BIRKBECK
University of London

GOVERNORS

27 November 2018

ANNUAL STATEMENT ON RESEARCH INTEGRITY
ACADEMIC YEAR 17-18

Report prepared by: Dr Sarah Lee, Head of Research Strategy Support

Confidentiality: This paper is unrestricted and free to be circulated.

Annual Statement on Research Integrity Academic year 17-18

Context:

Various aspects of research governance are managed through nationally-produced concordats which provide templates of good practice to institutions. These concordats are endorsed by our funding bodies and are used to drive continuous improvement approaches to core research governance questions. Institutions are expected to implement the concordats but have some flexibility in interpretation to ensure activities best suit the local institutional context.

One of these Concordats is the Concordat to Support Research Integrity, which recommends that "employers of researchers should present a short annual statement to their own governing body", and "to improve accountability, and provide assurances that measures being taken continue to support consistently high standards of research integrity, this statement should be made publicly available"

The statement should:

- provide a summary of actions and activities that have been undertaken to support and strengthen understanding and application of research integrity issues (for example postgraduate and researcher training, or process reviews)
- provide assurances that the processes they have in place for dealing with allegations of misconduct are transparent, robust and fair, and that they continue to be appropriate to the needs of the organisation
- provide a high-level statement on any formal investigations of research misconduct that have been undertaken.

Introduction:

As stated in the Colleges Research Integrity Code of Practice honesty, openness, accountability and integrity are vital qualities for any academic researcher in any academic discipline.

At Birkbeck all research is carried out in a climate where high standards of personal conduct are encouraged and expected. Everyone engaged in research, no matter what their level of experience, is expected to act with the highest standards of integrity.

To foster and maintain its research culture, Birkbeck expects all researchers to:

- Maintain open and honest professional standards
- Exercise accountability in research
- Ensure leadership and cooperation in research groupings
- Take special account of the needs of inexperienced researchers
- Ensure training and supervision for researchers
- Plan and conduct research in accordance with the requirements of funders and all relevant College and external codes of practice, legislation and regulatory bodies
- Follow best current ethical practice
- Exercise care and respect for participants in research projects
- Ensure data is stored, shared, preserved and disposed of appropriately and responsibly
- Document and making available research data
- Ensure the results of research are openly accessible
- Acknowledge the contribution of others
- Take appropriate measures to protect intellectual property
- Take action if research misconduct is suspected
- Manage any conflicts of interest in line with the College policy

Any person wishing to raise concerns about the integrity of research being undertaken by the College can do so formally or informally as described in the Colleges Research Misconduct Procedure (http://www.bbk.ac.uk/committees/research-integrity/Research%20Misconduct%20Procedures.pdf). Formal queries are raised with the Vice Master, Professor Matthew Innes (m.innes@bbk.ac.uk) and informal queries can be raised with the Head of Research Strategy Support, Dr Sarah Lee (sarah.lee@bbk.ac.uk).

This statement is part of the College's commitment to further strengthen our research integrity.

Statement:

The College has a suite of policies and procedures in place to ensure that research (and our other activities) are undertaken to the highest standards of integrity and ethics. The College recognises the important role such documents play in embedding a culture of ethics and integrity and in supporting our researchers to understand the standards expected of them in terms of values and behaviours.

These policies and procedures are all available at (http://www.bbk.ac.uk/committees/research-integrity/) and are reviewed against national best practice benchmarks ca. every two years to ensure that they remain relevant and up to date.

Our Research Integrity Code of Practice (http://www.bbk.ac.uk/committees/research-integrity/Research%20Integrity%20Code%20of%20Practice.pdf) is our institutional framework for good research practice, and sits alongside our Responsibilities and Procedures for Ethical Review (http://www.bbk.ac.uk/committees/research-

integrity/Responsibilities%20and%20Procedures%20for%20Ethical%20Review.pdf) which describes the framework and processes we have in place to ensure all our activities, including research, are conducted in accordance with fundamental ethics principles.

These policies are made available to staff through the University web pages (http://www.bbk.ac.uk/committees/research-integrity/) and are referenced in College induction processes.

Summary of actions and activities to support research integrity

The College recognises that there is still a body of work to be done to ensure that all our policies and procedures relating to research integrity, research ethics and research misconduct are effectively communicated to our researchers. Best practice in this area is constantly evolving and the College cannot "rest on its laurels" in assuming that all researchers are aware of latest developments at all times. Training is an essential part of this work.

At the student level, all UG, PGT and PGR students receive relevant training in questions of ethics and integrity as a core part of their research methods modules, and through workshops etc. which are run to support the process of writing dissertations. At the PGR level, this is complimented by generic training and information sessions which are run by BGRS (the Birkbeck Graduate Research School). It is compulsory that all PGR students receive additional training in research ethics and integrity.

In 16/17 some gaps in terms of research integrity training provision for staff were identified, and the College Ethics Committee identified this as a priority area for the 17/18 year. In 17/18, whilst ad hoc training continued through presentations, workshops and guest speakers, the College Ethics Committee worked with the Schools to identify real/realistic, generalisable, challenging questions and a set of training materials were produced and placed onto the College website (http://www.bbk.ac.uk/committees/research-integrity/CEC201705Ethicsroundtablediscussion.pdf) to support Schools to begin to develop more structured training programmes to be delivered in house. Potential gaps in the formal training of supervisors of PhD students were also identified, especially when those supervisors are external to the College. A supervisors network is in the process of being set up in 18/19 which will allow peer-to-peer support in considering questions relating to the supervision of PGR students, and ethics and integrity has been flagged as an area that the network should look into. For the first time in 2017/18 we asked the Schools to report on their training provision around ethics and integrity and this will allow us to monitor that the fruitful discussions from 17/18 translate into practice and to share best practice.

The College is a subscriber to the Research Integrity Office and attends the annual conference.

Following sector good practice, the College is supposed to review its ethics, integrity and misconduct policies and procedures against relevant good practice templates every two years. The latest review point was due to be in the summer term of the 17/18 academic year. This review schedule follows that of many of the templates we use as reference materials. However, many of our reference templates were signalled their intention to publish updated information after the introduction of the GDPR legislation in April 2018 which meant that our updated policies have been pushed back to a College Ethics Committee meeting in the 18/19 academic year.

Processes in place for dealing with allegations of misconduct

Our Research Misconduct Procedure (http://www.bbk.ac.uk/committees/research-integrity/Research%20Misconduct%20Procedures.pdf)outlines the procedure followed when there is an allegation of misconduct in research. This procedure is intended to ensure that that all investigations are carried out in a fair, transparent and timely manner, giving appropriate support to the complainant whilst maintain the presumption of innocence for the respondent. Appropriate protection of confidentiality for both the complainant and the respondent are also embodied within the procedure.

The Procedure draws heavily on the 2008 publication from the UK Research Integrity Office "Procedure for the Investigation of Misconduct in Research" (http://ukrio.org/wp-content/uploads/UKRIO-Procedure-for-the-Investigation-of-Misconduct-in-Research.pdf), but with some amendments to reflect the Colleges relatively small size, evolution (since 2008) in our understanding of best practice, and to map more effectively onto other Colleges processes (for example, to allow a Research Misconduct investigation to constitute the first stage of a formal disciplinary process where this is appropriate).

Statement on investigations of research misconduct undertaken in the 17/18 academic year

In the 17/18 academic year Birkbeck employed ca. 300 staff on academic contracts. In this year the College received:

- one formal complaint of research misconduct - dismissed at the initial stage because the allegation did not constitute research misconduct and could be better dealt with through other College processes
- one informal query about whether or not a specific action could constitute research misconduct

all links accessed 13/11/18.