

Board of Governors

Thursday 21 November 2024

Paper title	University Research Ethics and Integrity Annual Report 2023-24
Presenter(s)	
Author(s)	Head of Research Office, Elizabeth Goodwin-Andersson, School Research Ethics Leads
Communication Status	Open

Proposed resolution

The Board of Governors is asked to receive the report and:

a) approve the report.

1. Executive Summary

As part of our commitment to the Concordat on Research Ethics and Integrity we are required each year to provide details of actions and improvements to our ethics processes, and to formally record any misconduct investigations. The report must be approved by Governing Body and published online.

2. Previous and future consideration

The report has been approved by University Research Ethics and Integrity Sub-Committee, University Research Committee and Academic Board.

3. Strategic context

In line with the terms of reference for University Research Committee and Academic Board, we are required to provide assurances that our processes are transparent and robust in order to meet our strategic research objectives.

4. Risk, equality, environment, and ethics impact assessment

There would be a potential reputational risk and possible harm to researchers and participants if the annual reporting process was not in place. There have been no reports of misconduct in any of the school reports nor any allegations of whistle-blowing.

5. Next steps

The report must be approved by Governing Body and published online.

6. Report

Annual Statement on Research Integrity

Section 1: Key Contact Information

Name of organisation: York St John University

Type of organisation: higher education institution

Date approved by Governing Body: tbc

Web address of research integrity: <https://www.yorks.j.ac.uk/policies-and-documents/research/ethics-and-integrity/>

Named senior member of staff to oversee research integrity: Prof Robert Mortimer, Pro Vice Chancellor Research and International r.mortimer@yorks.j.ac.uk

Named member of staff who is first point of contact for research integrity: Dr Elizabeth Goodwin-Andersson, Head of Research Office e.goodwinandersson@yorks.k.ac.uk

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

2a Description of current systems and culture

Each school is supported by a School Research Ethics Committee (SREC) comprised of a chair, deputy chair and usually around five committee members. Overall responsibility for the committees lies within the leadership role of School Research and Knowledge Transfer Lead.

The chairs run annual CPD training for all staff on research and integrity and we regularly call on external consultants to provide training. The SRECs report to the University Research Ethics and Integrity Sub-committee (UREISC) which is comprised of the Pro Vice Chancellor for Research and International (chair), the Head of Research Office, the SREC chairs and several co-opted members who attend when their expertise is required, and a lay member of the public. The UREISC meets four times a year to discuss policy and regulatory updates and it reviews all applications which work with the NHS as well as cases where there is not a majority verdict in the SRECs and it offers advice.

Our committees are governed by our Code of Practice for Research and our Research Ethics Policy. The University treats all allegations of misconduct seriously in accordance with our Research Misconduct Policy and our Whistleblowing Policy. We have a Research Data Management Policy which requires researchers to deposit their data into our repository, RaYDaR (unless otherwise specified in the data management plan for legal, ethical or commercial reasons). Finally, we have an Open Access Policy which closely follows guidance from UKRI and requires researchers to deposit outputs in our repository RaY within one month of acceptance.

Each year, during the summer, we request annual reports from each of the SRECs to monitor engagement and feed into the university-level annual report.

2b Changes and developments during the period under review

This year we have continued to review and improve our Ethics Monitor software, enhancing it to include all level 7 by research degrees. We have reviewed our research misconduct policy to clearly delineate roles and responsibilities of staff and students.

This year we ran for the first time what we hope will become our flagship conference for research ethics and integrity: The Only Way is Ethics a conference which focuses on the challenges faced in ethical review. This year the theme was “reflecting on and learning from research after ethical approval” which aimed to improve reflection and practice. This novel, interdisciplinary conference encouraged wider ethical thinking rather than seeing ethics as an administrative exercise. There was a variety of case study presentations, workshops and a stimulating talk by our external keynote speaker, Nicole Brown.

2c Reflections on progress and plans for future developments

Last year our case study on good practice showcased a pilot run in the School of Education, Language and Psychology which introduced doctoral level students to the review process. PGR students were invited to read, review and give feedback on circa two ethical proposals each (without voting rights). After reviewing the pilot in the summer of 2024, we will now propose the new role of Associate Reviewers to all school level committees to give all doctoral students the opportunity to be involved in the ethical review process from the perspective of a committee reviewer.

2d Case study on good practice (optional)

This year the School of Science, Technology and Health Ethics Committee have expanded their Committee membership to include two members from the University's Institute for Health and Care Improvement (IHCI). The IHCI conducts research that involves collaborating with local National Health Service (NHS) Trusts and partners. As such, the Science, Technology and Health Ethics Committee have observed an increase in the number of applications for ethical approval that also require approval via the NHS Research Ethics Committee (REC).

The two new committee members have experience in working on and managing trials that have gained ethical approval via the NHS pathway, therefore, have brought an increased level of review and insight for applications the Committee has received that also require NHS approval. Furthermore, one panel member is also a reviewer for a regional NHS REC, therefore is able to feedback from their knowledge and experiences gained reviewing applications within this role. For example, recently the NHS Health Research Authority produced mandatory 'Quality Standards and Design and Review Principles' to improve information for people invited to take part in research. This Committee member was aware of these changes and was able to highlight during the review process applications where such guidance had not been followed.

Our University Research Ethics Policy <https://www.yorksj.ac.uk/policies-and-documents/research/ethics-and-integrity/policies-and-reports/> incorporates a section on the use of artificial intelligence in research. Furthermore, this is included in our staff CPD programme on research ethics and research security sessions and our postgraduate researcher skills training on ethics. The following website showcases our response to the presence of AI in the research landscape <https://www.yorksj.ac.uk/policies-and-documents/generative-artificial-intelligence/>

Section 3: Addressing research misconduct

3a Statement on processes that the organisation has in place for dealing with misconduct

York St John University is committed to maintaining the highest ethical standards in research carried out by its staff and students. Its approach to research integrity complies with the Concordat

to support research integrity (the Concordat). The University treats all allegations of misconduct seriously and is committed to ensuring that allegations are investigated with thoroughness and rigour.

We have a policy on research misconduct which applies to allegations of misconduct made against staff and research students. Allegations against research students may also be dealt with under our academic misconduct procedure, in cases of plagiarism or against taught elements of the programme. Staff and research students may also report cases via our whistle-blowing policy.

3b Information on investigations or research misconduct that have been undertaken.

There have been no formal investigations on research misconduct during the period under review.