Concordat to Support Research Integrity

The University is committed to supporting the highest standards of research integrity which are reflected in the 2019 Concordat to Support Research Integrity.

- Commitment 1: To uphold the highest standards of rigour and integrity in all aspects of research.

- Commitment 2: To ensure that research is conducted according to appropriate ethical, legal, and professional frameworks, obligations and standards.

- Commitment 3: To 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.

- Commitment 4: To use transparent, robust and fair processes to deal with allegations of research misconduct should they arise.

- Commitment 5: To work together to strengthen the integrity of research and to review progress regularly and openly.

The University Research and Innovation Committee is responsible for ensuring adherence to these commitments which it discharges via the University Research Ethics Sub-committee (URESC). We have a range of policies codes and processes to support researchers in maintaining these standards, including:

- Code of Practice for the Conduct of Research

- Code of Practice for the Reporting of Research Misconduct

- Research Ethics Policy (REP) and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)

    o URESC Ethical Guidance for Undertaking Research with Children and Young People

    o URESC Ethical Guidance for Undertaking Research with Vulnerable Adults

    o URESC Ethical Guidance for Undertaking Research with Edge Hill University Students

- Human Tissue Quality Manual

- Research Risk Assessment Guidance

- Open Access Policy

- Research Data Management Guidelines

All documents relating to research governance are all available on the University's webpages. The Research Office oversees the review and updating of these codes and policies on behalf of Research Committee. The Director of the Research Office provides an induction workshop (three times a year) that highlights these policies and codes; in addition, the newly enrolling PhD students have training sessions which cover the codes of practice, the ethics approval process, risk assessment and working with human tissue.

There is an additional policy on intellectual property that is owned by Academic Quality and Development Unit (AQDU) and is held on the central regulations pages.

Research Governance Structures

Research and Innovation Committee (URIC) is chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research. It has representatives from each faculty and ex-officio and appointed members from the Research Office, URESC, Learning Services and the Governing Body. The Committee delegates the responsibility for the ethical approval process to URESC which meets three times a year. Among its ex-officio members are the chairs of each Subject Research Ethics Committee (SREC) which, in turn, oversee the ethical approval processes of research conducted in their areas. The SRECs are new for the academic year 2020/21, there are five in total: Arts & Humanities, Education. Health-related, Science and Social Sciences. Departmental review is encouraged but not mandatory. All applications must be endorsed by the head of department with post graduate researcher (PGR) applications requiring the endorsement of the supervisor before the head of department. Where a SREC does not feel able to grant ethical approval, it may ask URESC to review the application.

URESC provides URIC with an annual report and a plan of business for the forthcoming year at its first meeting of the year.

In addition to the ethics committees, there is a Human Tissue Management Group (HTMG) chaired by the Associate Dean for Research and Innovation, Faculty of Health and Social Care, which has oversight of the work carried out under the licence. All projects carried out under the licence must receive ethical approval from the Science Research Ethics Committee. The 'Designated Individual' under the terms of the HTA licence is a member of the HTMG and an ex-officio member of URESC. The Biological Safety Officer is a member of the Science REC and is also an ex-officio member of HTMG.

All governance documents are reviewed by both URESC and URIC before being taken to Academic Board for final approval and adoption.

The Director of the Research Office is the a named senior member of staff to oversee research integrity and ensure that this information is kept up to date and publicly available on the institution's website and the secretary to URESC is named staff member who acts as a first point of contact for anyone wanting more information on matters of research integrity, and his contact details are publicly available on our website.

Activities and developments in 2019-20

(The relevant Concordat commitment is indicated in parenthesis.)

- After a review of ethical review processes in 2018/19 it was agreed that five subject research ethics committees (SRECs) would be established to replace the existing faculty research ethics committees (FRECs). At the same time, it was agreed that a new online ethics system would be implemented. The five Subject Research Ethics Committees were set up for implementation from October 2020 (this has been delayed by the coronavirus pandemic which also affected the timeline for the system implementation). The move to SRECs will help to ensure that the application is reviewed in a timely fashion (the committees will review on a monthly basis), that

there is greater consistency across the organisation and the projects are seen by the right committee. To ensure that best practice is shared, representatives from different committees will members. URESC has two lay members and we will be inviting applications to join the SRECs (#1, #3, #5).

- The online ethics system was implemented during 2019-20 ready for launch from October 2020 (#1,#2,#3,#4,#5). Additional policy and guidance documents have been created and revised training resources such as online narrated presentations to facilitate easy access to training. Committee members will be provided with additional training both regarding the system and ethics principles (including the new Concordat) (#1; #2; #3; #5):

- All ethics policies and guidance documents were made accessible in line with the new accessibility legislation requirements (#2, #3). The Research Ethics Policy and Standard Operating Procedures were amended and agreed to include incorporate the move to Subject Research Ethics Committees (#1, #2, #3, #5). The Research Code of Practice, the Misconduct CoP, and the Open Access Policy were reviewed and updated, and approved by Academic Board.

- A SREC Working Group was established to oversee the move from FRECs to SRECs and has reported regularly to University Research Committee. As part of this, the ToR for the SRECs were drafted and agreed . (#1, #3, #5).

- Training sessions on the GDPR and research were delivered by the RO and the Information Governance Officer. The Director of the Research Office continued to deliver three annual induction sessions, An Introduction to Edge Hill's Research Strategy and Code of Practice for the Conduct of Research, which includes reference to the range of governance documents. This session is aimed particularly at new academic staff but is open to all. In addition, there are other sessions in the Researcher Development Programme (RDP) programme which promote research integrity including research ethics, data protection, research management and working with human subjects. In these sessions it is stressed the anyone who witnesses or suspects misconduct should report it to whomever they feel comfortable to help to ensure that any such circumstance is addressed. It is noted, however, that any investigation must be led by the Director of the RO (#1; #2; #3; #5).

- PhD students have sessions on governance and ethics in the first semester and have access to RDP sessions more generally (#2; #3).

For the record, while one case was referred to the Director of the Research Office by a member of the public concerning the aftercare for a project which is still being reviewed, there have been no cases investigated under the Code of Practice for the Investigation of Research Misconduct (hence there are no actions under commitment 4).

Dr Nikki Craske
Director, Research Office

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