

# Concordat to Support Research Integrity

Signatories annual statement 2022–23

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# Foreword

This report provides a summary of activities from the Research Integrity Concordat Signatories Group for 2022–23.

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 and funders 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. As noted in the concordat, signatories publish an annual statement outlining what we, as a group, have been doing to further strengthen the integrity of UK research. Representatives of the signatories to the Concordat 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 2022–23, on behalf of the signatories group.

## Signatories to the concordat

Cancer Research UK

Department for the Economy, Northern Ireland

GuildHE Research

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](mailto:RIsecretariat@universitiesuk.ac.uk)

# Updates from signatories

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

## Cancer Research UK

In 2022, Cancer Research UK (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 other funders, journals and sector bodies.

CRUK has published its [own annual narrative statement](#) summarising all the actions and activities undertaken as a research funder in 2022 to promote good research practice and to foster a culture of research integrity. Actions included:

- Launching a [new registered reports pilot](#) in collaboration with researchers at the University of Bristol and a consortium of 12 journals. The pilot aims to encourage and incentivise more researchers to publish the results of their research, irrespective of the findings, by streamlining the pathway to submitting a Registered Report (RR) into one combined process.
- Publishing new [funding policies](#) on: research involving the recruitment of human participants; conflicts of interest for CRUK-funded researchers and commercial organisations; Continuing Professional Development (CPD) policy.
- In line with its new [Research Data Strategy](#) launched in 2022, expanding its data sharing and management policy to outline more clearly its expectations and requirements for CRUK-funded research.
- Sharing good practice on research integrity through [news blogs](#) written by research integrity advisors at core-funded CRUK Institutes.
- Supporting the development of the annual statement template on research integrity on behalf of the Research Integrity Concordat Signatories Group and produced by the UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO).
- Initiatives to encourage positive research culture, including partnering with expert organisations to develop targeted positive action [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion](#) initiatives to help diversify our research careers pipeline; publishing a [Statement of Intent for Patient and Public Involvement in our research work](#) and [rolling out narrative CVs](#).

## Department for the Economy, Northern Ireland

The Department for the Economy, Northern Ireland (DfENI) has conducted an annual review of the checklist for funders' commitments as set out in the Concordat. Since last year's review, the Department has put in place a process to deal with any allegations of research misconduct received from the universities and contact details are published on the DfENI website.

The Department continues to promote the Concordat with the Northern Ireland Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) by making compliance with the Concordat a condition of funding. The Department receives assurance that higher education institutions are complying with the Concordat via the annual assurance process and review of the higher education institutions' annual statements that are published on their respective websites. The Department continues to liaise with HEI contacts in order to provide feedback on relevant topics to Universities UK.

## GuildHE Research

GuildHE Research is the research consortium for smaller and specialist universities and colleges. Its members comprise 31 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 2022–23 this was enacted through continuing 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 sector understandings of accountability through a joint webinar with UKRIO, and to UK CORI's work through advising on a review of annual statements.

GuildHE Research continued to respond to member needs for support with understanding policies and processes relating to integrity matters. Through its

Doctoral Festival it also foregrounded research integrity in sessions on Research Culture and Research Ethics.

In the year ahead GuildHE Research sees some significant challenges emerging for ensuring the research integrity debates remain relevant for applied research, practice research, and creative and performing arts disciplines. In particular, it will work with colleagues to understand how reproducibility operates in these areas. It will also be supporting its members to adopt the annual statement template.

## **Higher Education Funding Council for Wales**

Through its support and implementation of the Concordat, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (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 requires all institutions to confirm they are compliant with the Concordat through their annual assurance statements. Annual institutional review conversations enable HEFCW to engage with funded institutions to ensure adoption of the commitments of the Concordat through institutional practice and policy. For the 2022–23 academic year, all funded institutions signed off their research integrity statements and confirmed they were compliant with the Concordat.

HEFCW continue to engage strategically on research integrity as part of the broader research culture and environment piece. This was reinforced in April 2023 through hosting of the UK Committee on Research Integrity (UKCORI), which convened all institutions and facilitated engagement with UKCORI. Engagement with Welsh HEIs pan-Wales, the Welsh Innovation Network (WIN) and the Learned Society of Wales (LSW) supports a collective commitment to promoting and facilitating positive, compliant, and nurturing research cultures and environments where research integrity thrives. HEFCW continues work at the nation level to advocate for, and facilitate collaboration among organisations as well as the sharing of promising practice.

Continued work with the other UK funding bodies in addition to UKRI and the other members of the Research Integrity Concordat Signatories Group ensures promising practice in promoting and implementing the commitments of the Concordat.

## **National Institute for Health Research**

In 2022, the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) has continued to focus on the transparency and scrutiny of our research, while also providing a consolidated

document making clear our commitment to maintaining the highest standards of research integrity.

NIHR is committed to open access, to making research freely, immediately and permanently available online for anyone to read, share and reuse. This maximises the societal, academic, and economic impact of publicly funded research, and enhances the integrity and rigour of research through greater openness and transparency. Over the past year NIHR has been working with Jisc who have established agreements with publishers that support increased and affordable open access publishing. NIHR have been collaborating with Jisc to ensure that non-HEI based researchers get access to similar opportunities which particularly benefits our researchers at NHS Trusts.

After a successful pilot in the previous year, NIHR also launched ‘NIHR Open Research’ which operates alongside the existing Journals Library to provide a platform to publish openly the results of research which was proving difficult to publish elsewhere. It ensures all findings from our funded research are publicly available.

NIHR has also been evaluating and updating its policy on reporting misconduct incidents, in doing so we have aligned our domestic and global research policies for simplicity and transparency. The document reaffirms NIHR’s commitment to sector wide standards of conduct and integrity within:

- The Concordat to Support Research Integrity
- UK Research Integrity Office’s (UKRIO) Code of Practice for Research
- Health Research Authority’s UK Policy Framework for Health and Social Care Research

The policy links to the NIHR policies on safeguarding, preventing harm in research and bully and harassment. It also makes clear any concern or incident will be managed under the UKRIO Code of Practice for Research.

The policy will ensure NIHR provide a single document to cover the principles and expectations, reporting and whistleblowing, and process for investigation; in doing so NIHR will be providing a consolidated resource and route to support anyone who has concerns about research integrity within the context of NIHR funding.

## **Scottish Funding Council**

The Scottish Funding Council (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 ‘research



sustainability'. In the academic year (AY) 2022–23 the outcome agreement guidance was expanded to invite a statement on research culture. Looking ahead to AY 2023–24 promoting open research and reproducibility will be highlighted as particular focuses within 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 and this is reflected in the SFC Strategic Plan 2022–27, 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, recently contributing to the project board for their commissioned HEI annual statement analysis.

## **The British Academy**

In its second year of being a formal signatory to the Concordat, 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, 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 all diversity characteristics, encouraging

the widest pool of applicants to feel that they ‘belong’ in their engagement with the Academy, and the recent launch of a new Additional Needs Funding scheme 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.

The Academy has, during the past year, introduced 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 (ECR) Network has successfully achieved the objectives of the first two-years of the pilot and is now being rolled out across London in the pilot’s final year with plans to expand nationwide by 2025. The ECR Network has over 2,000 BA-funded and non-BA funded members recruited so far.

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.

This year the Academy has also launched a new 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**

In 2021–22 UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) continued to engage the research and innovation sector in addressing the challenges and opportunities in promoting research integrity and implementing the Concordat.

In progressing the recommendation made by the 2018 Science and Technology Committee inquiry report, on behalf of the sector, UKRI officially launched the UK Committee on Research Integrity in 2022. Professor Rachael Gooberman-Hill and Professor Andrew George MBE were appointed co-chairs and started their tenure

engaging the sector through workshops exploring what accountability for research integrity means to different parts of the UK research system.

With Cancer Research UK and GuildHE, UKRI commissioned Research Consulting to explore the potential for developing indicators of research integrity. The work began with an initial exploration of the landscape, opportunities and challenges across the research system. The aim was to co-develop with the sector a framework to evaluate progress on embedding high integrity practices.

Separately, UKRI partnered with ARMA, the Leverhulme Trust and the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) to explore barriers to information sharing across the research and innovation sector, engaging with funders, publishers, and research organisations to map out challenges and responsibilities when research organisations are made aware of research misconduct.

Universities UK, Wellcome Trust and UKRI commissioned phase two of the [Concordats and Agreements Review](#). The review looked at opportunities to create efficiencies and decrease unnecessary bureaucracy by finding alignments in the objectives and reporting in current concordats and agreements.

## Universities UK

Universities UK (UUK) provided secretariat to the Research Integrity Concordat Signatories Group. As part of this role, UUK organised meetings of the group, developed the monitoring statement included in this report, and organised the Research Culture and Practice Forum. UUK also co-commissioned the Concordat and Agreements Review, which explored potential alignments across research concordats and initiatives. UUK is also represented on the [R&D People and Culture Ministerial Coordination Group](#), and has facilitated wider discussions on research policy, including the UUK Pro-Vice Chancellor for Research Seminar, UUK Research and Innovation Conference, and through engagement with member networks. Further, UUK worked with CRUK and UKRI to commission an annual reporting template for the Research Integrity Concordat, which is currently being piloted.

## Wellcome Trust

Wellcome updated its guidance on the [Responsible Conduct of Research](#) in March 2022 including the addition of references to Trusted Research, and launched a new funding policy on [Continuing Professional Development](#) (CPD) in August 2022.

Wellcome also completed a feasibility assessment for a funding policy on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion to support research culture. It is likely that we will publish a

statement in 2023 describing our expectations of researchers and organisations, including a funding policy on discrimination.

With other stakeholders in the sector, we have:

- Input into the early work of the UK Committee on Research Integrity (UK CORI).
- Progressed the Concordats and Agreements Review (part-funded by Wellcome)
- Worked on the ground with organisations handling cases to ensure a proportionate and appropriate response to cases reported to us.
- Continued to discuss the management of information in bullying and harassment cases.

### **Forward look**

In 2023, the Research Integrity Concordat Signatories Group is committed to supporting the sector with the concordat's implementation. This will be achieved in the following ways:

- Evaluating the pilot annual reporting template
- Supporting the outcomes of the Concordats and Agreements Review
- Reviewing the Concordat and ensuring it remains fit for purpose
- Supporting the next Annual Forum and related discussions on research integrity.

# Monitoring statement

This section provides an analysis of signatories' annual statements.

## Executive summary

- Annual statements include a range of examples on how organisations are supporting research integrity through their governance, policies, processes and communications.
- There is considerable variance in the length of these statements and the ways in which they are published.
- There is also variance in how institutions are reporting misconduct. The template annual statement may provide a more consistent mechanism.
- More consistency is needed by way of including named points of contact for research integrity.

## Introduction

The revised Concordat to Support Research Integrity was published in October 2019 in line with recommendations set out by the [House of Commons' Science and Technology Select Committee in 2018](#). It was agreed by the signatories there should be a 12-month period of implementation.

Subsequently, in November 2022, UUK published the pilot annual statement template, developed by UKRIO for the signatories. Use of this standardised template should facilitate and increase consistency of the monitoring of institutions' annual statements; however, at the time of writing use of the template is not yet widespread and so any benefits or issues relating to the template are not yet apparent.

Three points of information were requested for the reporting requirements:

- A named point of contact for research integrity matters.
- A contact to act as a confidential liaison for whistle-blowers or any other person wishing to raise concerns about the integrity of research.
- An annual statement on how the institution is meeting the requirements of the concordat.

This monitoring statement complements UK CORI's [Research Integrity in the UK: Annual Statement 2023](#) which provides a snapshot of research integrity in the UK, highlighting the work already being done by others and identifying areas for further work.

## Content analysis of annual statements

Analysis consisted of randomly selecting 43 institutions from Universities UK's 140 members, then checking those institutions' websites and annual statements against the requirements set out in the Concordat. This analysis was undertaken in April 2023, and it should be noted that more institutions have since published annual statements.

### Presence of an annual statement

The Concordat to Support Research Integrity sets out the requirement that employers of researchers (including the institutions considered here) will:

*produce a short annual statement, which must be presented to their own governing body, and subsequently be made publicly available, ordinarily through the institution's website.*

Of the 43 institutions sampled here:

- 38 (88%) had a distinct annual statement published on their website. The remaining institutions variously:
  - had no document mentioning research integrity,
  - mentioned research integrity within a larger annual statement to the governing body or a senior university committee,
  - had a general code of practice for research integrity, but this did not cover developments and was not updated annually.

### Frequency of reporting

Of the 38 annual statements dedicated to research integrity:

- 14 (37%) had not been updated for the 2021–22 academic year, with the most recent being listed as variously:
  - 2020-21: 11 (29%)

- 2019-20: 2 (5%)
- 2018-19: 1 (3%)
- Of the remaining 24 (63%), 22 were dated for the 2021–22 academic year, while the remaining two were listed as 2022–23. This highlights a potential inconsistency (see below) in how annual statements are dated.

## Dating of statements

In some cases, dates listed on statements describe the (calendar or academic) year in which they are published, while others describe the academic year they cover or in which the statement was initially prepared. Due to the need for review and for approval by a governing body, these dates might differ. While this does not present a substantial issue, it does complicate comparison and might obscure intervals of more than one year. The new template lists only the date on which the statement was approved by the institution’s governing body, so should resolve this inconsistency.

## Formatting and access

Of the 38 annual statements dedicated to research integrity:

- 33 (86%) were provided as a document. Of these:
  - 29 (76%) were provided as a PDF.
  - Four (11%) were provided in Microsoft’s docx format.

Of the remaining five, all provided as webpages, three were provided as a distinct page, while the remaining two simply included the text of the statement within a general research integrity page.

While not an issue among the universities considered here, some other institutions list their statements on their website but do not make these publicly available due to requiring a university login. In some cases, this is a recent draft – not yet approved by the governing body – and is therefore available only to staff, while finalised annual statements from previous years are made publicly available. In other cases, all annual statements are subject to this login requirement, preventing public access.

Statements should be provided as a distinct document in either PDF or docx format. This issue should also be resolved by adoption of the template. Once approved, current and previous statements should all be clearly and publicly available via each institution's website.

## Structure and layout

Aside from one institution in the sample using the new template, the remaining statements – as with last year – typically fell into two categories:

- Following the commitments of the Concordat and how the institution meets those.
- Following the requirements for the statement as outlined in commitment five.

As previously, the majority of institutions followed the second approach. An exception to this pattern were those institutions whose statements were composed of brief outlines of policies, actions, and/or misconduct statements, but without going into depth and sometimes with one or more of those categories missing. Typically, these were the shorter responses, with an average length of three pages, versus five for the remaining statements.

Overall, among those statements presented as a document, the length of the statements (excluding any cover page) varied from one to 10 pages. Some of this variation can be accounted for by variations in formatting, including the use of specific question-and-answer templates for papers sent to governing bodies; however, largely the length was reflective of the degree of detail, with some institutions discussing their actions at length and others providing minimal detail.

## Actions to support research integrity

At their most brief, statements simply provided a list of institutional policies relevant to the area. More detailed statements discussed what changes had been made to these policies, or went into detail of how their website, emails, and internal IT resources had been used to disseminate policy changes to researchers. Some statements cover actions taken to support research integrity by providing the relevant sections of their risk registers, showing what actions have been taken to mitigate these integrity risks. Discussion of training and events is also a common topic.



In many cases, research integrity statements also address what might at other institutions be covered in a separate ethics statement, detailing actions taken to support research that involves animal or human subjects, or their data.

## Reporting of misconduct

Among the 38 annual statements, only one (3%) failed entirely to discuss research misconduct; however, there was considerable variation among the other 37 statements in terms of how information was presented, the terminology used to describe cases of misconduct, the threshold for inclusion in the statement, and the discussion of any lessons learned.

As required by the Concordat, the statement must cover ‘any formal investigations of research misconduct that have been undertaken’; however, comparisons are made more difficult by variation in institutions’ threshold for mentioning cases of potential misconduct. While some explicitly stated numbers of concerns or allegations even when no formal investigations then took place, others simply stated the number of formal investigations. The threshold for what constitutes a ‘formal investigation’ may also vary between institutions. Taking the most inclusive definition of those reported, of the 37 statements discussing misconduct there were 13 (35%) who explicitly reported that there had been no cases in the preceding year. At one institution a large number of historical cases, raised in the previous year but relating to past publications, brought the number of cases reported to 20; however, this was very much an outlier, 76% of the institutions here reporting 0 (35%), 1 (27%), or 2 cases (14%).

The inclusion by some institutions of ‘near misses’ or cases that were handled informally, provides useful context for explanation of procedures. This also provides additional opportunities to discuss lessons learned, with the actions described including reviewing policies and implementing a new approval system, engaging with external organisations, renewing research integrity training, producing ethics guidance specifically for knowledge exchange projects, allowing complainants to request a change of investigator, and making specific procedural changes to address issues observed during an extended misconduct investigation.

Some institutions also discussed reviews of policy or lessons learned even when formal investigations had not taken place: of the 13 universities reporting no cases of misconduct, five (38%) of these still discussed how they were improving their procedures. Conversely, of the 24 universities reporting one or more cases, eight (33%) reported no lessons learned, nor any other steps that they might take to prevent future misconduct.

Another area in which reporting was inconsistent was the way in which institutions addressed the numbers of cases relating to staff, postgraduate research students, and – in two cases – taught postgraduates. For the eight institutions (22%) here who made this distinction explicit, it is clear which categories are being included; however, for other institutions it is unclear whether, for example, no investigations into misconduct among postgraduate researchers took place, or whether these were considered to be outside the scope of the statement.

Misconduct cases	Lessons learned	No lessons learned	Total
None	5	8	13
1 or more	16	8	24
<b>Total</b>	21	16	37

Discussions among signatories following this analysis have highlighted that:

- Exclusion of postgraduate researchers from research misconduct figures may be a product of distinct staff/student procedures, with some universities classing all misconduct by students as academic misconduct, even in the context of research.
- The term ‘formal investigation’ is now deprecated in some contexts due to its lack of precision.

While a uniform approach to misconduct cases and terminology may not be desirable or practical, institutions should explicitly define the scope of their misconduct report. Annual statements should explicitly state what their data covers and whether students have been included in the data.

Concordat signatories should consider updating language around investigations in order to help institutions to categorise this in a more consistent manner.

## Named points of contact

The Concordat to Support Research Integrity requires that employers of researchers:

*identify a named member of staff who will act as a first point of contact ... on matters of research integrity, and ensure that contact details for this person are kept up to date and are publicly available and*

*provide a named point of contact or recognise an appropriate third party to act as confidential liaison for whistle-blowers or any other person wishing to raise concerns about the integrity of research.*

There is a wide variation in how the sampled universities approached these requirements. As previously, in many cases it was difficult to find the confidential liaison, and in six (15%) of the institutions sampled here, no named contact could be found. In two cases, instead of a 'named contact' a policy relating to misconduct was identified. Unfortunately, in one instance this misconduct policy purported to provide details of a named contact, but the link provided simply led back to the initial research integrity page.

Among those (37, 86%) where a contact or contacts could be identified:

- 33 (77%) listed the contact or contacts on a research integrity or ethics webpage.
- Two (5%) listed the contact or contacts within the annual statement.
- Two (5%) did not have an annual statement but listed the contact or contacts within a linked code of practice.

When a contact or contacts were provided, the best and clearest examples:

- Put this information at the top of the page, or otherwise made it prominent.
- Explicitly stated that the confidential liaison was to be contacted by whistle-blowers and/or those wishing to report misconduct (as opposed to those 'wishing to raise concerns about integrity')
- Provided context and future-proofing by providing each contact's name, job title, and email address (explicitly typed out, rather than solely hidden behind a hyperlink which may have implications for accessibility).

Where possible, institutions should attempt to match the best practice for named contacts described above.

## Examples of practice

### Governance, policies and processes

Universities have developed a range of organisational roles and groups with responsibility for research integrity issues. These include, but are not limited to:

- Committees, eg, on research and innovation, knowledge exchange, research ethics.
- Networks and groups, eg, on research integrity, research development, research relationship oversight, sensitive research approval.

- Leads and officers, eg on research practice or research integrity liaison.

In some cases, it was noted that these roles engage with other parts of the organisation, eg with compliance leads. Some universities noted that they regularly review contact details (such as named contacts for whistleblowers) as part of their monitoring processes.

Some universities have referenced future activities, which include work to better integrate policies, guidelines and practices to support research integrity and ethics across the institution.

## **Communications and awareness raising**

Many universities have noted how policies, procedures and materials relating to research integrity are available on their websites. In many cases, there are dedicated sections of university websites / one-stop-shops on research integrity and / or ethics. The types of information included on these webpages include resources, policies, processes, procedures, guidance, contact points, lines of accountability, templates and case studies. Purposes of this information include providing transparency, encouraging open dialogue and communication, and making requirements and expectations as clear as possible.

Training can be general or directed at staff and students. Some of this training is considered mandatory, with some universities introducing these as part of standard HR monitored training requirements. These include engagement activities (such as webinars, inductions or drop-in sessions) on:

- ‘Conversation starters’ eg ‘what is research integrity?’.
- Research data management / security (including personal, sensitive and confidential data and intellectual property).
- Research misconduct, including investigating misconduct incidents.
- Research ethics, values and standards (some discipline specific).
- Usage of online platforms for data collection and analysis.

Some institutions have referenced activity in relation to other Concordats as part of their wider work to embed practices in relation to research culture. This has included work on equality, diversity and inclusion, monitoring data on researcher careers, open research, research leadership, and professional development.

## Review of previous recommendations

The previous analysis of annual statements, published in March 2022, made a set of six recommendations.

### Sign-off by the governing body

1. ‘As with the other concordats, the signatories should include an expectation that the annual statement is signed off by the governing body of the research organisation.’
2. ‘Statements should clearly note when the governing body approved the statement or include this in the email when reporting to the signatories.’

Of the statements received by the signatories email address since August 2022 (in order to provide time for implementation since this recommendation was published), more than one third of institutions failed to state whether their annual statement had been signed off by their governing body, neither including this in their email nor in the statement itself.

### Updates on activity

3. ‘Content should aim to provide an update on activity rather than repeat policies that are already in place. Updates on policies that have been changed or are under review are encouraged.’

There is still considerable variation in the nature of the content and the level of detail included in the statements. Some of the most brief simply list the relevant policies, without providing an update on activity. Some of the longer statements also fall foul by providing long lists of existing policies, but do then supplement this list with appropriate updates.

### Design of webpages

4. ‘If the annual statement is written in the form of a webpage, it would be useful to have a copy of previous annual statements to demonstrate how updated material has been used to meet the commitments of the concordat.’

Of the five statements examined here that were presented as a webpage, all included links to previous years’ annual statements.

5. ‘Statements should be openly accessible and the design of research integrity webpages should be clear. Where possible, institutions should provide links to previous annual statements as points of reference for past activity and changes over time.’

There is considerable variation in the design of research integrity webpages, and in some cases redesign of the institution’s website structure had broken links to relevant policies. While this is a common issue with large websites, and often outside the control of the staff responsible for research integrity, the importance of making this information accessible to researchers and the public means that these pages should be regularly reviewed and broken links updated as soon as practicable.

### **Posting of contacts**

6. ‘The two contacts required by the concordat should be posted very clearly. Given the purpose of these contacts, institutions should make them as accessible as possible.’

As discussed above, there is considerable variation in the visibility and accessibility of these contact details. In the best examples, this information was prominent, reporting of misconduct was explicitly mentioned, and a degree of future-proofing and redundancy was provided by giving not just the name or email address of the contact, but instead fully listing their name, job title, and email address.

# 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.

In June 2021, the Research Integrity Concordat Signatories Group supported the Annual Research Culture and Practice Forum. The Forum was arranged in collaboration with the Researcher Development Concordat Strategy Group. The Forum included a session on ‘Perspectives on accountability in research integrity’. Videos of the sessions are available on the [Universities UK Events YouTube channel](#).

In June 2022, this was expanded to include representatives from the Knowledge Exchange Concordat. The Forum included sessions on:

- Concordats 101 – what are they, and how do they drive positive research culture?
- How do staff at institutions work with the concordats and initiatives in practice?
- What does the future look like for research culture concordats and initiatives?
- Supporting research integrity – principles and practice.

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

# Annual reporting template

This section discusses an annual reporting template produced on for the Research Integrity Concordat Signatories Group by the UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO). The template provides guidance on how to complete an annual statement for the Concordat to Support Research Integrity. This template was introduced as a pilot from November 2022 and will be reviewed after a year of use.

## What should annual statements do?

Annual statements should:

- publicly demonstrate a commitment to high quality and ethical research, by declaring the practical measures undertaken to enhance research integrity
- reflect on successes and consider areas for improvement to help themselves and the sector continuously improve over time
- provide research funders with assurance information in an ‘ask once’ statement that is publicly available. This aims to reduce bureaucracy for organisations and to help meet funders’ terms and conditions.

## Why are they important?

Annual statements are an opportunity for the sector to provide information on activities and anonymised data in a consistent manner, allowing sector level analysis that provides evidence on the integrity of research and the research environment. Statements allow for showcasing.

## The template

The template was introduced in November 2022 on a pilot basis and is not currently mandatory. The template provides guidance on how to complete an annual statement. The template is intended to be flexible for use across different disciplines and size of organisation. Some organisations may be able to complete the statement more fully than others. All organisations are asked to use the boxes as it enables a sector-wide analysis to identify trends in policies and practice.



## Download the template

The template is available to download from the [Universities UK website](#). If you have difficulty accessing the template, or would like to give feedback on it, please contact [RIsecretariat@universitiesuk.ac.uk](mailto:RIsecretariat@universitiesuk.ac.uk)

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