

## **Annual Report on Research Integrity 2022/23**

This report reviews processes and any issues concerning research integrity for Research Committee and then to the Board also forming the basis to discharge our obligations under the Universities UK Concordat to Support Research Integrity. The report covers the single academic year 2022/23 and has been compiled by Professor Tom Villis, current chair of the Research Ethics Committee.

### **Context**

The University is a signatory to the Universities UK Concordat to Support Research Integrity (2012 updated 2019) the provision of which are enshrined and operationalised through the University's Code of Practice on Research Integrity (2018 updated 2021). The Code has five key aims. These are to

- Maintain the highest standards of rigour and integrity in all aspects of research
- Ensure that research is conducted according to appropriate ethical, legal, and professional frameworks, obligations, and standards
- Support a research environment that is underpinned by a culture of integrity and based on good governance, best practice, and support for the development of researchers
- Use transparent, robust, and fair processes to deal with allegations of research misconduct
- Work together to strengthen the integrity of research and to reviewing progress regularly and openly

### **Governance and Organisational Context and Updates**

In the period 2022/23, the Research Ethics Panel has continued to report directly to Research Committee and thence to Academic Committee. Four Research Ethics Panel meetings were held during the period covered in this report. To reflect the increased maturity of the ethics process within the university a few changes to the terms of reference were introduced:

- The title of the panel was changed to 'Research Ethics Panel' from 'Research Ethics Review Panel.' This is to reflect the main business of the panel to provide oversight over the ethical processes and procedures of the university. The main business of scrutiny of individual applications continued to happen through the online portal.
- The Academic Ethics Review Policy, originally adopted in 2022, was updated in 2023 with changes to the appeal process. Appeals relating to decisions made by members of the panel would no longer be heard by the ethics panel itself, but by a separate body.

- Overall university responsibility for research has passed from the Associate Provost, Professor Lawrence Philips, to the joint responsibility of Professor Tom Villis and Professor Jo Lusher.

## **Research Ethics Review Processes and Data 2022/23**

Since Autumn 2022, ethics approval processes have been dealt with via an online MS Teams App/Sharepoint workflow process when student ethical applications moved over to ownership of content areas -- with a reporting line of responsibility of Module Leader > Course Leader > Director of Content. Where deemed high-risk, these are referred to member of the Research Ethics Panel for review. University Research Ethics Panel members, when needed, co-opt subject-based reviewers to ensure thorough topic review.

In the period 2022/23 412 applications were approved using this system. In 2021/22, when separate subject panels were held, the numbers of projects approved was 354. This suggests that the new system is efficiently gathering all applications separately and is improving compliance. Early data suggests the number of applications has increased even further into 2023/24.

Ethics applications by students on the PhD programme in partnership with the University of Northampton are submitted and reviewed by the University of Northampton PGR Ethics Committee rather than locally.

## **Reflection and analysis**

The University Research Ethics Panel operated effectively to assure ethical review through this review period.

With dedicated support from Stephen Taylor, Learning Technology Lead, minor issues with the technical side of the form are gradually being resolved and plans are underway to offer the process through a mobile app. Training videos on ethics are available on the intranet and linked to course pages via Blackboard. Training for staff and students has also been offered by the chair of the Research Ethics Panel.

## Disclosure

Under the Universities UK Concordat to Support Research Integrity, the University is expected to produce annually a short annual statement made publicly available through the website to include:

- a summary of actions and activities that have been undertaken to support and strengthen understanding and the application of research integrity issues (for example postgraduate and researcher training, or process reviews)
- a statement to provide assurance that the processes the institution has in place for dealing with allegations of misconduct are transparent, timely, robust and fair, and that they continue to be appropriate to the needs of the organisation
- a high-level statement on any formal investigations of research misconduct that have been undertaken, which will include data on the number of investigations. If no formal investigation has been undertaken, this should also be noted
- a statement on what the institution has learned from any formal investigations of research misconduct that have been undertaken, including what lessons have been learned to prevent the same type of incident re-occurring
- a statement on how the institution creates and embeds a research environment in which all staff, researchers and students feel comfortable to report instances of misconduct.

There have been no incidents of a breach of research ethics requiring formal investigation within the provisions of the Concordat. Subject to the confirmation of this report, those statements will be updated for 2022/23.

In addition, we need to re-affirm and publish the following responsibilities (unless Research Committee or the Board directs otherwise):

- An identified named point of contact who will act as a first point of contact for anyone wanting more information on matters of research integrity – this is now Professor Tom Villis, chair of the Research Ethics Panel.
- A named point of contact to act as confidential liaison for whistle-blowers or any other person wishing to raise concerns about the integrity of research being conducted at the University – this remains the Provost/Deputy Vice Chancellor

Professor Tom Villis,  
Chair of the Research Ethics Panel  
24 May, 2024