

2016 Annual report to Council on research integrity at The Open University

INTRODUCTION

- 1 As recommended in the Universities UK Concordat to Support Research Integrity, in March 2015 the University's first annual statement on research integrity was presented to Council (C-2015-01-14) and subsequently published on the OU website.
- 2 The Concordat provides a comprehensive national framework for good research conduct and its governance, and compliance with it is evidence that an institution has good policies, procedures and training in place to support its academics and researchers and ensure the integrity of its research.

OU COMPLIANCE WITH THE CONCORDAT

- 3 The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) has made compliance with the Concordat a condition of grant funding. From 2013-14 onwards, universities have been required to confirm whether they are compliant with the Concordat as part of the annual assurance statement.
- 4 In order to assess compliance, the OU conducted a gap analysis and from that, identified actions and instigated an action plan. This showed that the OU had robust policies and procedures that ensured that its research was underpinned by high standards of integrity, and that the OU approach to matters relating to research integrity was fundamentally sound. However, in some instances, some work was needed to fully meet Concordat requirements. For 2013-14 therefore, the OU stated that it was working towards compliance.
- 5 For the year 2014-15, activity has focussed on addressing areas of the Concordat where additional work was identified as being required to fully meet the requirements. The gaps that had been identified were in relation to ensuring that information on research integrity requirements, and processes were available on faculty intranet sites, and in ensuring that research integrity is explicitly covered in academic and research staff induction programmes.
- 6 It was reported to Research Committee at its July 2015 meeting that all the requirements of the Concordat had now been met, and the Chief Auditor has been advised that the University is able to state in the annual assurance statement for 2014-15 that it is in full compliance.

REVIEW OF THE CODE OF PRACTICE FOR RESEARCH AT THE OPEN UNIVERSITY

- 7 The Code of Practice for Research sets out the standards that govern the conduct of research at the OU. It applies to all those who conduct, supervise or support research in the University's name, including postgraduate research students, and is a key tool for assuring the integrity of OU research
- 8 As part of its regular review schedule of policies and codes of practice, the Research Strategy Office completed a review of the Code of Practice for Research, and the associated Procedure. The review was intended to ensure that the documents remain accurate and up to date, and reflect recent developments such as research data

management requirements and the changing landscape of Open Access to research outputs. The review process included consultation with key stakeholders.

- 9 Research Committee recommended the proposed revision to the documents for Senate's approval at its July 2015 meeting, and Senate confirmed approval in October 2015.

BEST PRACTICE IMPROVEMENTS

- 10 Work continues to embed best practice in approaches to research integrity in faculty and University processes. A focus for the coming year will be on improving and extending training opportunities.

FORMAL INVESTIGATION OF ALLEGATIONS OF MISCONDUCT 1 AUGUST 2014-31 JULY 2015

- 11 Allegations of research misconduct or malpractice are a fairly uncommon occurrence at the OU. Where they do arise, it is sometimes the case that they are the result of misunderstanding and poor communications, which can be resolved without recourse to the formal process, to the satisfaction of all parties concerned.
- 12 In 2014-15, there have been no cases where a formal investigation of an allegation of misconduct or malpractice has been undertaken by the University.

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