reviewed central processes, policies and procedures to identify practices, systems and issues that may need revision to comply with the Concordat. The report is structured in line with the five commitments of the Concordat. A comprehensive review of each commitment, and the sub-commitments within them, demonstrated the level of compliance across the Group. A narrative highlights how the compliance is being met with proposed actions, where required.

## **2b: Changes and developments during the period under review:**

During the reporting year (2023/24) the following actions have been undertaken to support and strengthen research integrity and ethical practice across the Group:

- A 'Research Integrity Assurance Standard' was published internally. The standard is structured in accordance with the five commitments of the UUK Concordat to Support Research Integrity (2019) and sets out the principles and expectations for the Group to conduct research of the highest standard.
- An Internal Compliance Report on the UUK Concordat to Support Research Integrity (2019) was produced in May 2024. The report summarises the review of central processes, policies and procedures to identify practices, systems and issues that need revision to comply with the Concordat.
- UKRIO launched an online training course 'An Introduction to Research Integrity' in May 2024. During the pilot phase there were a total of 396 enrolments, which included research staff, the SRLT and the Research Governance Team.
- The Associate Director for Research and Engagement (with functional responsibility for ethics) and Research Ethics and Integrity Manager have worked with School Ethics Leads and Module Leaders across the Group to minimise further the risk of taught student research projects by utilising an internal block approval process via CU Ethics Online. All research across the Group requires ethics review and approval, and for taught students to submit an individual ethics application for approval before beginning their research project. The block approval process allows a Module Leader to apply for ethics approval across the module where the variation in projects is minimal, and projects are deemed low risk, utilising secondary data only, with no collection of primary data or contact with participants.

- Changes made to the CU Ethics Online question set and process over the academic year have been successful in improving the overall user experience and functionality. The changes have also provided greater scope for extracting reports and supporting audits. One such improvement has been to incorporate the procedure for amending an approved research ethics application, formally carried out by e-mail, onto CU Ethics Online, which has streamlined the process and improved the audit trail of changes made to a project post ethics approval.
- OMIS Future Travel, the Group's new online tool to authorise national and international travel, was rolled out to all research staff during the reporting year. Additionally, it was integrated with CU Ethics Online to streamline the process and risk assessment approval.
- In August 2023, the Doctoral Supervision Programme was accredited under the Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA) Professional Development Framework named award 'Supervising Postgraduate Research'. Coventry University staff who complete the required elements are entitled to refer to themselves as a 'SEDA Recognised Supervisor'. As part of the accreditation process, Coventry University is recognised under the SEDA Professional Development Framework until July 2028.

## **2c: Reflections on progress and plans for future developments:**

Notable progress has been made with research integrity developments across the Group during the reporting year **(2023/24)**:

- The publishing of the 'Research Integrity Assurance Standard' has strengthened the Group's commitment to upholding high standards of research integrity. The document clearly outlines the standards of research conduct and responsibilities of those engaged in research across the Group.
- Conducting a review of the internal compliance across the Group against the commitments in the UUK Concordat to Support Research Integrity (2019) has demonstrated areas of compliance and where there is room for improvement. The publishing of the 'Internal Compliance Report on UUK Concordat to Support Research Integrity – May 2024' will strengthen the work already being undertaken to improve research integrity and research culture across the Group. The internal compliance review will be conducted bi-annually increasing the accountability for upholding the standards of research integrity across the Group.

- An outcome of the 'Internal Compliance Report on UUK Concordat to Support Research Integrity – May 2024' is to conduct a review of the processes in place for dealing with allegations of misconduct. The review will provide a clear and accessible process that outlines the roles and responsibilities.
- A new role of Associate Pro-Vice Chancellor for Research (Governance) was embedded within the Group's structure in February 2024. The role includes chairing the UGREC, promoting good governance and ensuring the efficacy of ethics and integrity policies with support from the wider Research Governance Team.

There are areas from the previous reporting year **(2022/23)** where development is continuing:

- Review of the current research integrity training provision: The review includes exploring training providers and reviewing the training needs of staff and PGRs across the Group. This will see improvements to the Coventry University Research Integrity and Ethics Training and Development Framework that is accessible for all who are involved in, and support, research. There have been delays to this work due to on-going issues with the internal hosting platform. Part of the work is sourcing a new platform to host the current training package.
- Development of user guides and videos for CU Ethics Online: Due to implementing system changes to CU Ethics Online there was a delay in commencing the review of the existing user guides and, also creating supplementary training videos to support applicants applying for ethics review and approval. These resources, due to be completed by the end of the calendar year, will be used by staff and students to navigate CU Ethics Online.

Forecasting to **2024/25**, several activities are planned to enhance the research integrity environment and culture. These are:

- A formal review of our research policies. The two current policies, Conduct and Ethics, and Excellence and Impact, will be reviewed and updated in Autumn 2024 as part of the four-year review cycle and merged into one Research Policy. The updated policy will reflect the internal research structure, the current risks to the Group related to research and what controls are in place to mitigate the risks and will outline research principles and research related regulations. Once the policy is published, all supporting documents will be formally reviewed, and any gaps identified will be addressed in the calendar year 2025.
- The Research Ethics and Integrity information that is hosted on the Research Hub on the staff portal will be linked to the Doctoral College site to provide a greater level of information accessible to PGRs.



- The University Group Research Ethics Committee (UGREC) will be undergoing a governance structure change. This will reflect the internal changes that have been made within the Group ensuring representation from colleagues across all areas and new roles e.g. Head of Research Governance.
- The Research Ethics and Integrity team will work with the Records Information Governance Unit to streamline the Data Protection Impact Assessment Process (DPIA) and the ethics review and approval process, for research projects.

## **2d: Case study on good practice:**

During the reporting year, two PGRs approached the University Group Research Ethics Committee for advice and guidance after facing challenges in recruitment and data collecting for their research projects. After advertising for research participants (with a monetary incentive) on social media, they were encouraged by the level of interest their adverts generated relatively quickly, however after liaising with other researchers in this area, they realised this was uncommon. An in-depth review of the literature reinforced suspicions, and the 'participants' characteristics aligned with several flags consistent with fraudulent behaviour.

Some of the flags encountered during the recruitment process and data collection included a sudden surge of interest, e-mail format ([name.surnamenumbers@gmail.com](mailto:name.surnamenumbers@gmail.com)), inconsistent demographics, suspicious names (e.g., names that can be surnames and first names, such as John James), loss of contact when asked to confirm personal information, participants opting to keep cameras off throughout online interview, vague responses, presenting identical narratives and experiences to other participants. A further indicator surrounded participants questioning compensation, which had been included in online advertisements for participants.

After liaising with the University Group Research Ethics Committee and other groups, the students designed a screening protocol to assess if participants were genuine. Coventry University Group will continue to develop this case study in 2024/25 and share lessons learnt and best practice with the sector.

This is being shared as a case study because fraudulent participants in healthcare research have the potential to cause harm to research findings and evidence-based practise. It is hoped that by raising awareness of this risk, researchers can be vigilant and plan for such eventualities during the research design phase of their projects. Additionally, those supporting research, such as Research Ethics Committees, can be aware of this risk and advise accordingly when reviewing proposals.

The University Group Research Ethics Committee want to commend the students who brought this to the attention of the ethics committee, being transparent in sharing their experience and raising awareness of this risk, which has and will continue to be used to improve processes around identifying, handling and preventing fraudulent participants in research. For 24/25, the Research Ethics and Integrity team plan to (i) review the existing guidance on Research Participant Incentives (ii) review the CU Ethics Online questions on 'Payments to participants', and (iii) develop a case study to be used in training/workshops.

*This section was co-written with PGRs, Jennifer Godber and Bethany Probert, who have agreed to be named in this statement.*

### Section 3: Addressing research misconduct:

#### **3a: Statement on processes that the organisation has in place for dealing with allegations of misconduct:**

All research carried out by the Group is expected to be conducted ethically and with integrity, following excellent research practice and conduct.

The Deputy Vice Chancellor for Research has overall responsibility for research conduct and ethics. The Associate Pro-Vice Chancellor for Research (Governance) has management responsibility for all procedures in place to support good conduct and addresses concerns for misconduct.

Staff and PGRs are informed of research misconduct processes via induction and general regulations. Taught students are informed via research modules and general regulations.

For the academic year 2023/24 there were **4** cases of academic or ethical misconduct reported. Formal procedures are in place to investigate allegations of misconduct and poor integrity in research. Investigations are conducted in a fair and timely manner with serious cases of misconduct being referred to the relevant regulatory or professional bodies.

The 4 cases reported for the academic year 2023/24 fall under academic misconduct. Under the headings below a summary has been provided to be transparent.

#### **Falsification:**

This allegation of academic misconduct has been reported but is not able to be completed due to the withdrawal of the PGR. It is not possible to inform the PGR of the decision made and their right to appeal. This is currently on hold to be restarted should the PGR return to Coventry University.

#### **Misrepresentation:**

Both allegations are still under investigation and no formal outcomes have been reached.

**Multiple areas of concern:**

This allegation was raised when other concerns about the PGR were made. This resulted in becoming aware of a previous incident that had been dealt with internally and did not follow the formal procedures in place.

**3b: Information on investigations of research misconduct that have been undertaken:**

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	1	1	0	0
Plagiarism				
Failure to meet legal, ethical and professional obligations				
Misrepresentation (eg data; involvement; interests; qualification; and/or publication history)	2	1	0	0
Improper dealing with allegations of misconduct				
Multiple areas of concern (when received in a single allegation)	1	1	0	0
<i>Other*</i>				
<b>Total:</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>