

# University of Kent Annual Statement on Research Integrity

## Section 1: Key contact information

Question	Response
<b>1A. Name of organisation</b>	University of Kent
<b>1B. Type of organisation:</b>	Higher Education Institution
<b>1C. Date statement approved by governing body (DD/MM/YY)</b>	06/03/24
<b>1D. Web address of organisation's research integrity page</b>	<a href="https://www.kent.ac.uk/research-innovation-services/research-ethics-and-governance">https://www.kent.ac.uk/research-innovation-services/research-ethics-and-governance</a>
<b>1E. Named senior member of staff to oversee research integrity</b>	Name: Tegan Coleman
	Email address: t.coleman-581@kent.ac.uk
<b>1F. Named member of staff who will act as a first point of contact for anyone wanting more information on matters of research integrity</b>	Name: Tegan Coleman
	Email address: t.coleman-581@kent.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

#### Policies

The University of Kent expects that all research, and the application of research, undertaken at or on behalf of the University is conducted in line with best ethical practice and complies with all laws and regulations. To this end, our Code of Ethical Practice for Research outlines our expectations for staff and students when conducting research. This is due for review in the 2024 Summer term.

To support our Code of Ethical Practice for Research, the Code of Practice for the Investigation of Allegations of Misconduct in Research ensures that, where conduct falls short of our standards, the University of Kent have an objective and impartial system in place to investigate suspected misconduct. This is due for review in the 2024 Spring term.

#### Systems

At the University of Kent, the Research Ethics and Governance Committee is formed of academic and professional services representatives from across the University's schools, divisions and departments. The aim of the Committee is to encourage the dissemination of good ethical practice and quality in University research and enterprise activity. The following activities fall under the Committee's remit:

- 1) Maintain oversight of University policies, procedures, criteria and guidelines regarding research ethics and governance

- 2) Provide a forum to discuss research ethics and governance issues that affect University research activity
- 3) Advise the Senate on broader research ethics and governance issues
- 4) Monitor the work of the University Research Ethics Advisory Groups (REAGs)
- 5) Provide a forum for appeals to ethical decisions taken by the REAGs

The Research Ethics and Governance Committee meets 3 times a year, once per term. This Committee submits their meeting reports to the Senate, The University Ethics Committee and the Research and Innovation Board.

The University's Research Ethics Advisory Groups (REAGs) have devolved responsibility for the ethical review of research and enterprise projects. Currently, 14 REAGs serve the different divisions and schools within the University. All reviewers for the REAGs are academic staff members and where a project is identified to be 'high-risk', a minimum of two reviewers are assigned to review applications. All REAGs submit an annual report to the Research Ethics and Governance Committee to discuss their applications and any challenges.

The University of Kent also convenes an Animal Welfare Research Ethics Review Board (AWERB) to ensure any animal research conducted at or on behalf of the University is in line with best ethical practice and complies with all laws and regulations.

### **Communication and Engagement**

The University underwent a restructure in Summer 2023 which led to an opportunity to re-engage people across the University on matters of ethics. This involved a review of current processes and policies at the University and communication between the new Research Culture and Governance team with Chairs of REAGs, ethics representatives, reviewers for REAGs and researchers at the University.

The Research Culture and Governance team prepares and publishes a monthly newsletter to inform all interested and relevant parties at the University on updates to ethics policies and processes at the University, and highlight interesting events relating to ethical research, both internal and external.

Further to this are the establishment of four new Communities of Practice: Pre-Award, Post-Award, Data Management, and Ethics, Governance and Assurance. The aims of these communities are to foster collaboration, knowledge and best practice sharing among staff engaged in activities related to each topic. Their purpose is to provide spaces for people to connect, exchange insights, share resources, and collectively develop and enhance their skills to enable best practice

approaches to each area that actively supports and enabled research to be undertaken at Kent with the uttermost integrity.

### Culture

Fostering a positive research and innovation culture is a high priority for the University of Kent. For this reason, the formation of the Research and Innovation Support Culture and Governance team was confirmed as part of the organisational restructure in Summer 2023. The new team structure was implemented, alongside other developments across the department, on 1 September 2023. More information about these organisational changes is included in section 2B.

The Research and Innovation Support Manager (Culture and Governance) leads this team and plays a key role in supporting significant culture change across the University. They are responsible for monitoring and evaluating Kent's existing research culture and implementing of best practice support into practice and policy across areas such as: staff development; reward and recognition; open research and impact; equality, diversity and inclusion in research and innovation; responsible research and innovation; and nurturing a supportive and collegiate environment.

They liaise with Research and Innovation leaders from across the organisation via their combined membership of the Research Culture and Environment Steering Group, which is Chaired by the Deputy Director for Research and Innovation. Integrity is a core component of University of Kent culture which is why the Research Ethics and Governance has been expanded into the newly formed Research Culture and Governance team. Embedding ethics within this space will ensure continued prioritisation of integrity as a core component of its research culture.

The Senior Research Ethics and Governance Officer, also within the Research Culture and Governance team, plays a key role within the University by providing specialist support on research ethics, governance, and integrity. They lead on policy development and offer expert guidance that enables the University to respond to changes in the regulatory environment affecting research and research ethics. They are the University's Sponsor representative in relation to health and social care research that falls with the United Kingdom Policy Framework for Health and Social Care. They have continued to provide one-to-one support sessions for students, and have delivered at several multi-disciplinary lectures, on the topic of ethics.

### Leadership

- Vice Chancellor of the University of Kent (*Member of the Senate*)
- Deputy Vice Chancellor for Research and Innovation (*Member of the Senate, Research and Innovation Board, Research Culture and Environment Steering Group*)
- Director of Research and Innovation Support (*Member of the Senate, Research and Innovation Board, Research Culture and Environment Steering Group*)
- Deputy Director of Research and Innovation Support (*Member of the Research and Innovation Board, Research Culture and Environment Steering Group*)
- Research and Innovation Support Manager (Culture and Governance) (*Member of Research Culture and Environment Steering Group, Institutional Athena SWAN Self-assessment team, Race Equality Charter Working Group, Staff Disability Network Co-Chair, and the Research Culture Enablers Network (University of Warwick)*)
- Senior Research Ethics and Governance Officer (*Member of the Research Culture and Governance Committee*)

### **Monitoring and Reporting**

All REAGs keep detailed records of ethic applications they receive and submit annual reports on the activities to the REGC. Any external ethics application/ethical favourable opinion is recorded by the Senior Research Ethics and Governance Officer so that the University maintains oversight of research projects with ethical considerations.

A review period is underway whereby the newly appointed Research and Innovation Support Manager (Culture and Governance) will review the University of Kent's existing monitoring and reporting processes and undertake Equality Impact Analysis on each. They will seek to understand where our reporting gaps exist and improve and/or develop reporting mechanisms that the University can depend on as a Key Performance Indicators, and that are fully inclusive at their core, by using qualitative and quantitative data sources. This will include reviewing our existing commitment as a signatory to the San Francisco Declaration of Research Assessment (DORA) and the principles of the Leiden Manifesto.

By ensuring that our institutional monitoring practices are embedded in robust, fair, equitable, and transparent ways, it will help us to ensure that our internal and

external reporting obligations can be provided with honesty, trust, and integrity at its heart.

## **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.

### **Newly form Research Culture and Governance team**

A new Research Culture and Governance team was formed during the restructure of Professional Services in Summer 2023. This replaced the former Research Ethics and Governance team, doubling the size of the team by introducing two new roles, and increasing its remit. The team's purpose is to promote a positive research culture at the University, and which has inclusion, integrity, ethics and governance at its core. This team includes the following roles:

- Research and Innovation Support Manager (Culture and Governance)
- Senior Research Ethics and Governance Officer
- Research Ethics and Governance Officer
- Culture and Governance Coordinator

The start date for holders of the new roles: Research and Innovation Support Manager - September 2023; Culture and Governance Coordinator - December 2023. The roles of the two Research Ethics and Governance Officer's, one of which is senior, were original members of the Ethics and Governance team but have also been subject to changes resulting from the University restructure.

The Research and Innovation Support Manager (Culture and Governance) has and continues to speak with members of research and innovation community to seek their views on the existing research and innovation culture at the University of Kent. Additionally, a gap analysis is underway to evaluate best practice approaches to research culture and governance from across the Higher Education sector, to

help us highlight our successes and enable us to improve the support we can provide to our academic, professional service, and student researchers. Completion is expected early in 2024. Outcomes from each of these approaches will be reviewed and used to prioritise developments to the University's research culture in its broadest terms, across practice and policy. This a key part of the managers role in supporting significant culture change across the University (e.g. staff development; reward and recognition; open research and impact; equality, diversity and inclusion in research; responsible research and innovation).

### **Training and Development**

Part of the change of culture needed is not just ensuring a positive experience for individuals researching and studying at Kent, but about ensuring the environment in which our staff work to provide these professional services is equitable and positive.

Training and development are keys ways to impact the University's research culture and so designing a suite of training for a wide range of audiences is a key goal. There are currently countless silos of training and development approaches being undertaken across our Divisions, Centres, Institute's, and Departments. Training may be provided by members of staff from within the departments. However, Professional Services (PS) teams often provide training to research staff and students from across the university. Frequently, training is duplicated by PS teams for different departments, causing increased workloads with no additional resource. The Research and Innovation Culture and Governance team are actively building a central repository of training resources that have so far been created at local level. Further to this, the team are leading on providing a central platform to share all training events being hosted or delivered by teams across the University. These will help provide central oversight of training and enable sharing of resources. It will also help us to understand the existing training offers, and explore opportunities to enhance this for all those involved in research and innovation at the University of Kent. At the University, supervisors of students below doctoral level are responsible for their ethical conduct. To ensure staff feel supported when guiding students, the Culture and Governance team have designed and trialed new training for supervisors, with expected rollout in 2024, and includes the following topics: Ethical Risk, Internal Ethical Approval Process and External Approval Routes.

### **Open Research**

The University now has an [Open Research statement](#) and an agreed action plan. The Open Research Team within Information Services took a lead in coordinating work through the 'Promote an Open Research Culture at Kent' project. This

important initiative is overseen by the University's Research Culture and Environment Steering Group (RCESG). The statement and plan resulted from a well-attended Open Research workshop in September 2023 which engaged university stakeholders.

A review of guidance and policy to support the Open Research environment resulted in two new draft policies, the **Research Data Policy** and **Research Publications Policy** and new Open Research webpages. To support Open Research practice, technical changes to the Kent Academic Repository (KAR) were made. A new 'item type' for pre-prints in KAR now enables Kent's research community to share work and seek feedback earlier in the publication process.

Increasing visibility and access to Kent research is a core area of focus. A project to digitise theses means that 75% of Kent's thesis collection is now digital and openly available worldwide, with data showing downloads from a diverse range of countries. Similarly, investment in Read and Publish Agreements by the Library allows Kent authors to publish Open Access (OA) without the need for separate funding. These agreements enabled Kent researchers to publish a greater number of OA articles in 2022-23.

Additionally, Library Services piloted software tools to increase access and participation in research and improve research conduct and reproducibility. As of November 2023, an enhanced LibrarySearch Discovery service enables access to 50 million+ curated Open Access resources as part of a pilot. This is a publicly available discovery tool.

## **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.

Our previous annual report to Senate can be found on our website (<https://www.kent.ac.uk/research-innovation-services/research-ethics-and-governance>). We are pleased to report the establishment of the Kent and Medway Medical School (KMMS) REAG that will handle ethics applications for staff and students within the medical school. Additionally, our ethical review checklist was clarified to reduce ambiguity regarding data only studies.

Standardisation of ethical review process remains a challenge. While all REAGs follow the same principles of having two academic staff review applications, the administration of the review can vary between REAGs. This leads to a difference in experience for staff and students in the review process and also affects policy/process updates. Standardisation of the ethical review process remains a core goal for the Research Culture and Governance team.

The University is mindful of emerging ethical concerns, namely AI in research. This involves both research on AI and research which uses AI as a tool. A review of current policy and process is underway to confirm that research involving AI is appropriately triaged to ethical review.

Looking forwards, a project to enable UKRI funded Kent researchers to publish long-form publications is in its early stages. Project outputs will include guidance, communications, services and processes to support compliance with funder requirements. Initial guidance for alternative OA models including [Diamond and free OA publishing](#) is in place with the aim to maximise opportunities for items not eligible for UKRI central funding.

Author rights retention to support OA publishing of outputs is another area of future focus. This reflects sector wide developments and other universities now support their researchers to retain rights by adopting Institutional Author Rights Retention Policies (IARRPs). Early work is underway to inform planning towards adoption of this approach at Kent in future.

## 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, whistleblowing, 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.

The Code of Practice for the Investigation of Allegations of Misconduct in Research ensures that, where conduct falls short of our standards, we have an objective and impartial system in place to investigate suspected misconduct.

Our website lists our whistleblowing contact and we have a specific policy which seeks to balance protections for individuals who want to report misconduct with protections for staff and student at the University against inaccurate allegations.

All staff are required to complete mandatory training modules on diversity, equality and inclusion and our 'Respect at Kent' policy provides a code of conduct for our students.

3 cases of research ethics misconduct were reported and resolved during 2022/2023. All 3 instances related to student research projects which has highlighted an increased need for engagement with students and their supervisors on matters of research ethics. These cases were resolved informally as they did not impact participants and the preferred route was education on best ethical practices.

**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	0	0	0
Falsification	0	0	0	0
Plagiarism	0	0	0	0
Failure to meet legal, ethical and professional obligations	3	0	0	0
Misrepresentation (eg data; involvement; interests; qualification; and/or publication history)	0	0	0	0
Improper dealing with allegations of misconduct	0	0	0	0
Multiple areas of concern (when received in a single allegation)				
<i>Other</i>	0	0	0	0
<b>Total:</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>