

Brunel University London

Annual statement on Research Integrity

The University is a signatory to [The Concordat to Research Integrity 2019](#).

The following annual statement has approved for circulation by UREC and Research and Knowledge Transfer Committee of Senate and was approved by Council on 22nd October 2020.

- 1. The following actions and activities have been undertaken to support and strengthen understanding and the application of research integrity issues.*

Review of the BREO system in consultation with the Colleges

A complete and fundamental review of the BREO system was completed in 2019 including evaluation of the effectiveness of the application form in line with the needs of its diverse user base. The review was conducted in full consultation with the Colleges and other relevant stakeholders across the University. Feedback following implementation of the changes has indicated an improvement in the quality of applications received by each College Research Ethics Committee (CREC), reducing workloads and delays caused by inadequate submissions.

Development of online training provision

There are now several sources of training in research ethics available to staff and students, including some online video tutorials and regular lectures for students. Training for staff is now facilitated by Staff Development with regular sessions held for supervisors and for research ethics reviewers. There is work to be done relating to mandatory attendance; it remains the recommendation of the UREC that all supervisors overseeing primary research by students should be required to attend the training, as this is an area of risk leading to students receiving insufficient or incorrect advice from their supervisory team.

Training sessions have also been provided to TPO staff, who regularly deal with student queries concerning research ethics processes.

Collaboration with the UK Research Integrity Office on sector guidance documentation

The Assistant University Secretary acted as a consultant on a national, sector-wide guidance document developed by UKRIO and ARMA. The document, titled 'Research Ethics Support and Review in Research Organisations' was published in April 2020 and is intended to support the research community in achieving high standards of research ethics review.

Development of involvement in national multi-institutional forum for sharing of best practice

The Assistant University Secretary maintains close professional relationships with equivalent senior post holders at other institutions such as UCL, Royal Holloway and Kings College London. A new Research Integrity Consortium, led by Kings, has been launched with Brunel as a member. The purpose of this consortium is to bring together London-based colleagues working in research integrity in order to share best practice ideas, discuss issues relating to research integrity, and consider the Concordat to Support Research Integrity in terms of its implementation and any perceived related challenges.

Development of procedure with regard to monitoring of projects post-approval

This is ongoing with review of the College Research Ethics Committee (CREC) Standard Operating Procedures soon to be undertaken alongside a full UREC audit of CREC effectiveness and activity.

New website on research ethics

A new internal website has been developed containing guidance and advice on research ethics processes as well as relevant topics such as consent, recruitment, confidentiality etc. This is intended to assist students and staff when navigating the process including pointers on the expectations of research ethics reviewers.

Research during Covid-19

A new policy was approved by Executive Board on 25 August 2020 formalising restrictions on research activity involving human participants during the pandemic. These restrictions had been in place since the outbreak began in March. The policy remains in force with the first review due in January 2021. The policy sets out criteria by which research proposals may be measured in order to seek an exemption from the restrictions. The UREC have received a significant number of exemption requests with more expected; to date two exemptions have been granted.

Support for distance learners

Training provision had been extended to external supervisors contracted with Interactive. A previous lack of clarity as to the role of supervisors who are external to Brunel had been resolved and sufficient training given on Brunel processes and policies; however careful oversight would be maintained.

2. Processes for dealing with allegations of misconduct

Any person engaging in research in the name of Brunel University London is expected to observe the highest standards of conduct. The general principles in relation to research are addressed in the Brunel University London Research Integrity Code and in the University Code of Research Ethics.

The University has established and maintains standard procedures for the investigation of misconduct in research, ensuring that such allegations are thorough, fair and conducted in a timely manner. These are outlined in Council Ordinance 18 Procedures for Investigation of Research Misconduct

The University defines research misconduct thus:

Research misconduct includes fabrication, falsification, fiscal wrong-doing, plagiarism or deception in proposing, carrying out or reporting results of research, deliberate and dangerous or negligent deviations from accepted practice in conducting research, or conducting research with human participants without first obtaining research ethics approval. It includes failure to follow an agreed protocol if this failure results in

unreasonable risk or harm to humans, other vertebrates or the environment, and facilitating misconduct in research by collusion in, or concealment of, such actions by others. Any plan or conspiracy or attempt to do any of these things is also considered to be research misconduct. This also includes failure to follow rules and regulations including those of a third party with a legitimate interest in the research of the University.

Any allegation of research misconduct should be reported confidentially to the Secretary to Council or, in the event of a potential conflict of interest or absence, his/her nominated representative appointed by the Chair of Council. Any allegations of fiscal malfeasance or irregularity in relation to research activity should be reported confidentially to the Director of Finance.

2020/21 Review of Research Misconduct Procedure

A review is underway in consultation with internal stakeholders, specifically the Office of Complaints, Conduct and Appeals. A new iteration of the policy has been developed, aiming to streamline the internal investigation process and ensure compatibility with other relevant University policies and external regulations. It is expected the revised draft will be presented to Council for approval in the Academic year 2020/2021

3. Formal investigations of research misconduct 2019/20

The University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) made 14 investigations into research misconduct in 2019/20 (14 students). Of these, 14 were upheld. Four investigations were resolved formally; none involved research funded by a Research Council.

4. What the University has learned from formal investigations of research misconduct and actions taken to prevent the same type of incident re-occurring

All investigations undertaken during this period involved ethical approval for supervised student research projects; the University has therefore improved research ethics training provision for academic supervisors, including mandatory training where required. Training for students includes lectures, clear course guidance, web-based learning and engagement with research integrity training where the proposed research involves human participants.

5. How the University creates and embeds a research environment in which all staff, researchers and students feel comfortable to report instances of misconduct

Council Ordinance 18 Procedures for Investigation of Research Misconduct outlines a University central contact for cases of suspected misconduct and makes provision for individuals with concerns over research conduct to raise their issues in confidence and for confidentiality during the investigations.

This is clearly displayed on the University external research integrity webpage and the University internal research policy page and is linked to by each College research page.

Colleagues on Teaching and Research and Research only contracts are encouraged to complete the University Research integrity training unit, which is discipline specific and includes training relating to identifying and reporting misconduct. This training and the

research Integrity code is highlighted in the welcome letter for new appointees and Senior research Administrators in Colleges include this in induction checklists.

For Post Graduate Research students, the University's code of practice for research degrees sets out the University's mandatory policies and procedures. This includes a link to the Research Integrity code and highlights specifically the code of research ethics.

Links to the code and online integrity are also shown on the Graduate school training development and support page.

A discussion of ethics and data management is specified in the Research degree code as part of the 4 week progression review and review points include discussions around research management skills. Details of the contact point for queries around research misconduct is on the 'my research' page of the e-vision portal for post graduate research students.

Students on taught programmes receive guidance from supervisors in relation to ethics and misconduct as part of teaching provision