Research Ethics Policy

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Policy control

Approved by	DVC (Academic) Research & Enterprise Committee	
Contact/s	Director of Research Development	
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Audience	Internal (Intranet only)	x
	External (Internet)	

1. Purpose

1   The University of Bedfordshire is committed to maintaining the probity and integrity of academic research to the highest standards. To this end the University regards it as fundamental that the conduct of research must be ethical and represent sound academic practice.

2   This policy is an updated version of previous Ethical Procedures, Good Research Practice & Research Misconduct Policy, and incorporates the requirements of the Concordat to Support Research Integrity (Universities UK, 2012).

3   The Concordat sets out expectations of the signatories in relation to good research conduct, and compliance is a condition of research funding from those organisations.

2. Scope

4   All members of the University, staff and students, are under a general obligation to act in a professional and ethical manner, and to preserve and protect the probity and integrity of research and the reputation of the University.

5   This policy applies to:

*   All University employees, students, visiting and emeritus researchers, whether they are working on the University's premises or elsewhere.

*   Research conducted by all taught and research students studying through partners whether at home or overseas.

*   All research deliverables and outputs in whatever form, and all research activity, irrespective of how it is funded.

3. Policy

Compliance with the UUK Concordat to Support Research Integrity

6   The University strives for excellence in its research, including theoretical and empirical rigour, honesty, openness, and care and respect for all research participants. It is the University's expectation that all research will be in accordance with the core elements of research integrity as set out in the Concordat to Support Research Integrity

7   The Concordat, sets out five commitments that will provide assurances to government, the wider public and the international community that research in the UK continues to be underpinned by the highest standards of rigour and integrity. The Concordat is intended to:

*   provide better coordination of existing approaches to research integrity

*   enable more effective communication of efforts to ensure that the highest standards of rigour and integrity continue to underpin all our research

*   encourage greater transparency and accountability at both institutional and sector levels

*   stimulate reflection on current practices to identify where improvements can be made

8   The University of Bedfordshire, like all signatories, is required to make five key commitments in order to be compliant with the Concordat. These are addressed through the policies, procedures and structures described in this document and are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: University Compliance with the UUK Concordat on Research Integrity

Commitment required under the Concordat	University policies, procedures and structures
To maintain the highest standards of rigour and integrity in all aspects of research	Staff and students are made aware of expectations. The University Research Ethics Committee oversees research across the university, and regularly reviews research institute and faculty ethics processes. The committee includes external members as well as experienced staff from across the faculties and management of the university. To support honesty and rigour the university reserves the right to submit research applications, proposals or outcomes to text-matching software.
To ensure that research is conducted according to appropriate ethical, legal and professional frameworks, obligations and standards	Ethics policies and processes are available to all researchers and training and advice is provided for taught and research students, and for staff. There are established processes for the scrutiny of staff and student research proposals and for the referral to higher committees where appropriate.
To support 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	All research institutes have an ethics coordinator. All faculties have an ethics board with a named chair. Ethical issues are embedded within UG and PGT courses and form part of PGR mandatory training. Staff training is provided at away-days organised by the Research Graduate School.
To use transparent, robust and fair processes to deal with allegations of research misconduct should they arise	Robust processes for to deal with allegations of research misconduct are in place involving multi-stage processes to avoid conflicts of interest. A principle of no-detriment applies.
To work together to strengthen the integrity of research and to reviewing progress regularly and openly	The University Research Ethics Committee; the Research Institutes; and the Research Graduate School and the Research and Enterprise Office through their committees (Research Development Committee and Research and Enterprise Committee) all report to the Academic Board ensuring university-wide oversight issues of research integrity and ethics.

9   Staff and students engaged in research are expected to familiarise themselves with the Concordat and the University's guidance materials and to engage in training and other activities designed to support its implementation

Compliance with RCUK Definitions of Good Research Practice

10   All researchers must also comply with the following requirements of good research practice as defined by Research Councils UK and further elaborated by the individual research councils:

- Integrity - The research has been carried out in a rigorous and professional manner and due credit has been attributed to all parties involved.

- Plagiarism - Proper acknowledgement has been given to the authorship of data and ideas.

- Conflicts of Interest - All financial and professional conflicts of interest have been properly identified and declared.

- Data Handling - The research draws upon effective record keeping, proper storage of date in line with confidentiality, statute and University policy.

- Ethical Procedures - Proper consideration has been given to all ethical issues and appropriate approval sought and received from all relevant stakeholders. In addition the research should conform to professional codes of conduct where appropriate.

- Supervision - Effective management and supervision of staff and students for whom the researcher(s) is/are responsible

- Health and Safety - Proper training on health and safety issues has been received and completed by all involved parties. Health and safety issues have been identified and appropriate assessment and action have been undertaken.

Commitment to Ethical Practice in Research

11   The University requires that all research undertaken by its staff and students is conducted in line with generally accepted principles of ethical research in that:

- All participants give genuine informed consent being properly informed of the purpose of the nature of the research, take part without any actual or perceived coercion and are free to withdraw without giving a reason or threat of adverse effect

- The involvement of participants is proportionate to the likely benefits of the research

- Any harm or distress will be avoided or at least mitigated through robust precautions and be proportionate to likely benefits

- The anonymity of participants must be preserved unless otherwise agreed and data properly protected

- Researchers must conduct their research with integrity and transparency with regard to actual or potential conflicts of interest

12 All research projects conducted by staff and research students, all undergraduate and taught postgraduate projects and dissertations must receive the appropriate ethical approval (as set out in the Operating Procedures as approved by the University Research Ethics Committee) before collection of research data can commence.

13 Staff and students must receive ethical approval before commencing data collection and must abide by the terms of the approved ethics statement for their research. If the materials circumstances of their research change and unforeseen ethical issues or challenges emerge, they should seek further approval of their research.

14 Staff and students are expected to report instances where there may have been a breach of the Concordat or of University policy. Normally this should be through the appropriate Research Institute or via the Research Graduate School but members of the academic community may utilise the University's Whistleblowing Policy if required.

Responsibilities, University Bodies and Processes

15 The University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) is a sub-committee of the Academic Board and is chaired by a senior research-active academic, appointed by the Vice Chancellor. It includes lay members external to the University and PGR student representatives. The committee:

- Ensures that the University has an appropriate research ethics policy commensurate with good practice in the sector and a review system that ensures compliance

- Approves and keep under review the University's statement on ethical procedures and good research practice.

- Considers and advise on all ethical issues relating to staff and student research.

- Reviews and, if appropriate, approves protocols for the management of research ethics by Faculties.

- Receives proposals for research which is externally funded, which lies outside of the framework of delegated approval, or which presents areas of particular difficulty and have been referred by Institutes and Faculties, and may grant/withhold ethical approval or seek further information.

- Receives and approves annual reports on the management of research ethics from Faculties and Institutes.

- Commissions and receives audits of research ethics management within Faculties and Institutes.

- Ensures that appropriate advice and guidance is available to all staff and students of the University through, for example, the drafting of guidelines, advice on external ethical documentation, and dissemination of information on best practice.

16 Research projects involving funding from the NHS, or research participants who are patients or staff of the NHS, will be submitted through the NHS research ethics committee structure, the Central Office for Research Ethics Committees (COREC). The University Research Ethics Committee will normally accept the judgement of COREC (it will never approve a proposal that has been rejected by COREC).

17 The Research Institute Ethics Panels (RIEPs) are responsible for ensuring that staff and PGR students abide by the university ethics policy and maintain research integrity. It is anticipated that each Research Institute will grant ethical approval for the majority of staff and PGR student research. Each Research Institute has a named ethics coordinator and a Research Institute Ethics

Panel; provides guidance and ethical approval for research; and ensures that this conforms to the requirements of relevant professional bodies. Research Institutes are required to provide the University Research Ethics Committee with details of their procedures for ensuring adherence to relevant ethical requirements. This applies to any research whether it be, or not, likely to raise ethical issues. Where appropriate, within the guidance, RIEPs refer proposals for consideration by UREC.

18 Departmental Ethics Panels (DEPs) are responsible for ensuring that there is a process for approval for all project units in undergraduate and postgraduate programmes within their Faculty, and for reviewing the outcomes of the ethical approval processes within those programmes and modules. Where appropriate, within the guidance, they refer proposals for consideration by UREC.

19 Research Institute Ethics Panels and Departmental Ethics Panels are required to make annual reports to UREC in which they provide details of ethical approval processes, numbers and subjects of research proposals, outcomes of these proposals and an particular issues of research ethics and integrity that have arisen.

20 All research proposals in receipt of external funding must be reported to the University Research Ethics Committee together with details of the outcomes of ethical approval processes undertaken by the relevant RIEP or DEP.

21 Additionally, proposals that involve complex or novel research designs or approaches, or multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary research may be referred to the University Research Ethics Committee if the relevant Ethics Panel does not feel able or competent to provide ethical advice or approval.

Operating Procedures

Research conducted by staff, PGR students, and PGT and UG students, are subject to different procedures as set as follows:

22 All Staff Research Projects must receive ethical approval from the designated discipline based RIEP Proposals should be submitted electronically using the appropriate form from https://www.beds.ac.uk/research/rgs/research-ethics.

23 All PGR research projects must receive ethical approval from the designated discipline based RIEP. Proposals should be submitted electronically using the appropriate form from https://www.beds.ac.uk/research/rgs/research-ethics. All ethical scrutiny should be independent and not be undertaken by the supervisors of the student. Once ethical approval has been granted, it s the responsibility of the supervisory team to maintain oversight of ethical issues and, if necessary, to advise the student if additional ethical approval is required (for example, if a research design is adapted in the light of a pilot study)

24 In the case of PGT Students and UG Students, it is recognised that taught student projects are primarily training exercises and as a consequence the ethical implications will be proportionate. In many cases projects will be desk based and not directly involve human participants. It is likely that a light touch or 'proportionate review' process will be sufficient with only a minority of proposals being referred for more detailed scrutiny.

25 For many PGT Students and UG students, a tutor may undertake initial scrutiny of proposals, although the unit coordinator must maintain oversight of this process and will act as the first point of contact in any 'escalation' of a proposal for additional scrutiny as part of a proportionate review process, potentially to the relevant DEP or UREC.

26 Research activities undertaken by CLE, the Learning Resources Centre, and other non- faculty bodies within the University are subject to ethical scrutiny by the most appropriate Research

Institute Ethics Panel, usually the Institute for Research in Education.

27 For research activities that are undertaken as part of Course Enhancement Processes, Associate Deans (Quality) should conduct initial scrutiny, taking the advice of appropriate RIEPs as necessary.

28 Students enrolled at partner institutions will be subject to the ethical processes of their institution, as set out in the course handbooks required for institutional approval. However, there may be circumstances in which a proposal might be referred to the appropriate DEP, RIEP or to UREC for advice or approval

29 Appeals against a non-approval decision by a RIEP or DEP should be made to UREC. Appeals against a decision of UREC should be made to the University Secretary.

Research Ethics Training, Advice and Support

30 University members of UREC are experienced researchers drawn from a variety of disciplines. Members will be encouraged to attend national workshops and seminars to ensure that they are informed of current practice and developments in the sector. The lay members may be experienced practitioners and the University will support them in attending workshops and seminars as appropriate.

31 University members of RIEPs will be expected to have attended University workshops on research ethics run as part of the Researcher Development Programme. It is also required that they keep updated on developments in their own discipline area and ensure they operate in line with relevant professional body codes of practice. Discipline based RECS are encouraged to have lay members as appropriate.

32 Members of DEPS are expected to have attended University workshops on research ethics run as part of the Researcher Development Programme. Members of DEPS should ensure they are aware of subject based requirements and meet requirements of appropriate professional bodies.

33 Training related to research integrity forms part of mandatory Supervisor training. Staff may also receive training as part of the training needs identified as part of Staff review, research mentoring or probation processes.

34 The Innovation and Enterprise Service also provides support for staff engaged in preparation of research proposals which may information to be provided about issues related to research integrity such as ethical approval, oversight and governance or data management and preservation.

35 Training related to research integrity forms part of mandatory PGR training as well as the additional training, mentoring and supervision provided by Research Institutes. Issues of research integrity (including, but not limited to ethical approval processes) should be raised by students in their Training Needs Analysis and should be revisited as part of the supervision processes and through regular reviews and checkpoints (Annual Monitoring, PP1 and PP2).

36 The Research Graduate School provides additional training framed by the Vitae Researcher Development Framework and in addition students may identify through the TNA process, additional sources of training and support (for example through the National Centre for Research Methods or Professional Associations) should their research activities demand it.

37 Taught courses at PG and UG level involving research activities should incorporate teaching or guided learning activities appropriate to the level, context and subject matter of student projects. This might include reference to legal frameworks, guidelines issued by professional bodies, professional standards, examples and case studies.

Academic Misconduct Procedures

38 If concerns are raised about breaches of research integrity on the part of staff and PGR students, these are investigated under the procedures set out in the Procedures for Investigating Research Misconduct, which in turn supplement the Disciplinary Procedures applicable to members of staff and the Student Code of Conduct in the case of research students

39 If concerns are raised about breaches of research integrity on the part of PGT and UG students, these are handled according to the Academic Discipline Policy.

4. Forms/Instructions

5. Links/Dependencies

This policy should be read and its use considered with reference to:

1. Research Ethics Operating Process Documentation

2. Terms of Reference for UREC, RIEPs and DEPs

3. The UUK Concordat to Support Research Integrity

4. Research Council and Discipline-specific ethical frameworks and guidelines

5. Procedures for Investigating Research Misconduct

6. University Disciplinary Procedures for Staff

7. Student Code of Conduct for Research Students

8. The Policy and Procedure on Public Interest Disclosure ('Whistleblowing Policy')

The University Research Ethics Handbook includes 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 above.

6. Appendices