Template: annual statement on research integrity

If you have any questions about this template, please contact: RIsecretariat@universitiesuk.ac.uk.

Section 1: Key contact information

Question	Response
1A. Name of organisation	Queen's University, Belfast
1B. Type of organisation: **higher education institution/industry/independent research performing organisation/other (please state)**	Higher Education Institution
1C. Date statement approved by governing body (DD/MM/YY)	To be completed following Senate's approval
1D. Web address of organisation's research integrity page (if applicable)	https://www.qub.ac.uk/Research/Governance-ethics-and-integrity/Research-integrity/
1E. Named senior member of staff to oversee research integrity	Name: Professor Archie Clements
	Email address: a.clements@qub.ac.uk
1F. Named member of staff who will act as a first point of contact for anyone wanting more information on matters of research integrity	Name: Louise Dunlop
	Email address: l.h.dunlop@qub.ac.uk

Section 2: Promoting high standards of research integrity and positive research culture. Description of actions and activities undertaken

2A. Description of current systems and culture

Please describe how the organisation maintains high standards of research integrity and promotes positive research culture. It should include information on the support provided to researchers to understand standards, values and behaviours, such as training, support and guidance for researchers at different career stages/ disciplines. You may find it helpful to consider the following broad headings:

- Policies and systems

- Communications and engagement

- Culture, development and leadership

- Monitoring and reporting

This statement builds on that of previous years; therefore, its focus will be on what has happened during the intervening period.

Policies and systems
Queen's University Belfast, has in a place a range of regulations, policies, and procedures to ensure research is appropriately governed. The full suite of documentation can be found on the <u>Research Governance, Ethics and Integrity webpages</u>. As detailed in previous statements, robust governance spans many areas of the University, with various Directorates taking the lead and developing policies that support and protect individual researchers and the Institution. During this past year the University has been revising the Research in Conflict Zone policy, rebranding and updating it to cover **Research in High-Risk Areas**, which is particularly pertinent, given geo-political developments in the past year.

Research in the digital space is an area of growth, which has identified gaps in understanding as to what information is personal, private or public in the digital space. To support our researchers, a policy on research in the digital space has been developed and distributed for consultation. Engagement around the topic has been strong and as the year ends feedback following the consultation is being collated to shape the final version of the policy, which will be submitted during 2024-25 for consideration and approval through the University's governance structures.

The **Regulations Governing the Use of Animals in Research** were also reviewed and revised this year, to enhance compliance with the Animals Scientific Procedures Act (ASPA) and ensure the culture of care ethos was embedded within.

Communications and Engagement
The use of Town Halls to impart information and open discussion and learning continued during the year. Three such events were held to augment understanding of ASPA. Such initiatives are often conducted on-line.

In person events were also held across the University on a variety of topics. Awareness raising continued of Trusted Research requirements, as opportunities to attend School Meetings, Faculty Executive Boards and Faculty Research Committees were taken.

The University was delighted to host a meeting of the UK Committee on Research Integrity in October 2023, and for senior staff to then participate a round table the following day. Along with other stakeholders from across Northern Ireland, University staff engaged in the considering the indicators for research integrity, a project that is due to report in August 2024.

Culture, development, and leadership
There are four priorities in the University's Strategy 2030 "Delivering for our Future". Research and Innovation is one of those priorities, subsequently the Research Strategy was implemented in 2022. One of its main pillars was that of Research Quality, with a specific work-stream to ensure that the University's research is founded upon integrity, excellence and ambition. As the current strategy is coming to the end of its three year life cycle consideration is being given to the continued enhancement of the research integrity agenda over the medium term.

The University's Research Culture Action Plan 2021-24, which notably drove the creation of the Postdoctoral Development Centre and the Research & Innovation Professionals' Network, came to an end this year. A new institutional Action Plan is in development, which will bring together different initiatives under the same umbrella. A core element will be research integrity, alongside building on previous activities, there will be new priorities and cognisance of sector developments. It will notably aim to review research team structures and promote a positive research culture at team level, particularly to support good research practices and integrity. The Research Culture Action Plan operates alongside other important action plans, including the institutional action plan for Athena Swan Gold, which Queen's was awarded this year (the first institution on the island of Ireland and second in the UK to receive this level of certification), Racial Equality Charter (REC) action plan, the Open Research Roadmap, new Responsible Research Assessment Policy, Technician Commitment action plan, Researcher Development Concordat Action Plan etc.

While the University doesn't receive ring-fenced Research Culture funding, it was successful in securing a grant from Wellcome's Institutional Research Culture Fund, with co-applicant Ulster University, which officially started on the 1st of April 2024. This grant will enable the delivery of the 'Research Culture NI' project (RCNI) and support the establishment of a Research Culture sub-team in the University. The Research Culture sub-team includes a Research Culture manager (new post), Research Culture Assistant (new post), Research Careers and Employability Officer (new post), Postdoctoral Development Centre (PDC) Officer (repurposed PDC manager post), and Project Assistant (existing post). It will focus on delivering the RCNI project, the institutional Research Culture Action Plan, supporting the People, Culture and Environment element of REF2029, and continue to deliver personal and career development support to research staff. This will notably be enhanced in terms of provision for career design, career exploration, employer engagement and one-to-one career support via a dedicated strand of the RCNI project.

Queen's is playing a key role in the promotion of Research Culture in the region. As lead applicant for RCNI, Queen's is overseeing a programme of activities bringing together Northern-Irish universities, companies, public sector organisations and local government to identify NI-specific research culture priorities to develop a strategy for the region, promote research talent usage in NI, better support Practice As Research, and promote interactions between research and innovation professionals (via the NI Research Professionals' Network, NIRPN).

In addition to this NI-specific network, Queen's developed its own internal Research Professionals network, and is a co-founder and active member of the All-island Research Enablers Network (AiREN), both of which hosted events on research governance and export control for research administrators during the year. Queen's is also co-Chair of the All-Island Research Culture Network with University College Dublin, and was involved in the organisation of the first All-Island research Culture Conference which took place in May 2024.

Further evidence of Queen's playing a key role in the promotion of Research Culture in the region was the hosting of the annual QUB Culture of Care Day and the NI ASPA training day. At both events, recent advances in the 3Rs, of reduction, refinement and replacement central to ASPA-related research were presented. The National Centre for the 3Rs were invited to highlight resources available and to present best practice in experimental design. Attendance at both events was circulated to personal license holders at all establishments in Northern Ireland, to foster discussion and shared learning.

Monitoring and reporting
Audit is a core component of the University's monitoring programme. Alongside audits of premises and laboratories hosting human tissue, a selection of studies are identified and subsequently audited to ensure

compliance with the Human Tissue Act. Audits were completed on all studies identified with no major findings. Aggregated reports from the audits are presented to the Human Tissue Steering Group for consideration and possible identification of trends and patterns.

The University's Biological Services Unit was inspected during the year, as part of the Department of Health's inspection programme of establishments where ASPA- related research are undertaken. Conventional rooms on the Establishment License were inspected to ensure compliance with the Home Office Code of Practice for the housing and care of animals bred, supplied or used for scientific purposes, alongside the environmental conditions in which the animals are housed. In addition, training records for competence in regulated procedures for selected personal license holders were reviewed. Staff training records for Biological Service Unit technicians were also requested for review. The low-risk findings identified from the Inspection have been actioned as part of our continuous quality improvement processes.

The Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS) audited the University in relation to the Nagoya protocol and the process concluded in November 2023.

The Faculty Research Ethics Committees (RECs) undertake an audit of those studies that have undergone proportionate review, to ensure this process is being complied with. The Faculty RECs make an annual report to the Research Governance, Ethics, and Integrity Committee, with the Faculty REC Chairs bringing any matters requiring more urgent attention to the quarterly meetings.

2B. Changes and developments during the period under review

Please provide an update on any changes made during the period, such as new initiatives, training, developments, also ongoing changes that are still underway. Drawing on Commitment 3 of the Concordat, please note any new or revised policies, practices and procedures to support researchers; training on research ethics and research integrity; training and mentoring opportunities to support the development of researchers' skills throughout their careers.

Training

Alongside the induction programmes for post-graduate students and training for their supervisors the following specific events were held:
- March 2024, the School of Biological Sciences hosted an event to understand more fully the requirements of the Nagoya Protocol. The Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS) and Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) event was opened to

all relevant research organisations across Northern Ireland. An opportunity to seek feedback regarding the event, which 36 attended, which proved positive.

- The School continued to demonstrate its commitment to the integrity of research, and compliance with legislative requirements by holding an event in April 2024 for their staff on Research Integrity. This event focused on research integrity, authorship, team science and collaborations and formed part of a series seminars contributing to research integrity.
- In May 2024 the Research Collaboration Advice Team (RCAT) participated in the University's senior leadership forum. RCAT also spent time with staff whose role it is to implement government requirements be it in international student recruitment, cultivation of overseas relationships or managing research portfolios.
- In June 2024 the Royal Irish Academy hosted a public panel meeting on 'What is Ethical Research', in the School of Chemistry and Chemical Engineering. This session looked at ethical research through the lens of trusted research, clinical trials, personal and public involvement and nanotechnology/big research data.
- In addition to these new events, monthly human tissue act training was provided to staff and students working with tissue.

On-line Training
The University currently holds a license for Epigeum's Good Research Practice training. During the year the UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO) issued their research integrity training, which the University is currently piloting.

<u>Data Management</u>

Several developments occurred within Research Data Management (RDM) during this time. Of note was the provision of a suite of training resources to researchers in the form of Research Data Management LibGuide. New training programmes (for example, "Finding and Sharing Research Data," "Interviews and Research Data" & "Let's Get Persistent with Your Research") were also created.

In total 32 one-to-one sessions and approximately 35 training sessions (staff and students) were delivered in this period, numbering a combined total of 2,1000 attendees in total. The Research Data Librarian represented Open Research across Faculty and School Research Ethics Committees (RECs), to provide feedback and input regarding the data sharing implications for proposed research.

This was in addition to the provision of continued core services - review of data management plans and creation of datasets in the data repository - also continued; new guidelines/instructions for data curation of datasets in the data repository were issued, resulting in the sharing of data that is now more FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Reusable) enabled.

One significant development was increased collaboration with cross-institutional partners via the Research Data Management group and moves towards an incipient Data Access Committee. This group is committed to developing solutions to promote the FAIR and ethical sharing of research data. A further notable event was the Research Data Management workshop event, organised in September 2023. This was organised by the RDM Librarian for research support professionals across the institution. This event saw a leading Research Data Management expert from the University of Bristol, speak on salient aspects of RDM at a series of two engaging talks.

Research Ethics Committees

During 2022-23 the University recruited lay members to their Animal Welfare Ethical Review Body and their Faculty Research Ethics Committees. An induction day was held at the end of August 2023. This event included an introduction by current sitting Chairs, followed by an overview of Research Ethics at QUB from a Research Ethics Officer. As data protection in research can have ethical implications, the lay members received training on the data protection implications. There was an opportunity to discuss case studies of research projects and engage with lay members who had already served on the Faculty Research Ethics Committees.

Training on data protection was provided to all three Faculty RECs, equipping members with the necessary knowledge to identify how data protection can feed into ethical concerns.

The University's Research Data Librarian, who is a member of the Faculty RECs in MHLS and EPS and therefore is able to engage in the ethical issues relating to data management provided training to the Faculty REC chairs in AHSS to increase awareness of integrity in research data management in research studies.

2C. Reflections on progress and plans for future developments

This should include a reflection on the previous year's activity including a review of progress and impact of initiatives if known relating to activities referenced in the previous year's statement. Note any issues that have hindered progress, e.g. resourcing or other issues.

The Annual Statement for the academic year 2023-24 demonstrates research integrity is an integral part of the University business. In addition to the elements that have been outlined in detail, research integrity forms an integral part of the University's research strategy. In addition, the Research Culture Roadmap has been updated with areas to support research integrity identified.

In recognition of the importance of the ethical review processes, the University has committed to procuring an IT system that would enable the automation of a research ethics management system. It is intended that this system would also integrate and support governance functions such as information compliance. A clear, standardized and proportionate approach to ethical approvals will enhance research quality and integrity. Dedicated resource to assist in setting up the system and deliver training to support the implementation has also been identified.

As the year ends, the University is aware that potential indicators for research integrity have been identified by the UK Committee on Research Integrity. We await the final indicators being developed as part of the People, Culture, and Environment component of REF 2029. These indicators will form the basis of development work for 2024-25 and beyond.

2D. Case study on good practice (optional)

Please describe an anonymised brief, exemplar case study that can be shared as good practice with other organisations. A wide range of case studies are valuable, including small, local implementations. Case studies may also include the impact of implementations or lessons learned.

As noted above, the University's School of Biological Sciences commenced a programme of research integrity to build a community of team science through 2023-24. The initiative examined integrity through the lens of supervision, within team science, and in global collaborations and partnerships. Following a series of talks School members discussed the PhD's students' journey and how what was required to enhance their experience and the support they required.

Running alongside staff events the School hosts doctoral students from a broad range of funding schemes. Those on UKRI-funded doctoral training programs follow an established scheme that is delivered by their respective schemes. However, this left a gap in training for students funded through different schemes. This was identified through student representatives on our PGR Voice Committee. To address this, the School has developed a comprehensive training scheme for doctoral students in the first year of their enrolment. In Semester 1, this takes the form of the SEED (statistics, ethics, and experimental design) training module. Research integrity is at

the centre of this module. The Head of Research Governance, Ethics and Integrity delivers a dedicate session on Research Integrity and the systems in place to support this at QUB, as well as introducing discipline-specific considerations such as the Nagoya protocol. Sessions on ethics cover the breadth of human, animal, and environmental research that happens within the School. The remainder of the training focusses on underpinning research integrity by equipping students with knowledge of robust experimental design and statistical analysis. Emphasis is based on ensuring experiments are designed with sufficient statistical power and analysed with appropriate methods to ensure conclusions are based on research which can be trusted. Training in Semester 2 moves the focus onto students taking the lead in designing their own personal development plan for their doctoral training in our PLANTS (planning and transferrable skills) module. This aligns to Vitae's Researcher Development Framework and encourages students to take a holistic approach that encompasses training and development across the four domains of the framework.

Section 3: Addressing research misconduct

3A. Statement on processes that the organisation has in place for dealing with allegations of misconduct

Please provide:

- a brief summary of relevant organisation policies/ processes (e.g. research misconduct procedure, whistle-blowing policy, bullying/harassment policy; appointment of a third party to act as confidential liaison for persons wishing to raise concerns) and brief information on the periodic review of research misconduct processes (e.g. date of last review; any major changes during the period under review; date when processes will next be reviewed).

- information on how the organisation creates and embeds a research environment in which all staff, researchers and students feel comfortable to report instances of misconduct (e.g. code of practice for research, whistle-blowing, research misconduct procedure, informal liaison process, website signposting for reporting systems, training, mentoring, reflection and evaluation of policies, practices and procedures).

- anonymised key lessons learned from any investigations into allegations of misconduct which either identified opportunities for improvements in the organisation's investigation procedure and/or related policies / processes/ culture or which showed that they were working well.

As required by the Concordat to Support Research Integrity the University has in place Regulations to Govern the Allegation of Misconduct in Research, maintained by the Research and Enterprise Directorate. The People and Culture Directorate are responsible for the Bullying and Harassment Policy, working closely with colleagues in R&E to ensure Funder's requirements are met.

The Registrar's Office is responsible for maintaining the Whistle Blowing Policy, amongst many others that underpin robust corporate governance requirements and add to the wider corporate integrity agenda. All Regulations, Policies and procedures in this space are reviewed and updated when legislation and/or codes of practice mandate or at routine review – normally every 2-3 years. The Regulations Governing and Allegation of Misconduct in Research were last reviewed and updated on October 2021. The review scheduled for 2023-24 has been delayed owing to staff absence.

The Research Governance, Ethics and Integrity Webpages have the information required for the reporting of allegations.

During this reporting period no new allegations were received, however at the time of writing five concerns have been received in two weeks.

Addressing research misconduct and the actions required to ensure the accuracy of the research records spans across reporting timescales. Work has continued during 2022-23 to ensure the correction of the research record for two of the allegations received during 2022-23.   This has been a slow process and it has been challenging to secure swift actions by publishers. For one manuscript an erratum has been published. Work continues to correct the research record for the other outstanding matter.

3B. Information on investigations of research misconduct that have been undertaken

Please complete the table on the number of **formal investigations completed during the period under review** (including investigations which completed during this period but started in a previous academic year). Information from ongoing investigations should not be submitted.

An organisation's procedure may include an initial, preliminary, or screening stage to determine whether a formal investigation needs to be completed. These allegations should be included in the first column but only those that proceeded past this stage, to formal investigations, should be included in the second column.

Type of allegation	Number of allegations			
	Number of allegations reported to the organisation	Number of formal investigations	Number upheld in part after formal investigation	Number upheld in full after formal investigation
Fabrication	0			
Falsification	0			
Plagiarism	0			
Failure to meet legal, ethical and professional obligations	0			
Misrepresentation (eg data; involvement; interests;	0			

qualification; and/or publication history)				
Improper dealing with allegations of misconduct	0			
Multiple areas of concern (when received in a single allegation)	0			
Other*				
Total:	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
*If you listed any allegations under the 'Other' category, please give a brief, high-level summary of their type here. Do not give any identifying or confidential information when responding.				
[Please insert response if applicable]				