Staffordshire University Annual Statement on Research Integrity 2022/23

1. **Introduction**

Staffordshire University expects high standards in the conduct of research undertaken by staff, students, honorary and emeritus titleholders, associates, and consultants. The University aims to uphold the commitments outlined in the 2019 Concordat to Support Research Integrity, which provides a national framework for high standards and governance of research conduct. In line with the Concordat, Staffordshire University is committed to:

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

In compliance with the Concordat, the University publishes a statement on research integrity on an annual basis, which is presented to its governing bodies (Academic Board and the Board of Governors). **The current statement covers the academic year 2022-23**.

This statement outlines the actions and activities undertaken throughout the course of the academic year and the frameworks in place to foster and strengthen a culture of research integrity in line with the Concordat expectations. It also provides a high-level summary of investigations of research misconduct that have been undertaken by the University during the academic year.

2. **Named contacts for research integrity matters, in accordance with the Concordat**

Research integrity at Staffordshire University is overseen by Deputy Vice Chancellor, Professor Kevin Hetherington (kevin.hetherington@staffs.ac.uk). The University's first point of contact, should anyone require more information on matters of research integrity, is the Research Policy and Governance Manager, Dr Jane McKay (jane.mckay@staffs.ac.uk). Should any person wish to raise concerns about the integrity of research being conducted under the auspices of Staffordshire University, they can contact, in confidence, the Head of Research Environment and Development, Mrs Emma Davies (E.J.Davies@staffs.ac.uk).

In accordance with the Concordat to Support Research Integrity, the contact details for the above points of contact are kept up to date and are publicly available on Staffordshire University's external facing website: https://www.staffs.ac.uk/research/research-governance/integrity

The institution's annual statements on research integrity are also compiled on this webpage, in accordance with the 2019 Concordat.

3. **Governance and Policies**

The governance of research at Staffordshire University is overseen by the Research, Innovation and Enterprise Committee (RIEC), chaired by the Deputy Vice Chancellor, reporting directly to Academic Board. The RIEC's Terms of Reference include the "development and implementation of institutional policy, procedure and guidance in respect of Research Governance, Environment, Ethics [and] research integrity." Research Ethics at Staffordshire University is overseen by the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC), which reports to the RIEC.

The main policies governing research integrity and research ethics at the University are:

- [Code of Conduct for Research and Research Integrity](#) (updated annually)
- Staffordshire University Research Ethical Review Policy (2019)

The University's Research Misconduct policy is embedded within the Code of Conduct for Research and Research Integrity (Section 7.0) and the procedure for investigating allegations of Research is available of the University's web pages Misconduct can be found in Section 8.0.

These and other associated policies and guidance are available on a dedicated page on the University's website: [Research integrity - Staffordshire University (staffs.ac.uk)](#)

4. Embedding a supportive environment for reporting potential misconduct

The University's procedure for investigating potential cases of misconduct comprises processes that are transparent, timely, robust, and fair. The procedure adopted by the University draws on the principles set out in the UKRIO's Procedure for the Investigation of Misconduct in Research.

Where a formal investigation into allegations of research misconduct is undertaken, the investigation panel's report will be provided to the complainant and the respondent, who will have the opportunity to request amendment of any factual errors. The outcome of any investigation of research misconduct will be reported by the Deputy Vice Chancellor to the RIEC and UREC, ensuring transparency.

The investigation process is timely, with the subject(s) of an allegation being given a written response to the allegation(s) within ten working days. The policy stipulates that a formal investigation should take no longer than thirty working days.

Fairness and robustness are ensured at several stages of the process. The Deputy Vice Chancellor may seek the advice or views of external experts to ensure independent, expert input into the investigation, ensuring robustness. The policy enables allegations that have some substance— but which are capable of being resolved without further investigation—to be resolved as such. The investigation panel (where needed) is composed of individuals drawn from a School that is different to the complainant or respondent to ensure the impartiality and robustness of the investigation. The respondent will be interviewed by the investigation panel to allow them to respond in person to the claims. Similarly, the complainant will be interviewed by the panel for robustness.

As described in detail in previous annual reports, the University is committed to maintaining and strengthening a research environment in which all staff, researchers and students feel comfortable reporting instances of suspected misconduct. Staffordshire University's Research, Innovation and Enterprise Strategy includes an ongoing commitment that "in all that we do, we will demonstrate the highest levels of integrity and ethical behaviour." This includes awareness of what constitutes research misconduct and how this can be reported in confidence. Research misconduct guidance in our Code of Conduct (Section 7) makes clear that the identity of a complainant will not be disclosed

at any stage during any misconduct investigation. This encourages a supportive framework in which to report any potential misconduct.

Support is provided centrally through Research Innovation and Impact Services (RIIS), and locally within Schools by the Associate Deans for Research and Innovation (ADRIs). The culture within Schools is one where staff, researchers and students are assured that an allegation of misconduct will be handled in confidence.

This is reflected by the current iteration of the CEDARS survey (completed July 31st 2022), which demonstrated a stable environment regarding research activity and attitudes toward the research culture and environment at Staffordshire. As with the previous year's survey results, there is broad awareness of misconduct procedures, with almost 76% of staff overall saying they were familiar with the institution's mechanisms for reporting misconduct, while 71% overall said they would be comfortable reporting any incident of potential misconduct. This is further supported by 71.5% of staff overall trusting the institution to investigate reported cases fairly. A slightly lower proportion of staff (68% overall) thought the institution would take appropriate action following an investigation; this is perhaps a reflection of the fact that a significant proportion (more than 50% overall) said they had not heard of the Concordat to Support Research Integrity, while around 34% of staff claimed to not know the detail of the university's Code of Practice for Research. This could explain the finding that around 63% of staff overall believe the institution does not promote the highest standards of research integrity and conduct. This particular finding is a concern, although given the timing of the survey it is expected that these results will have since improved, and the university will be taking steps throughout the coming academic year to ensure that all research staff are provided with the necessary information and time to assimilate it into their practice in order to enhance the overall research culture.

It is clear that while there is an overall positive research environment at Staffordshire University, work remains to be done more broadly across the institution on raising awareness about the various policies and frameworks to support research integrity. Following the launch of the revised Code of Conduct for Research and Research Integrity in 2022, ongoing training and development activities will be delivered to ensure policies, procedure and best practice are presented to all research staff during the coming academic year.

It will be imperative that the newly appointed Dean of Research, working with ADRIs, will take ownership of further developing this supportive research environment across the institution and within Schools in the coming year 2023-24.

5. **Summary of actions and activities undertaken to support and strengthen understanding and the application of research integrity issues**

During the period under review (academic year 2022-23), Staffordshire University has undertaken several actions and activities to support and strengthen understanding and the application of research integrity issues.

Revision of the university's Code of Conduct for Research, which began in 2021-22, was completed in 2022-23 after a rigorous examination by the Ethics Committee and the RIEC, with Academic Board providing final approval. The revised document is now entitled the Code of Conduct for Research and Research Integrity in order to mainstream understanding of the term 'research integrity'. This is now live on the University's research pages.

Other significant developments include the addition of a Policy on the Use of Human Tissue in Research together with an institutional advisor (approved following amendments in autumn 2022); the development of an export control policy; and a revised data management policy as part of a suite of policy documents to enhance and expand research integrity across the university to ensure that our support for researchers continues to reflect sector best practice, and that researchers are aware of their responsibilities under the Concordat to Support Research Integrity, along with clearly defined institutional support. The University is also developing policy and procedures in relation to the governance and implementation of artificial intelligence (AI) in Learning and Teaching and Research; notably an AI Ethics policy and an AI policy working group, in order to delineate reasonable/unreasonable use.

Other actions taken in the review period include the following:

- The action plan for addressing and strengthening our provision against the revised Concordat is monitored on a continual basis by the RIEC. Research integrity is a standing agenda item for the RIEC throughout the academic year.
- The four-year review of the HR Excellence in Research Award was conducted in January 2023, with a working group overseeing the implementation of the action plan and work towards the requirements of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers. The first meeting focussed on 'culture and environment' and one of the three topics of discussion was embedding a culture of research integrity. We expect that the next review period (2023-26) will witness improvements for our growing research community. ADRIs are now in post for all three schools (summer of 2023). Moreover, a pilot scheme has been introduced to enable movement between the two career pathways (teaching research and innovation [TRI] and teaching advanced scholarship and knowledge exchange [TASKE]). In many cases, the actions outlined in the 2021-23 action plan have been completed, but we have not yet witnessed a positive change in staff perceptions, as evidenced in the previously mentioned lack of awareness of research integrity policies described by staff in the most recent CEDARS survey. To an extent, it is recognised that the lagged effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have hampered the return to more face-to-face training, development and networking to the detriment of our overall research culture and environment. Review has been ongoing and iterative throughout the period of the EiR award through the Researcher Development Working Group (RDWG) comprising 22 members from across the university, providing invaluable insight and feedback from the research community. This group meets three times a year, each meeting focussing on issues pertinent to one of three areas of the EiR action plan (environment and culture, employment, and professional and career development) to review progress against the EiR action plan and identified future priorities. The EiR Award is a standing item on all meetings of the RIEC (the governance committee with oversight of EiR Action Plan progress and implementation the Concordat principles).
- The University's annual research development and training programme was revised and updated for the 2022-23 academic year, including a review of our provision by SCoLPP (Staffordshire Centre of Learning and Pedagogic Practice) and a new Research Training Manager (Gary McNally) was appointed to aid in its implementation. The programme includes training, awareness raising, and permanent resources on matters of research integrity and research misconduct.
- The University's membership of the UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO) continues. The regular programme of webinars and events are publicised to staff, as are the resources

available through UKRIO. The Research Policy & Governance Manager regularly attends these webinars and disseminates best practice to colleagues.

Actions undertaken to strengthen research ethics

In addition to the above listed actions to strengthen research integrity, and as reported in previous annual statements, the University continues to undertake considerable work to strengthen the processes and awareness around research ethics in the period under review. While distinct from research integrity, these form important aspects in the development of our research environment, governance and culture of research integrity.

Actions undertaken this year included continued annual audits of school ethics processes, and the appointment of School-level ethics coordinators with responsibility for oversight of ethical procedures and applications for review. The ethics coordinators (2 per school for DTA, JSS and HSW and 1 for IOE) sit on the University Research Ethics Committee and oversee the school-level panel of reviewers. A review of ethical procedures and practices was conducted at the University level by the incoming Research Policy and Governance Manager who commenced employment at Staffordshire University in June 2023. Research ethics training and guidance is being revised and updated in accordance with the 2019 Concordat and a suite of staff development and training workshops is planned for the next academic year to support and embed the principles presented in the university's Research Ethics Code of Practice.

6. **Research Misconduct**

As outlined above, the research misconduct investigation policy, and the Code of Conduct for Research in which it is situated, were revised in 2021-22. This review took into account best practice in the sector, guidance from UKRIO, and the requirements of the updated Concordat to Support Research Integrity. Following approval from Academic Board in Autumn 2022, the final version of the policy is definitive procedure in operation for any allegations of misconduct that emerge.

7. **Formal investigations of Research Misconduct**

Where concerns are raised about poor research practice, these can often be addressed via competency, education, and training mechanisms. Some concerns fall outside of the scope of research misconduct, as outlined in our Research Misconduct Investigation Policy, and are instead dealt with according to the relevant HR procedure, or via academic misconduct.

Where there is an accusation or suspicion of research misconduct, these are addressed through the research misconduct investigation policy and an initial investigation is instigated, led by the Deputy Vice Chancellor.

The instances of each category of research misconduct investigated in the period under review are indicated in the below table.

	Number of initial investigations completed (2022-23)	Number of formal investigations completed (2022-23)	Number of allegations upheld (in whole

			or in part) (2022-3)
Fabrication	**0**	**0**	**0**
Falsification	**0**	**0**	**0**
Plagiarism	**0**	**0**	**0**
Failure to meet obligations (e.g., legal, ethical and professional obligations)	***0**	**0**	**0**
Misrepresentation (e.g., of data, results, interpretation)	**0**	**0**	**0**
Improper dealing with allegations of misconduct	**0**	**0**	**0**

*Note: whilst no new investigations were recorded during this academic year, a continuation of a case from the previous year was completed in 2022

8. Reflection on misconduct investigations

With no new investigations being conducted in 2022-23, this is a clear improvement on the previous year in terms of volume; however, the completed case (see note above) involved a member of staff failing to seek ethical approval for research conducted at the university. This is clearly a serious matter that is in breach of all research protocols where there is an expectation on all research-active staff to uphold the standards of research integrity that have been communicated extensively.

Whilst the absence of new cases is reassuring in terms of the robustness and suitability of the university's policies, any instance where a member of staff is in breach of standards is taken very seriously and further highlights the importance of ensuring training and development for research-active staff (as mentioned in Section 4 of this statement).

9. Approval of annual statement

Approving Committee	Date of approval
Research Innovation and Enterprise Committee	03.10.2023
Academic Board	08.11.2023
Board of Governors	28.11.2023

Dr Jane McKay, Research Policy and Governance Manager, October 2023