

## Annual Research Integrity Statement 1<sup>st</sup> August 2020 – 31<sup>st</sup> July 2021

### Foreword

1. Aberystwyth University is firmly committed to the principles found within the **Concordat to Support Research Integrity**. To improve accountability and provide assurances that measures are being taken to support high standards of research integrity, the Concordat advises that employers of researchers should produce an annual statement to be presented to their own governing body which provides:
  - A summary of actions and activities that have been undertaken to support and strengthen understanding and the application of research integrity issues
  - 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
  - A statement on what the institution has learned from any formal investigations of research misconduct that have been undertaken,
  - 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

### Purpose and Context

2. This annual statement sets out the University's position in relation to research integrity, including what actions are undertaken to achieve compliance, as well as assurances of the process for and full disclosure of any allegations of research misconduct. This statement will be made publicly available through the Aberystwyth University website.

3. This public statement concerns research undertaken by academic staff and postgraduate research students. Research undertaken by undergraduate and taught postgraduate students is administered by the Academic Registry.
4. Research is an integral part of Aberystwyth University's mission and work. As a recipient of public funding, the University recognises the need to be innovative and ambitious yet responsible and professional. This is encapsulated in the **University Strategic Plan 2018-23**.
5. 95% of the research activity submitted to REF2014 by Aberystwyth University is of an internationally recognised standard. In order to maintain and build upon the University's successful research portfolio, it is important that we are committed to maintaining the highest standards in our research, from design through to dissemination, by demonstrating openness, rigour and integrity in all of our research activity.
6. We achieve this through underpinning our research with a number of quality processes and by providing relevant support, policies and guidance in a widely-accessible format.

### **Period covered by this Annual Statement**

7. This Annual Statement reports the actions and activities undertaken during the 2020/2021 Academic Year. This report also provides the required statement on research misconduct for the same time period.

### **Policies and procedures**

8. The University hosts a number of [policies and procedures](#) to not only ensure that research is conducted appropriately, but to also ensure that effective mechanisms exist for the reporting of any concerns or queries. These policies are regularly reviewed and monitored by the appropriate [University Governance](#) committee:
  - [Research Ethics Framework](#)
  - [Sensitive Research Policy](#)
  - [Procedure for the Investigation of Misconduct in Research](#)
  - [Public Interest Disclosure \(Whistleblowing\) Policy](#)

- [Professional Integrity Protocol](#)
- [Data Protection, Processing & Retention Policies](#)
- [Research Data Management Policy](#)

#### AU's Sensitive Research Policy (related to Prevent Duty)

9. Researchers considering or undertaking research on sensitive topics, which may include areas associated with the Prevent Duty <https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/hse/proc-prac/prevent/> should ensure that the appropriate ethics requirements have been considered and satisfied, and consult the University's Sensitive Research Policy and Procedure.  
<https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/media/departmental/healthsafetyenvironment/Sensitive-Research-Policy-and-Procedure.pdf>
10. The University acknowledges that academic freedom is key in relation to its research activities. However, the University also has a duty to ensure that research, particularly research that is sensitive in nature, is conducted ethically and appropriately.
11. The University has produced a Sensitive Research Policy Procedure which all researchers (both staff and students) need to follow if they are using sensitive data. Compliance with this policy allows the University to demonstrate to external authorities that any use of such material forms part of legitimate research. Although, we cannot guarantee that this will provide protection from any investigation by such authorities, should the situation ever arise.

## **Actions and Activities in 2020-2021 undertaken to support and strengthen understanding and the application of research integrity issues**

### 12. Terms of Reference for the University's Research Ethics Committee

12.1 Aberystwyth University's terms of reference for the University Research Ethics Committee were reviewed and approved in February 2021.

### 13. Terms of Reference for the Research Ethics Panel

13.1 Aberystwyth University's terms of reference for the University's Research Ethics Panel were reviewed and approved in February 2021.

### 14. Coronavirus Policy

14.1 The University has worked to ensure that all staff, students and participants in research are able to work safely during the coronavirus pandemic. UREC approved a 'Research Ethics Guidance Policy for Covid19' which was developed to advise researchers on how to manage their projects during the Covid19 pandemic. The policy has been continually reviewed and evolved in line with the current government guidance and provides guidance on:

- Managing ongoing research projects
- Conducting research remotely
- New research projects
- Face to face research
- Research projects related to Covid19
- International Research

14.2. The University currently advises researchers that research which involves human participants should be conducted remotely wherever possible. For as long as there are social distancing restrictions implemented within the UK. The University has directed researchers towards guidance available for managing research online to support them during this time. Researchers can apply to undertake research face to face with human participants, where conducting research remotely is not possible, and a risk assessment

must be undertaken to identify any risks which may affect either the researcher or the participants and ensure that these risks are managed and mitigated.

## 15. Governance and Ethics

UREC discussed the publication by the UK Research Integrity Office and the Association of Research Managers and Administrators '[Support and Review in Research Organisations](#)' alongside consideration of the current review processes within the University. It is an action point for the next academic year to develop this discussion and to develop new processes if necessary to ensure that the University continues to achieve high standards of ethical review in the most efficient way.

### 16. Responsible use of Metrics

16.1 The University has published a [statement](#) on the responsible use of metrics.

16.2 The University has signed the Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) which recognises the need to improve the way in which researchers and the outputs of scholarly research are evaluated.

## Training

17. Training and awareness raising in the areas of ethics and integrity plays an important role in facilitating good research practice. Training and awareness raising events at Aberystwyth are aimed at all levels of researchers and are delivered in a variety of formats.

18. To date, there has been a drive to ensure that student and early career researchers are aware of their responsibilities towards maintaining the highest ethical standards when undertaking their research.

19. The University has been able to maintain all of the current training sessions offered throughout the coronavirus pandemic and was successful in moving all training sessions which were available before March 2020 online using teams.

20. At an UG and PGT level, module co-ordinators and other departmental staff are encouraged to embed the appropriate University processes and procedures into the delivery of their teaching. Undergraduate training on research ethics is organised on a departmental level. At a PGR level, RBI delivers the '*Ethics, Plagiarism and Academic Practice*' module, which is facilitated by the Graduate School. This module is compulsory for all new research students (PhD & MPhil). This module must be passed in order for the student to progress on to study year two. This module is run every September and January.

21. Early career researchers and newly-appointed academic staff are invited and encouraged to attend a number of sessions which are tailored and delivered throughout the academic year. Existing research staff members are also able to attend any of the available sessions. We continue to participate in the rolling programme of AU-wide *Research Good Practice* sessions facilitated by RB&I, which were delivered to a range of new and existing research staff. These Research Good Practice sessions are delivered throughout the academic year and a different session is delivered every two weeks from September to May of each academic year.
22. The University remains pleased with the levels of engagement from the research community and will continue to develop and refine its training offering ready for the 2021/22 academic year.

### **External Memberships**

23. RBI continues to actively participate in the [Association of Research Managers and Administrators](#) (ARMA).
24. The University is a member of the [UK Research Integrity Office](#) (UKRIO). This has enabled the University to receive support in matters of research integrity and misconduct, consistent with the principles and expectations found within the Concordat to Support Research Integrity.

### **Procedure for the Investigation of Misconduct in Research**

25. 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
26. The University takes all allegations of misconduct in research seriously and has developed a procedure to facilitate full exploration of potentially complex matters in research that can arise in situations where misconduct may have taken place.
27. This procedure follows the guidelines for a Procedure for the Investigation of Misconduct in Research issued by the UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO) in August 2008 and in accordance with guidelines from the Concordat. Its objectives are to ensure that issues of misconduct in research may be addressed appropriately and investigated effectively and to enable an independent panel to produce a report on the basis of which the University may initiate appropriate action.

28. The use of this Procedure *will* be informed by the principles of Fairness, Confidentiality, Integrity, Prevention of Detriment, and Balance.
29. There are three stages to the procedure for the investigation of misconduct in research. Any complaints of misconduct in research must be made in writing.
- A preliminary stage is held where the allegation of misconduct is formally acknowledged and the nature of the allegations are reviewed. If the allegations of misconduct cannot be entirely discounted at this point then the second stage will commence.
  - A screening stage is then undertaken and a Screening Panel will be convened (comprised of the relevant Institute Director and two senior members of academic staff at least one of whom should be from the same Faculty as the Respondent) to determine whether the allegations of misconduct in research require formal investigation. This is completed within thirty working days. The Chair will provide a report of the Screening Panels' findings to the on whether a formal investigation is required.
  - The Formal Investigation Stage is held where a Formal Investigation Panel is appointed. The Formal Investigation Panel will comprise a Pro Vice-Chancellor (normally the PVC with responsibility for Research) in the Chair and two senior members of academic staff from the same Faculty as the Respondent. The panel should be appointed within thirty working days of the receipt of the Screening Panels' report recommending a formal investigation. The panel will examine the evidence collected and undertake any further investigations necessary and interview the respondent and the complainant. There is no time limit set for this stage and it will be completed as soon as possible.

29. The University strives to maintain a culture which promotes good practice and encourages honest and ethical research. Researchers have a responsibility to report any allegations of research misconduct and the University has created a procedure which not only facilitates the investigation of research misconduct but also allows people to feel comfortable in reporting any allegations. The University offers an informal process of managing such allegations to alleviate the worry some may feel if making a complaint. A complainant has three other options other than a formal complaint:

A) Approaching the individual and seeking jointly to find a way to resolve the matter

B) Approaching the Faculty PVC/Head of Service Department and requesting that he/she acts as intermediary between the two parties in resolving the issue;

C) Seeking mediation through an ACAS trained mediator at the University or at a sister university.

30. However, if a researcher felt they had no option but to report an allegation of research misconduct then the University has developed procedures as previously discussed, which not only provides a mechanism to investigate the allegation but to also support the staff involved.

31. Summary of Research Misconduct Investigations

32. Based on the [Procedure for the Investigation of Misconduct in Research](#), the University can report that for 2019-20 there have been **NO high level (formal)** investigations in relation to research misconduct.

33. All queries relating to this statement or any of the University's activities undertaken in relation to the Concordat should be directed to one of the following contacts:

[Professor Colin McInnes](#) – Pro Vice Chancellor for Research, Innovation and Knowledge Exchange

[Lisa Fisher](#) – Research Ethics and Integrity Officer, Research, Business & Innovation

[Dr Jennifer Deaville](#) – Research Development Manager, Research, Business & Innovation

34. If anyone reading this document has concerns relating to the conduct of an Aberystwyth University researcher, they should first consult the appropriate policy and procedure ([see page 5](#)). If you are unsure which policy applies or if you are a participant in a research project, please contact the Research Ethics team who will be able to advise:

✉ [ethics@aber.ac.uk](mailto:ethics@aber.ac.uk)

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