

Research Integrity: Code of Conduct

1. Guiding principles and policy

The University is committed to the highest standards of research integrity and compliance with the Universities UK concordat to support research integrity (1). The concordat provides a comprehensive national framework for good research conduct and its governance. By acting in accordance with the principles and commitments in the concordat, the research community can demonstrate that they:

- Underpin all of their work with common values of rigour and integrity
- Conform to all ethical, legal and professional obligations incumbent on their work
- Nurture a research environment that supports research of the highest standards of rigour and integrity
- Use transparent, robust and fair processes to handle allegations of misconduct
- Continue to monitor, and where necessary improve, the suitability and appropriateness of the mechanisms in place to provide assurances over the integrity of research

The concordat applies to all fields of research and recognises the different responsibilities of: researchers; the University as their employer; and other bodies involved in the research process in each of its commitments.

Concordat Commitments:

1. We are committed to maintaining the highest standards of rigour and integrity in all aspects of research.
2. We are committed to ensuring that research is conducted according to appropriate ethical, legal and professional frameworks, obligations and standards.
3. We are committed to supporting 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.
4. We are committed to using transparent, robust and fair processes to deal with allegations of misconduct should they arise.
5. We are committed to working together to strengthen the integrity of research and reviewing progress regularly and openly.

This code of conduct prescribes standards of work performance and conduct expected by all persons engaged in research at the University.

2. Scope and responsibilities

The Senate of the University, through its Research Committee, has general responsibility to ensure compliance with the Code across the University. Executive Deans have a responsibility to ensure compliance with the Code in their Schools. All staff, students and visiting researchers must familiarise themselves with the Code and ensure that its provisions are observed. The

University will ensure all newly appointed research administrators, researchers and research students are made amply aware of the Code, and Supervisors of students and visiting researchers involved in research will seek to ensure that they comply with the Code.

3. Maintaining the highest standards of rigour and integrity

Researchers should conduct their research in accordance with the core elements of research integrity:

Honesty, in all aspects of research including:

- Presentation of research goals, intentions and findings
- Reporting on research methods and procedures
- Gathering data
- Acknowledging the work of other researchers
- Conveying valid interpretations and making justifiable claims based on research findings

Rigour, in line with prevailing disciplinary norms and standards in:

- Performing research and using appropriate methods
- Adhering to an agreed protocol
- Drawing interpretations from the research
- Communicating the results

Transparency and open communication, in:

- Declaring conflicts of interest
- Reporting of research data collection methods
- Analysis and interpretation of data, including sharing negative results as appropriate
- Presenting work to other researchers and the general public

Care and respect, for:

- All participants and subjects of research, including humans, animals, the environment and cultural objects
- Research stewardship and scholarship for future generations
- Environment impacts of research, including efficiency, waste and sustainability

These core elements apply to all aspects of the research process, including: the preparation and submission of grant and project proposals; data collection and analysis; publication and dissemination of findings; and peer review of proposals and publication.

The primary responsibility for maintaining the highest standards of rigour and integrity lies with researchers who must ensure that they understand the expected standards and act according to them in all aspects of their research work, including peer review.

The University supports researchers in maintaining the highest standards of research integrity by maintaining a research environment that develops good research practice.

4. Ethical, legal and professional frameworks, obligations and standards

Research is governed by a range of ethical, legal and professional frameworks obligations and standards. These frameworks change over time, and so researchers therefore have a responsibility to have an up-to-date knowledge of those that apply to their work both in the UK and any countries outside the UK where research is being conducted.

Researchers should comply with all relevant requirements and associated University policies:

4.1 Registration of research and ethical review

- All research should be registered via the University on-line research governance registration system¹, and where appropriate be considered and given a favorable opinion by an ethics committee

4.2 Research involving human participants

- Researchers should ensure the consent of participants in research, along with the confidentiality of any personal information, and that the research fulfils any legal requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998
- Research involving human participants and/or their tissues and/or data that are being recruited in association with the NHS must be submitted for Research Governance review by the University and if required reviewed and given a favorable opinion by an appropriate National Research Ethics Service Ethics Committee²
- All research involving the NHS (research with patients and/or tissues and/or data and/or staff) must have NHS Permissions at each site involved in the research and be conducted in accordance with the Department of Health Research Governance Framework (2)
- Research involving clinical procedures must be undertaken in accordance with the Good Clinical Practice Standards (3)
- All research with human tissue must be carried out in accordance with the Aston University Quality Manual for the Collection, Storage, Use and Disposal of Human Tissue³

¹ This system will be introduced during the 2014/2015 academic year, in the interim please seek advice on current School procedures

² For advice on these procedures please contact the Aston Health Research and Innovation Cluster – ahric.governance@aston.ac.uk

³ Copies of the Quality Manual can be obtained from the Aston Health Research and Innovation Cluster – ahric.governance@aston.ac.uk

- Additional approval from regulatory bodies should also be sought where necessary, such as the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency

4.3 Research involving animals

- During the design of research that will involve animals, researchers must consider the opportunity for reduction, replacement and refinement of animal involvement
- All research involving animals must have approval of the Bioethics Research Committee
- Appropriate Home Office licenses (institution, investigator and project) must be in place for all studies using animals

4.4 Legal requirements

- All research should comply with any UK and as appropriate overseas legal requirements
- Research should be conducted in accordance with relevant University policies, such as the University Health and Safety Policy

4.5 Professional Standards

- Researchers must comply with any professional codes of conduct, ethical frameworks and guidelines of professional bodies with which they are registered
- Researchers must adhere to specific requirements of research funders as part of the conditions of a grant and broader HEFCE requirements
- Researchers must ensure that academic and non-academic impact of their research is maximised

4.6 Data Management

- There should be clarity at the outset of a research project of the ownership and confidentiality of data and samples created in the course of the research, and the results of the research; where necessary, collaborative agreements should be in place to achieve this
- Research data (methods and results) should be documented in a manner that would facilitate replication by independent researchers and audit
- When submitting a thesis, raw data should not be included in the submission but must be made available, on request, to Supervisors and, subject to ethical and confidentiality considerations, to Examiners

- Research data should be maintained and archived according to local and University policies

4.7 Supervision

- It is the responsibility of Executive Deans (or their nominee, usually the Associate Dean Research) to ensure that appropriate direction of research and supervision is provided, and that training in supervisory skills is provided and undertaken
- Supervision must be in accordance with the University's Code of Practice for Research Degrees and any requirements which may be prescribed from time to time by Senate through its Learning and Teaching or Research Committee

4.8 Publication

- Anyone listed as an author on a publication should accept responsibility for ensuring that he/she is familiar with the contents of the publication and can identify his/her contribution to it
- Anyone who has participated in a substantial way in research (conceiving, executing or interpreting) should be given the opportunity to be included as an author of a publication derived from that research. Appropriate reference to, and acknowledgement of, contributions from significant participants in the research should always be included in publications

4.9 Conflicts of interest

- Any personal conflicts of research interest – potential or actual – should be disclosed to the Executive Dean. Such conflicts of interest include close family affiliation or financial involvement with organisations funding research being undertaken by the researcher

4.10 Peer Review

- All information provided to staff and students as part of peer review processes must be treated as strictly confidential and used for the purpose of the review only. Reviewers must not take advantage of any information provided as part of the review process
- Reviewers should keep all documentation secure during the review process and destroy it once the review process has been completed

4.11 Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

Researchers should pro-actively engage in CPD associated with the changing, ethical, legal and professional obligations associated with undertaking research

5. Research Misconduct

Research misconduct can take many forms, including:

- Fabrication
- Falsification
- Plagiarism
- Failure to meet ethical legal and professional obligations
- Improper dealing with allegations of misconduct, including covering up misconduct and reprisals against whistle blowers

The University has a separate code of practice covering allegations of research misconduct to which researchers must adhere. Within the University, any suspected misconduct should be reported confidentially to the Director of Governance.

When investigating allegations of research misconduct the University will ensure:

- Allegations are investigated in a robust and fair way
- There is no detriment to whistle blowers making allegations of misconduct in good faith
- Investigations of alleged misconduct are reported as appropriate to funders; professional and/or statutory bodies; and research collaborators
- That appropriate steps are taken to remedy any situations arising from misconduct

6. Research Integrity Concordat Compliance

The University will produce an annual statement on compliance to Council which includes:

- A summary of actions and activities undertaken to support and strengthen research integrity
- Assurance that the processes for dealing with allegations of misconduct are transparent, robust and fair, and that they are appropriate for the University
- A high-level statement on any formal investigations of research misconduct that have been undertaken

The statement will be made publically available.

References

1. Universities UK concordat to support research integrity

<http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/highereducation/Documents/2012/TheConcordatToSupportResearchIntegrity.pdf>

2. Research governance framework for health and social care

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/research-governance-framework-for-health-and-social-care-second-edition>

3. Good Clinical Practice Standards

Good clinical practice guide, Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency, September 2012

Approved by the University Senate September 2014