Annual Report: Research Integrity

Reporting period July 2015- July 2016

The University is a signatory to the University UK's '*Concordat to Support Research Integrity'*.

To comply with the <u>five commitments</u> of the Concordat, and to provide assurance to HEFCW and the funding councils (RCUK/UKRI) that all research conducted in the University is of the highest ethical standards, the University in 2014/15 developed a '*Policy Framework on Research Integrity: Ethics & Governance'* and established Institutional structures, policies and protocols to support and implement the framework.

In the **first year (2015/16)** of implementation, a University Research Ethics & Governance sub-committee was formed. Membership of the committee comprised of representatives from Colleges, representation from relevant Professional Services Units and the local NHS Trust. Six out of the seven Colleges also established College level Ethics & Governance committees that report to the University Committee.

In the **second year (2016-17)** of implementation of the research integrity governance structures, the following were achieved:

1. Appointment of an Academic and a Deputy Academic Lead for Research Integrity to provide strategic direction to the area (June 2016)
2. Appointment of a dedicated Research Integrity Compliance Officer in the Vice Chancellor's Office to act as the first point of contact for research integrity queries and provide strategic oversight and policy direction for regulatory compliance (Oct 2016)
3. Appointment of a dedicated Research Governance Framework officer in the Research Engagement & Innovation Services (REIS) to help establish the University sponsorship processes and protocols for quality assurance
4. Purchase of an online training package on research integrity (Epigeum) for staff and student training.
5. Support for the purchase and piloting of an online system for ethical approval of applications (Infonetica) in the College of Human & Health Sciences, and support for the development of an 'in-house' online system for the ethical approval of applications in the College of Science.
6. Develop an additional 'in house' training package on research integrity for staff and student training through the APECS Development & Training services and REIS that would focus on research integrity policies, ethical review of research, sponsorship of research, working with human tissue and Safeguarding in Higher Education.
7. Develop a dedicated a research integrity website with policies, procedures and information for staff, students and external visitors

8. Produce and disseminated a research integrity leaflet with key information and contact details.
9. Review current research integrity policies and develop and implement new policies on 'Working with Children & Vulnerable groups' and a 'Policy for Clinical research'.
10. Develop a draft policy on risk assessment of research projects
11. Achieve 'substantial assurance' for the area from an internal audit conducted by the Joint Internal Audit Unit (JIAU).

Area progress report:

- **University Research Ethics and Governance sub –committee**

The University Research Ethics & Governance sub-committee met three times during the year (once per term) to provide strategic oversight to a number of University policies and processes. The membership of the committee was increased to include representatives from the Joint Scientific Review Committee (JSRC), the Research Governance Framework Officer and the Director of Research Institute of Ethics & Law (RIEL). Members received information and several presentations from external service providers of training on ethics (Epigeum, Safeguarding) and on online ethical approval systems (Infonetica) to help inform the decision making process. Progress reports from College ethics committees and other sub committees (AWERB) were received along with updates from Professional services sections in relation to 'Prevent' Compliance (security sensitive research), Safeguarding, Business Continuity and Resilience (Safezone).

- **College Research Ethics and Governance Committees**

With the establishment of the School of Medicine Research Ethics Committee, all Colleges/Schools now have a functioning Ethics & Governance committee with membership drawn from the various disciplines and research areas of the College. The Chairs of College committees attend and provide regular reports and updates to the University Committee. During the course of the year, the Academic Lead for research integrity met the Chairs of College Ethics and Governance committee to discuss risk assessment and monitoring of projects and highlighting the requirement of a 'risk based' assessment approach for reviewing ethical applications. The Academic Lead is continuing to work with the Post-graduate Research office, Student services, Head of Resilience and Business continuity and Major projects to raise awareness in Colleges of risk in relation to research ethics.

The Deputy Academic Lead for Research Integrity has worked with the Chairs of College Research Ethics & Governance to develop College research integrity websites with accessible contacts relevant guidance and information for researchers.

- **University Research Integrity webpage & Research Integrity marketing**

A dedicated research integrity webpage with relevant contacts, policies, procedures and guidance has been developed. Accessed through the University Research pages, it provides links to key internal and external policies and guidance to research staff and students. A research integrity leaflet that has key information, guidance and contacts has been developed and disseminated for staff and student use.

- **Policy Development**

All policies within the Policy Framework on Research Integrity: Ethics and Governance were reviewed in 2016/17 to ensure that they were in line with regulatory requirements and 'fit for purpose' for the Institutional objectives. New policies on Working with Children and vulnerable people, Policy on Clinical research were developed and adopted. A Policy on ethical risk assessment of research projects has been developed and is being consulted with the wider research community. The policy on 'Research Data Management' was revised to incorporate the requirement of the '*Concordat on Open research data*'. The policy on 'Receiving allegations of Research Misconduct' is currently under review following an RCUK good practice guideline change.

All College research ethics and governance committees were reminded of the requirement to assess risk to researchers as the core component of ethical appraisal, and to consult the Head of Resilience and Business continuity prior to embarking on field trips or off–campus visits.

- **On-line Ethical Approval**

A couple of online systems for ethical approval of applications are being 'piloted' in the College of Human & Health Sciences and the College of Science to provide key information on the usefulness and requirement of a wider University online system.

- **Sponsorship**

The appointment of a Research Governance Framework Officer was a major milestone to assist in setting up appropriate University level processes, protocols and procedures for monitoring University sponsored research. An agreement of co-sponsorship model for clinical research (CTIMP) with ABMU NHS Trust was signed. With the Director of REIS as the University signatory, the Academic Lead for Research Integrity instituted risk assessment for all non-CTIMP studies prior to the appointment of the RGF Officer.

Challenges for 2017/18:

- **Training**

The online training on research integrity (Epigeum) purchased in September 2016 has yet to be 'rolled out' for staff training. The Deputy Academic Lead for Research Integrity is working closely with colleagues in REIS and ISS along with Colleges and REIL to ensure that the training is available to staff as soon as possible. It is envisaged that all 'new staff' would undertake the 5 hour training and a condensed one hour package would be offered to senior academics

Monitoring the uptake of both the training package and data collection in relation to them could prove a challenge once the training is implemented. This aspect could also have resource implications which have so forth not been thought through the business planning process.

Training students on research integrity policies and procedures is a requirement of the Concordat to Support Research Integrity and can be used as a measure for enhancing the research environment. The roll out of the student training would be a large project, again, with possible resource implications for monitoring uptake, and reporting.

- **Engagement and raising awareness of research integrity**

The past few years has seen a massive drive in relation to implementing and supporting the University's commitment to the Concordat to Support Research Integrity. As a result, the University is better placed, than it has ever been, in relation to policies, processes, protocols, training, and information for staff and students. There is however still a lot to be done to ensure a 'cultural shift' and 'raise awareness' amongst researchers of the benefits of undertaking research with integrity.

The focus of research integrity activities in the forthcoming year would therefore be to conduct such activities that raise awareness of research integrity issues amongst staff and students. Working together with the Academic Services, REIS, ISS and the wider University, such proposals could include conducting frequent 'lunch & learn' or 'breakfast' sessions on both campuses, conducting half day workshops on research integrity and possibly an annual conference on research integrity with invited external guest speakers from the UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO) and other UK Russell Group Universities who are at the forefront of implementation of the Concordat within their institutions. These activities will have resource implications in relation to budget and staffing and would therefore need to be built into the business planning process.

- **Raising awareness about reporting cases of Research Misconduct**

The past year has seen a couple of instances where staff within the Institution, and external individuals/bodies were unsure of the process of reporting a suspected allegation of research misconduct. The research integrity webpage now has a dedicated email address and a contact for reporting such allegations. It would be advisable however to ensure that this information is distributed as widely as possible within the University, and an option of setting up a dedicated group of 'research integrity' champions to provide confidential advice/direction to those wishing to report an allegation. A policy on 'Whistleblowing' for research should also be developed to provide protection and anonymity to complainants from reprisals for raising a concern.

- **Sponsorship**

Establishment of appropriate sponsorship processes and protocols, Clinical research webpage with policies, processes, flowchart and information for staff, appropriate training on procedures, monitoring and quality assurance of projects that fall under the remit of the Health Research Authority and the Research Governance Framework are to be undertaken in 2017/18.