

Concordat to support Research integrity

Signatories annual statement 2023

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Foreword

This report provides a summary of activities from the Research Integrity Concordat Signatories Group for 2023.

The Concordat to Support Research Integrity, otherwise known as the Research Integrity Concordat, seeks to provide a national framework for good research conduct and its governance.

Signatories to the Concordat are committed to:

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

The ways in which researchers, employers of researchers and funders of research are expected to meet these commitments are set out in relevant sections of the Concordat.

Oversight of the Concordat is provided by the Research Integrity Concordat Signatories Group (the 'Signatories Group'). As noted in the Concordat, signatories will publish an annual statement outlining what we, as a sector, have been doing to further strengthen the integrity of UK research. Representatives of the signatories to the Concordat will also convene an annual research integrity stakeholder forum to provide a focus for debates on research integrity. This report provides a summary of these activities in 2023, on behalf of the Signatories Group.

Signatories to the Concordat

- Cancer Research UK
- Department for the Economy, Northern Ireland
- GuildHE Research
- Medr (Commission for Tertiary Education and Research), formerly the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
- National Institute for Health Research
- Scottish Funding Council
- The British Academy
- UK Research and Innovation
- Universities UK
- Wellcome Trust

Contact us

If you would like to discuss the Research Integrity Concordat or share examples of how your organisation has been implementing its principles, please contact RIsecretariat@universitiesuk.ac.uk.

Updates from signatories

This section contains short updates from Concordat signatories on activities relating to research integrity.

Cancer Research UK (CRUK)

In 2023, CRUK continued to strengthen its initiatives to improve research quality and to promote positive research culture both by leading new projects itself and by working in collaboration with others.

During this period, CRUK published a [new policy](#) to set out CRUK's position on the use of generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools in CRUK funding applications. Broader [guidance for researchers](#) on the use of generative AI was also shared. CRUK led the development of a [joint statement with other major UK funders](#) to agree a joint approach.

Under our [Research Data Strategy](#), CRUK set up a new Data Community Support Unit (DCSU) to help shape researcher-led data activities and support a connected and collaborative data community. CRUK also runs a research data webinar series for researchers.

CRUK promoted Registered Reports and [CRUK's Registered Reports Funding Partnership](#) including hosting a webinar for other major UK research funders and a [blog post with one of our publisher partners](#) for Peer Review Week 2023.

An away day was hosted for research integrity advisors based at CRUK core-funded Institutes to discuss emerging trends and hot topics including Trusted Research, AI and data sharing. Representatives from the UK Committee on Research Integrity and UKRIO attended.

Our research integrity advisors at CRUK core-funded Institutes shared good practice on research integrity through [news blogs](#).

Working with other members of the Research Integrity Concordat Signatories Group, CRUK helped analyse survey feedback on the [pilot annual statement template on research integrity](#).

CRUK evolved its approach to research assessment including [sharing survey feedback](#) from grant applicants and expert reviewers on the introduction of narrative CVs. The charity published an update on how [CRUK's Equality Diversity and Inclusion in research initiatives](#) help to drive change.

CRUK will publish its full 2023 annual statement on its website summarising activities to promote good research practice and to foster a culture of research integrity.

Department for the Economy, Northern Ireland (DfE NI)

DfE NI continues to work with the Research Integrity Concordat Signatories Group and other key stakeholders to support and implement the commitments of the Concordat. The Department continues to promote the principles of the Concordat with the Northern Ireland Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) by making compliance with the Concordat a condition of funding, and seeking their feedback, advice and input on matters arising within this policy area, as required. Each year, DfE NI seeks written confirmation that HEIs are complying with the Concordat via the established annual assurance process. For academic year 2022–23, all funded institutions confirmed that they were operating in compliance with the Concordat.

DfE NI is committed to using transparent, timely, robust, and fair processes to deal with any allegations of research misconduct if and when they may arise. In October 2023, the Department held discussions with the NI HEIs on the Department's Fraud Policy and the HEIs' responsibilities in ensuring that any allegations of research misconduct associated with projects funded by the Department, are notified immediately to the Department and the associated requirement to have this reflected in the HEIs' procedures.

In October 2023, DfE NI representatives participated in a UK Committee on Research Integrity (UKCoRI) round table event in Belfast to discuss possible indicators and accountability for Research Integrity.

DfE NI continues to engage strategically on research integrity with partners on the Research Integrity Concordat Signatories Group, as part of our shared remit within the broader research culture and environment policy area, promoting the sharing of learning and promising practice.

GuildHE Research (GHER)

GHER is the research consortium for smaller and specialist universities and colleges. Its members comprise 30 institutions across England and Wales working in diverse research areas, from agricultural sciences to creative and performing arts. The consortium supports member institutions to conduct excellent research and support positive research environments through: the provision of shared services, including a shared research outputs repository; policy intelligence and influence; doctoral student support; and peer support for Research Leads (those in Director of Research and Pro-Vice Chancellor Research roles).

The consortium has prioritised supporting institutions in research integrity in the organisations' strategic actions. In 2023–24 GHER continued its role as a signatory of the Concordat to Support Research Integrity, and therefore, in combination with Universities UK, extending direct engagement with the Concordat across the full diversity of HEIs in the UK.

Consortium representatives have engaged with colleagues in key bodies, including UKRI and UKRIO, on research integrity matters, helping to elucidate the challenges and opportunities that exist in institutions with a specialist focus or a smaller research environment. Specifically it has contributed to UKCORI's work on developing indicators for research integrity and is part of the signatories working group conducting the review of the Concordat.

GuildHE Research continued to respond to member needs for support with understanding policies and processes relating to integrity matters. A showcase of current trends in research integrity was held for research leads at member institutions, stimulating engagement in the review and gathering case studies from creative and performing arts to illuminate how such practice-led disciplines are engaging researchers in explorations of research integrity. At its annual Doctoral Festival it engaged current PhD students in sessions on Creative Research Methods and Ethics, and the role of allyship and inclusive practices in research. The template for the annual statement has been effectively shared with members and many have adopted it as a useful tool to demonstrate their commitment and account for their actions.

Medr (Commission for Tertiary Education and Research)

Formerly the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), when the statement was submitted.

Through its support and implementation of the Concordat, HEFCW continues to be wholly committed to promoting and supporting the highest standards of research integrity. HEFCW's terms and conditions of funding for all its funded institutions require all institutions to confirm they are compliant with the Concordat through their annual assurance statements. Annual institutional review conversations enable HEFCW to directly engage with funded institutions to ensure adoption of the commitments of the Concordat through institutional practice and policy.

HEFCW continues to work with Welsh higher education institutions, the Welsh Innovation Network (WIN) and the Learned Society of Wales (LSW) on the development of positive research cultures that support good research conduct and its effective governance. In December 2023, HEFCW launched the Wales Research Environment and Culture Fund to support the development of healthy research cultures and environments.

From 1 August 2024, HEFCW's functions will be transferred to Medr (Commission for Tertiary Education and Research), a new arm's length body responsible for funding and overseeing post-16 education and research in Wales.

National Institute for Health Research (NIHR)

In 2023, NIHR has continued to develop thinking around transparency and open data. In support of [NIHRs position on the sharing of research data](#), Data Access and Management Plans (DAMPs) are now required for studies across all NIHR funding programmes contracted from 1 July 2023. To minimise researcher burden these are completed during the startup of the research and, for transparency, will be made available on the [NIHR Funding and Awards website](#). NIHR will monitor the submission and implementation of these plans through the usual programme progress and reporting mechanisms. The NIHR request for DAMPs is aligned with UKRI guidance and HRA requirements for ethical approval, and HRA submissions may be used in substitution.

The NIHR Journals Library has been working to increase the discoverability and transparency of research inclusion, community engagement and sustainability through better guidance and tagging. This is supported through [a new threaded publication approach](#) which enables links to all related publications and is now the primary publications route for the journal.

NIHR has also been considering and updating policies and strategies. The [NIHR Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy](#) was published and updated in early 2023; the [NIHR policy on clinical trial registration and disclosure of results](#) and NIHR data sharing position are currently under review; and a new complaints policy is also in draft which will complement the existing NIHR policy on Bullying and Harassment and the government approach to whistleblowing.

Scottish Funding Council (SFC)

SFC is a committed signatory of the Research Integrity Concordat. SFC sets expectations that all Scottish HEIs implement the Concordat through the [annual outcome agreement](#) process, under the key priority ‘high-quality research and innovation’. In the academic year (AY) 2022–23 the outcome agreement guidance was expanded to invite a statement on research cultures. In AY 2023–24 Scottish HEIs were expected to provide a high-level description of their plans to promote open research and reproducibility within institutional research culture statements.

SFC’s review of [Tertiary Education and Research](#), published in June 2021, highlighted that we can and must do more to improve Scotland’s research culture. This is reflected in the [SFC Strategic Plan 2022–27](#), particularly Priority 2.2. (‘We will promote a supportive research culture for talented people and teams.’). SFC is exploring with the sector how it could best support positive cultures and collaboration at a national level by connecting, convening, and supporting dissemination of good practice.

SFC continues to engage strategically on research integrity and related issues with institutions, with the other members of the Research Integrity Concordat Signatories Group, and with the UK Committee on Research Integrity.

SFC is also working closely with the other UK higher education funding bodies to develop the next Research Excellence Framework (REF) exercise. Research integrity will be considered in the development of a robust and meaningful set of indicators and a robust process for assessment of the people, culture and engagement (PCE) element of REF 2029. We have, and will continue to, engage with a wide range of stakeholders, institutions, research professionals, and researchers from all career stages and disciplinary backgrounds in the development of the next REF exercise.

The British Academy

The British Academy continues to provide a range of funding support to UK and international researchers to further their curiosity-driven academic activities and build their careers. The British Academy's Code of Practice, [published on its website](#), sets out the standards by which it assesses and administers applications for all the funding awarded through its domestic and international portfolio and is reviewed annually. The terms and conditions of its research awards, which were fully revised and updated in March 2024 and communicated to all existing award-holders, together with its scheme notes for applicants, set out the expectations and standards researchers and their employing institutions must follow when conducting research.

The British Academy has a process for investigating accusations of research misconduct and takes proportionate action which might include terminating or suspending a research award. Cases which are notified to the Academy are reviewed with relevant parties - Principal Investigator, Co-Investigators, Other Participants and their Institutions – as appropriate. While most cases may be resolved at institutional level, the Academy reserves the right, as funder, to take suitable action, including, if necessary, the termination of a grant and refund of sums paid out.

The Academy is committed to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in everything we do, including research funding and support for our disciplines. We have dedicated working groups with specific programmes to deliver this commitment and achieve long-term and sustainable change by embedding EDI into our strategic plan and operations. These include the monitoring of a range of diversity characteristics, encouraging the widest pool of applicants to feel that they 'belong' in their engagement with the Academy, and the [Additional Needs Funding scheme](#), launched in 2023, which is designed to be as inclusive as possible by providing specific support to applicants and award-holders which is in addition to any funding already requested for research expenses. During its first full year of operation the Academy approved 18 awards with a total value of £49k out of 104 submissions in total. The Academy is also a partner with UKRI, Innovate UK and others in supporting the EDI Caucus project which is working to establish and disseminate best practice across the academic and innovation communities.

The Academy has continued with the trial of a revised assessment process to our Small Research Grants scheme involving partial randomisation. After initial assessment in the normal way to determine whether an application passes the quality threshold to be suitable for funding, the decision on which applicants are to be offered awards is taken on a randomised allocation basis, removing human bias and partiality from the final decision-making process. This is a trial over three years and will be fully evaluated. Among the advantages of this new process is the ability to offer more feedback to unsuccessful applicants.

With generous support from key partners, the [Early Career Researcher Network](#) has successfully achieved the objectives of its pilot and is now being rolled out across the UK with over 4,000 BA-funded and non-BA funded members recruited so far. The Network offers training and engagement opportunities for all of its members, including, in the past year, on topics such as ethical approaches to researching with children, developing research partnerships to explore the feasibility of establishing specialist alcohol treatment services and creative practice as research.

The Academy continues to embed the principle of equitable partnerships in its internationally-focused programmes. This has included specific reference to the importance of equitable partnerships in Academy scheme notes, a dedicated question in application forms, consideration of the equity of the proposed partnership by assessors and panel members, and ongoing monitoring of the partnership in any award made.

The Academy has also continued to support its programme for Researchers at Risk that is currently focused on those from Ukraine. Awards are for two-year fellowships. The Academy has been able to support 177 researchers to continue their work at UK host organisations through this programme.

UK Research and Innovation

Over 2023–24, UKRI continued its commitment to fostering research integrity and supporting the sector in the implementation of the Concordat.

UKRI continues to host and support the UK Committee on Research Integrity (UK CORI) which launched in 2022. The committee published its [first annual statement in July 2023](#) following the recommendations of the 2018 [Science and Technology Committee Inquiry report](#).

The organisation contributed to the UK government's response to the Reproducibility and Research Integrity SITC report in July 2023 which highlights a range of areas where UKRI supports the sector and sets expectations across for both research integrity and reproducibility.

The Governance of Good Research Practice policy was updated and published in April 2024. The update includes signposting to the [UKRI position statement on funding ethical research](#).

UKRI continues to make progress to the Good Practice Exchange (GPEx). It will use the findings of the [Research culture initiatives in the UK report](#), to develop options for the next stages of delivery.

Universities UK (UUK)

UUK has developed the agenda and papers for discussions of the Research Integrity Concordat Signatories Group. We hope that through these discussions, we will be able to support the sector with implementing the Concordat. UUK also undertook an analysis of the Concordat's annual statements, a summary of which is included in this report. Further, UUK supported the development of, and presented at, the 2023 Research Culture and Practice Forum, which is also discussed in this report.

To promote the importance of research integrity, the [2023 UUK Research and Innovation Conference](#) included a session on "Supporting talent through a positive university research culture". We are keen to continue these discussions with the sector. Separately, with our members we have been feeding into the [Independent Review of Research Bureaucracy](#), which will help to refocus bureaucracy into promoting a culture of transparency and research integrity.

UUK is committed to working with the sector to support the implementation of the R&D People and Culture Strategy.

Wellcome

In 2023, Wellcome published a new funding policy on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion including discrimination and expanded its Bullying and Harassment policy to cover abuse and other harms, to support research culture.

With other stakeholders in the sector, we have:

- Become a member of UKCoRI's working group 'Addressing research misconduct'.
- Published the outcomes of the Concordats and Agreements Review (part-funded by Wellcome).
- Begun creating a set of knowledge modules to inform how to manage information in research misconduct and bullying and harassment cases.
- Worked on the ground with organisations handling cases to ensure a proportionate and appropriate response to cases reported to us.

Monitoring statement

This section provides an analysis of annual statements on research integrity.

Introduction

The revised Research Integrity Concordat was published in October 2019 in line with recommendations set out by the Science and Technology Committee in 2018.

Since then, the Research Integrity Concordat Signatories Group developed an [annual reporting template](#), to help streamline and compare reporting. The template is intended to be flexible for use across different disciplines and size of organisation. The template sets out:

- Key contact information
- Promoting high standards of research integrity and positive research culture
 - Description of current systems and culture
 - Changes and developments during the period under review
 - Reflections on progress and plans for future developments
 - Case studies (optional)
- Addressing research misconduct
 - Statement on processes that the organisation has in place for dealing with allegations of misconduct
 - Information on investigations of research misconduct that have been undertaken.

We reviewed a sample of 20 annual statements on research integrity, focused on organisations using the pilot template. Most organisations used the template in its exact form, while others adapted it to align with organisational branding. Due to the sample size, this section does not include an analysis of allegation numbers.

Emerging themes from case studies:

Promoting high standards of research integrity and positive research culture

Governance frameworks, policies, procedures, types of training, culture and environment, codes of practice, misconduct policies and procedures, committees and conferences, auditing, data management, communications and engagement actions, contact points, monitoring and reporting processes

Changes and developments during the period under review

Reviews of research codes of practice, researcher development programmes, ethics management software, use of research culture funding, new staff and graduate training, web pages, formalised processes, workshops, social media policies, mentoring

Reflections on progress and plans for future developments

New posts, review of procedures, enhancing training, enhancing approaches to audits applications, better options for anonymous reporting, plans for improved awareness raising, new networks, formal training

Statements outline a range of organisational groups tasked with promoting and reviewing research integrity. At a higher level, statements outline how research integrity actions align with organisations' wider strategic plans, with groups such as research governance committees that report to governing bodies. In some cases, activities are embedded as part of organisations' research culture strategies or equivalent.

There are also groups and networks that incorporate oversight processes, including research auditing, ethics, outputs, animal research, plagiarism, whistleblowing, EDI, data protection, misconduct anti-bribery, safeguarding, reproducibility, health and safety and conflicts of interest. More recent developments related to national security / export controls and artificial intelligence.

Informal engagement on research integrity and culture

Some statements outline informal groups where issues such as research integrity and wider research culture issues are discussed, such as ethics drop-in clinics or research culture cafes. Statements also outline engagement with active research networks, and external networks such the UK Committee on Research Integrity, UK Research

Integrity Office, and mission group forums. As part of this, statements highlight wider research culture activities, concordats and initiatives that organisations are engaged with, as well as use of research culture funding.

Communicating policies, processes and procedures on research integrity and culture

Statements outlined how these policies, procedures and contacts are shared, along with active promotion of a culture / environment of academic freedom without discrimination or harassment. Examples included external webpages, intranet sites, newsletters, training, checklists and sharing modelled behaviours. Communications outline the responsibilities of individual researchers to self-educate and comply with requirements, but also where researchers can seek advice at every stage of their research journey e.g. academic mentoring. One example was a new Research Integrity Hub website for clearly articulating the expectations of researchers, sharing best practice and promoting training opportunities.

There were also examples of embedding policies and systems in induction programmes for staff, postgraduates, supervisors, and schools, explaining the ethical, legal and professional obligations and standards. Statements highlighted training opportunities for staff, students and external collaborators. This included training on research ethics and responsible research conduct.

Embedding and reviewing research integrity processes

Statements outlined work to better integrate policies, guidelines and practices to support research integrity and ethics across organisations. This included how codes of practice are embedded with wider policies, such as policies on good research practice, social media, induction processes and software. Also, how work aligns with other concordat / initiative activities. Some statements outline how group memberships were being reviewed, without outcomes including an increase in postgraduate representation on relevant committees. Another example included revisiting equality impact assessments with each updated policy, to ensure that policies are aligned, and monitoring take up of integrity training.

Statements highlighted new staff posts, roles and responsibilities, relating to research integrity. One example was a new Researcher Development Manager, tasked with exploring innovative ways of engaging with researchers to support their ability to deliver excellent research with integrity. Other examples included research integrity champions and advisers. One organisation noted that they are consolidating their

plans of action for research culture with the formation of a Research Culture and Researcher Development Team, within the Research Services Directorate.

Statements highlighted review processes, including pulse surveys, reviews of research ethics by internal auditors, research governance frameworks, light touch annual reviews of frameworks, 'near miss' events, training modules, and the nature of inquiries and policy support. It was noted as important that changes to policies and procedures are circulated to communities.

Future challenges in research integrity

Statements highlighted a range of challenges and developments in the sector, including:

- Reducing barriers to returning or moving into research
- Trusted Research, export controls and the changing geopolitical context
- Changing funder requirements
- National R&D policy developments.

Such is the complexity of these issues, it was noted that they require coordination across several stakeholders. A risk was noted that more time is required to respond to case work, with less resource available for training.

Addressing research misconduct

Statements provide examples of how queries, allegations and investigations into potential research misconduct are managed. This covered a range of areas, including:

- Clear identification of who is responsible for integrity, governance and ethics
- Mechanisms to implement and communicate (anonymised) lessons learned from investigations of research misconduct
- Identified points of contact for informal discussions on research integrity and allegations of research misconduct
- Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblowing) policies and procedures
- Cross referrals to other departments – swift, with respect to confidentiality and process
- Creating a safe environment for policies to be raised

- Tools to support anonymous allegations
- Complaints handling procedures
- Review appeals policies

One organisation noted that they were developing a public facing webpage for all institutional complaints processes. Another noted that they were updating procedures to make responses to allegations more proportionate and timelier.

Research Integrity Forum

The forum is an opportunity to bring colleagues from across the research community together to discuss the developments or challenges relating to research integrity, and share examples of good practice.

On Tuesday 13 and Wednesday 14 June 2023, Universities UK hosted a free online event for all staff in the research ecosystem. The event was hosted in partnership with the Technician Commitment and Researcher Development, Research Integrity and Knowledge Exchange Concordats. Many of these sessions included discussions relating to the Research Integrity Concordat, such as the following:

- **Concordats 101 – what are they, and how do they drive positive research culture?**
The aim of this session was to provide an introductory overview of research culture concordats and initiatives and articulate their role in driving positive research culture and the beneficiaries. Speakers featured representatives from the Concordat steering groups, who provided practical information on engaging with the initiatives.
- **How do staff at institutions work with the concordats and initiatives in practice?**
The aim of this session was to hear from colleagues at institutions who work with and implement the concordats in practice. This was an opportunity to hear about how the concordats have benefitted institutions and their staff, as well as some of the challenges around implementation and how the initiatives can be improved.
- **What does the future look like for research culture concordats and initiatives?**
This session looked at developments in the research culture space, and what it could mean for concordat and initiative owners, institutions, researchers and other key stakeholders in the sector.
- **Supporting research integrity – principles and practice.** This was a joint session, featuring speakers from the Research Integrity Concordat Signatories Group and the UK Committee on Research Integrity, introducing their analysis of annual statements on research integrity from institutions.

Videos of these sessions are available on the [Universities UK YouTube Channel](#).

Forward look

The Signatories Group is undertaking a review of the Concordat, through a review group and consultation process.

In 2024, the Concordat is due to undergo its five-year review, which comprises revisions and updates to the content of the Concordat and not to governance arrangements or structures that surround it. Revision of the content of the Concordat will ensure that it is fit for the future and continues to safeguard research integrity.

The Signatories Group is carrying out the review so that:

The Concordat appropriately reflects recent developments in research nationally and internationally, including technological advances

The Concordat is appropriately aligned with international frameworks for research governance to support research carried out in international contexts

The Concordat is as useful and practical as possible.

The review group comprises representatives of the Signatories Group and is chaired by the UK Committee on Research Integrity.

The review group is particularly keen to hear from across the research sector to inform revisions to the Concordat. This includes researchers and colleagues working in research at all career stages and in all roles; funders of research; research performing organisations; organisations that support research and researchers; and those who commission research.

To enable stakeholders to provide their views, a series of consultation exercises will take place in 2024. First, an online survey was open from May to July 2024. Next, workshops will present possible changes and ask for feedback. Finally, the Signatories Group aim to launch the revised Concordat the final quarter of 2024.