



Culture of Scientific Research in the UK: A response to the Nuffield Council on Bioethics report

In December 2014 the Nuffield Council on Bioethics published a report on The Culture of Scientific Research in the UK (<http://nuffieldbioethics.org/project/research-culture/>). Responses were received from researchers at all levels (from students through to Heads of Department) across multiple disciplines. The report presents a number of areas that respondents believed were having a positive impact upon the culture of research, such as open access. It also presented a number of views regarding areas that were having a negative impact, such as the current funding environment and short-term contracts leading to job insecurity.

In order to address the concerns raised by respondents on the culture of research in the UK, a number of suggested actions were set out for funding bodies, research institutions, publishers and editors of scientific research as well as for individual researchers.

This paper focuses on the suggested actions for research institutions, considering how UCL currently addresses the suggested actions and setting out actions that could further address the concerns set out in the report.

The seven suggested actions for research institutions have been grouped into three of the categories shown in Figure 1 (page five) of the Nuffield report: research governance and integrity; careers; and assessment, with the suggested actions from the report being addressed under the relevant category.

This report was submitted to the UCL Research Governance Committee in November 2015 and has since been re-formatted for publication on the UCL website as part of UCL's commitment to transparency and open communication (see the UCL Statement on Research Integrity <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/research/integrity/integrity-at-ucl>).

	Current Activities	Suggested further action
Research governance and integrity		
1	<u>Cultivate an environment in which ethics is seen as a positive and integral part of performing research.</u>	
	<p>Information on research ethics, the relevant processes (including research with human participants and animal research) and guidance on related areas is publicly available on the UCL website. For example, the research integrity webpages hold information on research ethics across a number of disciplines (http://www.ucl.ac.uk/research/integrity/research-ethics).</p> <p>Regarding research with human participants, further information for researchers is available on both the main UCL and UCL Institute of Education Research Ethics Committee webpages, along with sample information sheets and consent forms for applicants to review when preparing their own application (http://ethics.grad.ucl.ac.uk/ and www.ioe.ac.uk/ethics).</p> <p>Training relating to research ethics is often embedded within course programmes to ensure that students understand the relevant issues and processes prior to undertaking research. The Doctoral School's Handbook includes information on research integrity and research ethics as well as offering the following courses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethics 1: Good Research Practice • Ethics 2: Working with Human Subjects • Ethics Committee Applications for Research Involving Human Subjects • Working Ethically with Children and Young People as Research Participants <p>More recently, the Centre for Advanced Learning and Teaching (CALT) trialled half day integrity seminars and sessions using the Dilemma Game created by Erasmus University Rotterdam (http://www.eur.nl/english/eur/publications/integrity/dilemma_game/). The discussions around research integrity dilemmas central to these sessions, and assisted using the Dilemma Game, help to support a positive environment by enabling attendees to collaboratively think through these issues, often across disciplines.</p>	<p>UCL's Research Integrity Training Strategy includes consideration of training relating to research ethics for staff and students as part of and alongside future research integrity activities.</p> <p>Implementation of the training strategy has commenced and will continue over academic years 2015/16 and 2016/17.</p>
2	<u>Ensure institutional ethical review processes are flexible, appropriate and integrative, and that ethics committee members have appropriate guidance, training and knowledge.</u>	

	<p>During 2014-15 a working group was established to review routes for ethical approval of non-NHS human participant research and processes across UCL relating to the ethics of research. Another aspect was to consider the interface between UCL ethical approval processes and those that related to UCL-sponsored research within the School of Life and Medical Sciences domain.</p> <p>In addition, the working group was charged with making recommendations on the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – improvements in ethical approval workflows; – harmonisation of ethical approval processes between UCL and the recently merged Institute of Education; – ethical issues that may fall outside the scope of the current policy and process but which should be given adequate consideration as part of a general process for ethical approval; – ways in which research ethics knowledge, understanding and consideration may be better incorporated into normal academic routines through the examination of good practice in this area. <p>The recommendations of the working group were submitted earlier this year and centred on a formally devolved review structure; a more flexible approach allowing for local review systems to best fit with the needs of faculties. The recommendation to introduce a system of proportionate review would also help to address the concern of unnecessarily burdensome processes for lower risk research.</p> <p>A further recommendation related to a centralised induction training programme for all research ethics committee reviewers.</p>	<p>Following the submission of the recommendations earlier this year, it was agreed that the proposed recommendations, processes and new documentation would need to be piloted before a final decision on the suitability of the proposed system could be made.</p> <p>Organisation of the pilot is currently underway and it is anticipated that two faculties will be involved during the academic years 2015/16 and 2016/17.</p>
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Careers

3	<p><u>Sign up to the principles of the Athena Swan charter and adopt other employment practices that support diversity and inclusion.</u></p>	
	<p>Launched in 2005, UCL was one of the first to sign up to the Athena Swan charter and was awarded an institution wide bronze award 2006, which was twice renewed until this year when UCL received a Silver Award; a total of 7 institutions now having received this award to date. In addition, at departmental level, UCL currently has 16 Silver and 13 Bronze Awards.</p> <p>Further information on support for departments, key contacts and events can be found on the Equalities and Diversities webpage:</p>	<p>The Athena Swan charter was expanded in May 2015 to include non-STEM disciplines (science, technology, engineering, maths and medicine). One of the departmental Bronze Awards UCL has is from a non-STEM discipline and UCL would welcome more applications from non-STEM departments.</p>

	<p>(http://www.ucl.ac.uk/hr/equalities/gender/athena_swan.php). A list of UCL departments with Athena Swan awards can be found on the Equality Challenge Unit's website: http://www.ecu.ac.uk/equality-charters/athena-swan/athena-swan-members/.</p>	
4	<p>Support leaders in research by providing appropriate training, resources and recognition for their diverse activities.</p>	
	<p><i>Researcher Development Working Group</i></p> <p>A Researcher Development Working Group (RDWG) was established at UCL in February 2013 with the intention to identify the researcher career pathways and to support the development of researchers as leaders. UCL seeks a framework that offers clear pathways whilst retaining flexibility and a fundamentally self-driven character to researcher development.</p> <p>In 2013, UCL received the HR Excellence in Research Award, a recognition that reflects UCL's commitment to support and develop research staff in line with the European Charter & Code. Organisational Development will be monitoring the implementation of the institutional action plan for maintaining the Award and ensuring the support for researchers.</p> <p><i>Doctoral Skills Development Programme</i></p> <p>The Doctoral Skills Development Programme supports students through all stages of their degree, starting from the general welcome event, the induction programme (held twice a year), through to submission and viva examination. From the induction stage students are encouraged to identify their own training needs and take charge of their development by becoming independent professional researchers. Research students are required to regularly self-assess their training needs in relation to their research and career plans and to record evidence of their progress. The <i>Skills Self-Assessment Tool</i> is located in the Research Student Log – the mandatory project management tool for all UCL research students.</p> <p>Inductions for supervisors of researchers are delivered through CALT and supported through Organisational Development to ensure that research student supervisors are aware of the importance of personal and professional career development in supporting researchers from the very outset of their careers.</p> <p>The Organisational Development Professional Development Programme offers a large variety of events, training opportunities and workshops to support research staff in developing their careers such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Taking Control of Your Career - Springboard Development Programme for Women Researchers 	<p>Information on the Implementation of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers at UCL can be found on the UCL website (http://www.ucl.ac.uk/hr/od/research/index.php). The Concordat Implementation Plan was created to continue providing UCL researchers with a supportive and productive working environment and was last updated December 2015.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Leadership in Action - Best Practice in People Management <p>Organisational Development also organises an annual Research Staff Conference or Research Networking event. This provides researchers with opportunities to participate in workshops such as “From Researcher to Academic – transition”, and “Fellowships” and “Managing Your Career by Yourself”.</p>	
5	<p><u>Provide mentoring and career advice to researchers throughout their careers. Encourage them to plan their future and expand their skills and experience outside of the research environment, and tackle negative attitudes towards those leaving academia.</u></p>	
	<p><i>Mentoring</i> Mentoring arrangements are supported centrally through Organisational Development as a key mechanism for career development and enhancement.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mentoring at UCL - promoted and developed to meet the needs of UCL researchers, the scheme provides training for mentees and mentors as part of the registration process. - B-Mentor - a cross-institutional mentoring scheme for Black and Minority Ethnic academics and researchers. <p>Organisational Development also offer a coaching and mentoring skills course for senior staff and line managers.</p> <p>In addition, informal mentoring networks for researchers have been identified at department level including a student women’s mentoring scheme set up by students, though further work would need to be carried out to get a more comprehensive view of the support available at local level.</p> <p><i>UCL Careers</i> UCL Careers provides specialist support for UCL researchers. Research students and staff at UCL have access to a wide variety of services and products provided by UCL Careers: access to career coaching opportunities; one on one interview practice; career skills workshops (career planning as well as application and interview skills); relevant online reference material describing career paths and options for researchers; and opportunities to interact with relevant employers outside academia through researcher specific job sector forums. (Further details can be found at: http://www.ucl.ac.uk/careers/specialistsupport/researchers.)</p> <p>Through the UCL Careers and the Doctoral Skills Development Programme, PhD students</p>	<p><i>Mentoring</i> The value and benefits of mentoring schemes is recognised and increasing awareness of mentoring opportunities within UCL should be encouraged. Participation with mentoring would also encourage researchers to further develop their skills and to pass on knowledge learnt, as well as highlighting the availability of mentors outside of the immediate work environment or discipline.</p> <p>Suggestions as to ways to further promote the mentoring schemes, as well as ways to highlight and build upon current good practice, will be addressed over the coming academic year.</p> <p><i>Cross-working and secondments</i> As another means of further promoting transferable skills and views beyond academia, suggestions regarding possible secondments and ‘cross-working’ both within and external to UCL are being considered.</p>

<p>have access to regular skills development workshops delivered by invited employers where the focus is on awareness and development of competencies that are essential for many fields of work, e.g. teamwork, commercial awareness. Five per cent of places on these workshops are open to research staff.</p> <p><i>Skills Development for researchers</i></p> <p>UCL demonstrates its ongoing commitment to the researcher development agenda by the provision of extensive programmes of development opportunities for research students and staff through the Organisational Development Doctoral Skills Development Programme and the Professional Development Programme respectively. These opportunities include face-to-face workshops as well as online courses.</p> <p>The Doctoral Skills Development Programme is a central programme open to all postgraduate research students at UCL. The purpose of the programme is to give researchers the opportunity to expand generic research skills and personal transferable skills. These skills are intended to help research at UCL and to enhance life skills and employability for both academic and non-academic careers. The programme offers a series of research skills training courses and workshops and takes around 12,000 course registrations per year; the programme has been recognised in the Higher Education sector as an example of excellence and good practice for supporting the development of researchers.</p> <p>Organisational Development’s training provision for research students and research staff has been informed by, and mapped onto, Vitae's national Researcher Development Framework, a professional national development framework for planning and supporting the personal, professional and career development of researchers.</p>	
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Assessment

<p><u>Ensure that the track record of researchers is assessed broadly, without undue reliance on journal impact factors, in processes for making appointments, conducting staff appraisal and awarding promotions.</u></p> <p><u>Recognise and reward high quality peer review and committee service.</u></p>	
<p>The various criteria for academic and research staff promotions list a number of items for consideration such publications (sometimes listing this as significant record of outputs) and evidence of contribution to their discipline. However, other factors are also listed regarding contributions to other processes such as supervision, and in some cases peer review.</p> <p>In relation to the recruitment of staff there is information on the UCL recruitment pages</p>	<p><i>Broad Assessment</i></p> <p>Work is already underway looking into methods of assessment for promotion that take into account a breadth of criteria such as those that contribute to UCL as a whole.</p> <p>One suggestion to assist with the broad assessment of</p>

regarding UCL's commitment to equality and diversity as well as very detailed information on the full recruitment and selection process. This includes examples of questions for applicants and UCL's Equal Opportunities Policy Statement. In addition, UCL has signed up to the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (<http://www.ascb.org/dora/>) as well as being a Stonewall Diversity Champion (<http://www.stonewall.org.uk/get-involved/workplace/diversity-champions-programme>).

However, as the Nuffield report states that 54% of respondents think the assessment of promotion is having a negative or very negative effect, it would be beneficial (in addition to the above) to try to address this perception.

researchers was to encourage discussions during appraisals regarding activities undertaken within the past year that contribute to UCL as a whole. Such activities could include, for example, peer reviewing, mentoring, committee membership, being a member of a research ethics committee.

Peer Review

Currently, Organisational Development runs a ThinkWrite course on writing a peer review. There is additional information on peer review on the research integrity website. However, it has been suggested that additional webpages be created to provide further information explaining the role of peer reviewers, the different types of review that researchers might be asked to undertake (reviewing papers, grant applications, etc) as well as providing advice to those who have been asked to undertake peer review.

Consideration should also be given to publishing a set of behaviours or standards expected of UCL peer reviewers, so that staff are aware of the standards expected of them.