

Annual Report on Research Integrity 2020/21

University Policy Framework

Research integrity is embedded at Regent's University London via two key policies:

- Research Ethics Policy
- Code of Practice on Research Integrity

Both policies were updated in the period to reflect our new faculty structure (see below), while the Research Ethics policy is subject to a full periodic review in 2022.

Extensive training, support and information is provided to all university students about research ethics and research integrity. University employees are similarly informed and receive appropriate ongoing development.

Regulatory updates

During this review period an update was made to the University's Academic Regulations to clarify those rare instances where students present work for grading which should have been reviewed by a Research Ethics Panel. This has always been an instance of academic misconduct subject to referral and penalty by the Academic Misconduct Board, but this has now been made explicit in Academic Regulations with the following addition:

failure to meet legal, ethical and professional obligations, for example:

- not observing legal, ethical and other requirements for human research participants
- not observing legal, ethical and other requirements for the protection of the environment
- breach of duty of care for humans involved in research whether deliberately, recklessly or by gross negligence, including failure to obtain appropriate informed consent
- misuse of personal data, including inappropriate disclosures of the identity of research participants and other breaches of confidentiality

Governance and organisational changes

During the period covered by this report, the University reorganised its faculty and governance structure. This entailed moving to a single faculty structure from three district faculty units (Business and Management; Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences; and Regent's Institute of Language and Culture). Several functions were organised around the previous faculties which now have a shortened and more direct reporting line to Academic Committee (formerly Senate). This includes research ethics.

From January 2021 there is now a university-level Research Ethics Review Panel (RERP) that reports directly to Research Committee and thence to Academic Committee. This will make it far more efficient to explicitly set, regulate, assure, and disseminate a consistent minimal standard approach to the ethics review process across the University, albeit mindful of additional PRB requirements and established processes with external partners in relation to doctoral programmes with the Open University, the University of Wales, and the University of Northampton. This will strengthen the standard of research ethics review across the University.

The review of student ethical applications will continue at subject level although the mechanism to do so is currently under review by the Research Ethics Review Panel. The outcome of the review will strengthen and streamline the process of assuring consistency and quality. The University RERP reports directly to Research Committee for this function.

Staff research ethical review applications will be directly to University Research Ethics Review Panel which will co-opt subject-based reviewers to ensure thorough topic review. Any changes to the research ethics processes will be implemented no sooner than the 2022/23 academic year and will be fully reviewed in the next report.

For the 2021/22 academic year the above subject RERPs will remain in operation subject to the following changes:

Languages

The Languages area generates few projects requiring ethical approval as it does not have any discrete programmes in the area. Any clearances that are needed during 2021/22 will be presented to the Business Subject RERP.

Creative Arts

The former Head of the School of Creative and Liberal Art used to chair this panel and the combined unit does not exist in the new academic structure. It is therefore proposed for 2021/22 that the existing Liberal Studies Subject RERP is extended to cover the filmmaking and acting programmes now in the Liberal Arts Content area, and a separate panel is created for the Fashion & Design Content area.

Reflection and analysis

The subject RERPs continued to operate effectively to assure ethical review through the University's reorganisation.

COVID-19 had a significant impact on students which was more evident for some programmes than others reflecting the nature of the programme, subject and, principally for PG subjects, profession. For example, in the Psychotherapy & Counselling area, which is at PG level, many students chose to defer their dissertation component to beyond the end of the 2020/21 academic year covered by this report not least because COVID-19 lockdown prevented the conduct of in-person data collection essential to therapeutic projects in these areas.

In the Languages area, the RERP existed to review staff requests for ethical clearance as the area does not oversee UG or PG programmes of its own. There were no such applications from staff needing review during 2020/21, no doubt reflecting COVID and staff reorganisation in that area. Since this subject RERP does not receive student applications, its functions can be assumed by the University RERP.

Incidents and formal investigations

There were no allegations of research misconduct during the period and therefore no formal investigations were required.