



## Research Integrity Annual Statement 2020-2021

### Enabling research and supporting our researchers during COVID-19

1. Throughout 2020-2021 UCL continued to provide guidance and support to researchers regarding the impact COVID-19 had upon research. Guidance created in the previous academic year continued to be updated to support researchers in planning their research. This included the continuation of Coronavirus Update communication emails, as well as reviewing the fieldwork framework guidance.
2. The framework for starting or resuming fieldwork at non-UCL settings was published in 2019-2020 by the Fieldwork Framework Group and was reviewed and revised throughout 2020-2021 to ensure that that the guidance remained up to date. [www.ucl.ac.uk/research/integrity/framework-starting-or-resuming-fieldwork-non-ucl-settings](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/research/integrity/framework-starting-or-resuming-fieldwork-non-ucl-settings)

### Enabling a healthy and sustainable research culture at UCL

3. UCL recognises the complexity of the research system, the wide variety of determinants of research culture and the reciprocal relationship between culture and behaviour. In order to better support a positive research culture, it is important to better understand the influences that shape it, how they are interconnected, and how they in turn translate into behaviours, both positive and negative.
4. Therefore, in January 2021, and as part of UCL's commitment to ensuring a healthy and sustainable research culture, a Task and Finish Group was commissioned to undertake a scoping project. The project was designed to provide a deeper understanding of UCL's research culture, including challenges and positive influences (both internal and external) to identify any priority areas for improvement. An additional aim was to better understand the drivers of research culture, including the impact of management behaviours on researcher's wellbeing.
5. Data collection was broad, ensuring that a wide variety of voices across UCL were obtained. This included 2,400 survey responses, including Wellbeing and staff surveys, as well as considering response to external surveys, including the 2021 CEDARS survey and the Wellcome Survey (anonymous data). There were also 135 semi-structured interviews and 30 hours of focus groups, and café discussions with research staff and students, as well as consultations with colleagues from other UK universities, as well as leadership consultations with senior management and professional services staff.

6. The findings and recommendations were set out in a report entitled 'Understanding UCL's Research Culture' and were presented to the Research, Innovation and Global Engagement Operations Committee at the end of September 2021. Subsequently the report is due to be considered by the Research, Innovation and Global Engagement Committee in the academic year 2021-2022.

### **UCL Office for Open Science and Scholarship**

7. In October 2020 the UCL Office for Open Science and Scholarship was created. This virtual body was designed to support researchers and enable research by working with colleagues across UCL in the promotion of open science and the 8 pillars of open science. [www.ucl.ac.uk/library/open-science-research-support/ucl-office-open-science-and-scholarship](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/library/open-science-research-support/ucl-office-open-science-and-scholarship)
8. Headed by Dr Paul Ayris, Pro-Vice-Provost for UCL Library, Culture, Collections and Open Science, the office will enable UCL to concentrate on three broad areas:
  - Ensuring that UCL policies and strategies reflect Open Science/Scholarship principles and practice.
  - Supporting UCL colleagues across the institution as a centre of knowledge for Open Science and Scholarship activities, platforms and services.
  - Building a community of practice around Open Science and Scholarship amongst the UCL academic community.
9. The office is supported by a dedicated website, which includes a community and support section, as well as an active blogsite for the publication of further guidance, case studies and guest posts from different research related teams across UCL. The office is also committed to communication, releasing termly newsletters with contributions from across the university, an active social media presence (@UCLOpenScience) and regular themed campaigns for Open Access and Love Data weeks. <https://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/open-access/> Plans are currently underway for a research data campaign involving a wide range of professional services to support researchers in better understanding the data related processes across UCL.
10. During 2020-2021 a number of events were organised, including webinars and events, such as the UCL Festival of Code and the Focus on Open Science webinar in collaboration with the University of Stockholm and Scientific Knowledge Services. The 2021 Open Science Conference sold over 700 tickets and included talks on open science, technical aspects for supporting open science, citizen science, and metrics, including a keynote presentation on a toolkit for transparency, reproducibility and quality in energy research.

### **Reviewing and streamlining processes to support a culture of research integrity**

11. As stated in the previous annual statement, due to the impact of Covid-19, the decision was taken to put the review and revision of research ethics processes and systems on hold until the new academic year.

12. In 2020-2021 the project recommenced with the creation of the UCL Research Ethics Strategy Board (RESB), a UCL cross-faculty board, comprised of senior research staff and tasked with strategic oversight of research ethics across UCL and implementation of the process of devolved ethical review for low risk research.
13. Under its Terms of Reference RESB has strategic oversight of the operation of all research ethics processes at UCL. This responsibility includes
- developing and reviewing research ethics policies and procedures and institutional guidelines, ensuring they remain fit for purpose;
  - ensuring effective communication of UCL’s research ethics governance policies and procedures to the academic research community of UCL;
  - reviewing and approving proposals for local research ethics committees (LRECs) and granting formal delegation of reviewing authority, including the authority for LRECs to approve low risk research;
  - monitoring and auditing ethics review practices in accordance with research governance procedures, including receiving regular reports from UCL ethical review bodies (UCL REC, LRECs and other ethics review bodies);
  - reviewing the system of appeals, complaints and adverse events or incidents reported regarding ethically approved research.
14. RESB reports directly to the Research, Innovation and Global Engagement Committee (RIGEC) and is tasked with reporting annually to RIGEC with an overview of the effectiveness of UCL’s current ethics policy, practices and procedures.

## **Guidance and support for researchers**

### *UCL Code of Conduct for Research revision*

15. Though the impact of Covid-19 necessitated the decision to delay the UCL-wide consultation of the revised Code of Conduct for Research, work continued on the revision of the Code following feedback from faculties, UCL’s Academic Board, and Unions, including the UCL Student Union.
16. In July 2021 a UCL-wide consultation on the draft of the new Code of Conduct for Research was launched. The online survey was open to all students and staff members and provided an important opportunity for researchers to contribute to the policy and governance of the university. [www.ucl.ac.uk/research/strategy-and-policy/ucl-consultation-new-code-conduct-research](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/research/strategy-and-policy/ucl-consultation-new-code-conduct-research)
17. The consultation closed in September 2021 and the responses will be analysed in the academic year 2021-2022. It is anticipated that the final version of the new Code of Conduct for Research will be submitted for approved next academic year with the aim of publication in 2022.

### *Statement on Transparency in Research*

18. As set out in the 2019-2020 Annual Statement the UCL Statement on Transparency in Research was approved and then published in November 2019.

In 2020, work commenced on the creation of online training to support researchers in making their research transparent.

19. Utilising animation and video with experts in the field, the online course will be primarily aimed at those in the early stages of their research careers, such as PhD students and postdocs, and will provide an introduction to what transparency and reproducibility are, why they are important and how researchers can implement transparent research practices.
20. Work is currently underway to finalise the course content and it is anticipated that the course will launch in 2022. Following the launch, as part of UCL's commitment to reviewing processes and embedding lessons learned, the course will be evaluated, including through surveys and interviews with course participants, in order to increase our understanding of early-career researchers' current views on the topic and consider ways in which UCL could refine/improve the course and/or wider efforts in this space.

### **Reviewing progress to strengthen the integrity of research (Commitment 5)**

21. Regularly reviewing processes, guidance and initiatives is important not only for ensuring adherence to the Concordat, but also to enable intuitions to best support researchers and its research culture by identifying the lessons that can be learned, and ensuring these are built into everyday practices. Such reviews can be undertaken as standalone reviews of specific aspects, such as the aforementioned review of the UCL Code of Conduct for Research, as well as arising from everyday practices and actions.
22. The following represents some of the actions that have been implemented in the academic year 2020-2021 as part of UCL's continuous review.

#### *Creation of a new research ethics website*

23. In 2021 a new website dedicated to research ethics at UCL was published. Created as a mirror of the research integrity website, the new ethics website was designed to provide a central point of information regarding human ethics and ethical approval for UCL researchers. [www.ucl.ac.uk/research-ethics/](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/research-ethics/)
24. The new design provides streamlined guidance and support, enabling researchers to more easily access information and guidance on how to apply ethics within their research, as well as how to apply for ethical approval; both internal and external to UCL.
25. To support researchers, there are clear links from the home page on
  - How to apply for ethical approval
  - Which ethics committee to apply to
  - Applying ethical approval from UCL
  - Guidance for researchers, including FAQs, commonly made mistake, and guidance for researchers undertaking overseas research or working with children
  - Guidance for external researchers approaching UCL staff and students as potential research participants

### *Publication of new guidance*

26. In addition to the creation of the new website, additional guidance documents were approved and published. This included a guidance note on data protection and ethical review. This guidance note was created to support researchers in better understanding the link between data protection and ethical review; explaining how the two UCL systems work alongside each other as well as highlighting how the data protection principles and legislation are aligned with accepted ethical principles. [www.ucl.ac.uk/research-ethics/guidance-applicants](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/research-ethics/guidance-applicants)

### **Training & Awareness Raising**

27. In November 2020 UCL launched two new online training programmes for staff and students; Disclosing and managing conflicts of interest at UCL, and Understanding and protecting intellectual property (IP). In addition, a new 'UCL Manage Conflicts and Declare Interests' system for staff to disclose conflicts and declare interests was launched in December 2020. [www.ucl.ac.uk/enterprise/news/2020/nov/new-training-and-system-launched-help-you-manage-intellectual-property-and-conflicts](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/enterprise/news/2020/nov/new-training-and-system-launched-help-you-manage-intellectual-property-and-conflicts)

### *Introduction to Research Support & Integrity*

28. In previous years this three-hour postgraduate seminar was run as a single, in-person session. The course was designed to introduce postgraduates to the principles and importance of research integrity, the support available to them within UCL, and to understand their obligations as a UCL researcher.
29. During 2020-2021 the course was revised to become an online learning programme. The change to online learning enabled the course leaders to provide expanded training on the existing topics, as well as including new areas and trainers:
- Introduction to the Research Support and Integrity course
  - Research Integrity
  - Data Protection
  - Research & ethics
  - Research Data Management and Research IT
  - Open Access and copyright
  - Summary and Q&A
30. The course is provided as a collaboration of staff from across UCL, and is run as a combination of live online interactive sessions, and online training modules, as well as dedicated discussion and question and answering sessions with each trainer.

## Research Integrity – External Engagement

### *House of Commons Science & Technology inquiry: Reproducibility and research integrity*

31. UCL submitted a response to the inquiry in September 2021 and contributed to the submission from the Russell Group.

### *League of European Research Universities (LERU)*

32. UCL continues to be an active member of LERU, which is an association of 23 European research-intensive universities. As part of the Dual Use Ad-Hoc Group, UCL continued to contribute to discussions regarding dual use compliance for academia, including the Export control and publications statement published in June 2021. The statement highlights the need for guidance to support universities in being able to comply with complex requirements relating to publications and knowledge exchange where the Dual Use regulations apply.  
[www.leru.org/publications/export-control-and-publications](http://www.leru.org/publications/export-control-and-publications)
33. As part of the Nagoya Protocol Ad-Hoc group, UCL also contributed to the LERU DSI statement (Nagoya Protocol), which updates the LERU statement published in 2018 entitled 'Inclusion of Digital Sequence Information in the Nagoya Protocol would Significantly Impede University Research' published in 2018.  
[www.leru.org/publications/leru-asks-for-a-simple-multilateral-system-for-digital-sequence-information-dsi-which-keeps-access-to-dsi-open-to-all](http://www.leru.org/publications/leru-asks-for-a-simple-multilateral-system-for-digital-sequence-information-dsi-which-keeps-access-to-dsi-open-to-all)
34. As part of the Information and Open Access Policy Group, UCL contributed to, the LERU note on Implementing Open Science, which considers the progress of implementing Open Science as well as the challenges and opportunities. This group was Chaired by Dr Paul Ayriss, UCL.  
[www.leru.org/publications/implementing-open-science](http://www.leru.org/publications/implementing-open-science)

## Research Misconduct

35. The UCL procedure for investigating and resolving allegations of misconduct in academic research closely follows the UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO)'s model whilst allowing some minor variations to fit with local circumstances and usage of terminology. The Named Person has increased powers to resolve allegations that are considered to be straightforward and not considered to be serious in nature and there is no intent to deceive. UCL also has a standing pool of screening panellists from across all UCL's faculties from which to draw to form screening panels. The version of the UCL procedure for investigating and resolving allegations of misconduct in academic research (the procedure) that was in place in 2020-21 was implemented on 1 January 2017. It can be accessed via the UCL website at: [www.ucl.ac.uk/governance-compliance/sites/governance\\_compliance/files/research-misconduct-procedure-jan-2017.pdf](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/governance-compliance/sites/governance_compliance/files/research-misconduct-procedure-jan-2017.pdf)
36. In light of experience, a review of the procedure continued in 2020-21-. The draft revised version of the procedure was consulted with various UCL committees and input was sought from UCL's Legal Services team as well as UKRIO. The revised version of the UCL procedure was approved by UCL's former Research Governance Committee and implemented for allegations received from 1 August

2021 onwards. It can be accessed via the UCL website at:

[www.ucl.ac.uk/governance-compliance/sites/governance\\_compliance/files/research-misconduct-procedure-aug-2021.pdf](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/governance-compliance/sites/governance_compliance/files/research-misconduct-procedure-aug-2021.pdf).

37. Once the draft revised UKRIO model procedure is launched, it is intended that some mapping be undertaken between the UCL procedure and the draft revised model procedure, to see if any further changes need to be made to the UCL version.
38. A summary of the main changes in the revised procedure are as follows:
  - the establishment of a standing screening committee consisting of trained members drawn from across all UCL Schools, to be supplemented by co-opted members as required;
  - the adoption of a hybrid approach for handling cases of research student academic misconduct similar to current practice at some other institutions. Academic misconduct in relation to assessed work will be referred to UCL's student Academic Regulations, while misconduct in relation to work intended for publication or already published will be referred to the procedure;
  - that taught student cases of academic misconduct be dealt with through UCL's student Academic Regulations;
  - publication of appropriate anonymised summaries of proven cases of research misconduct similar to those published for student complaints by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA).
39. The screening committee was set up in summer term 2021 to expedite this stage of UCL's process in place of its former standing pool. It is supported by an advisory team consisting of colleagues from UCL's Governance Team, Human Resources and Legal Services. Details of its membership can be found at: [www.ucl.ac.uk/governance-compliance/research-governance/research-misconduct-allegations-screening-committee](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/governance-compliance/research-governance/research-misconduct-allegations-screening-committee).
40. The committee met twice in summer 2021 where members received training on their role and the procedure and ensuring fair treatment, as well as a training session covering the wellbeing of participants from UCL Workplace Health. The committee also made some revisions to its Terms of Reference that included allowing for the Named Person to submit a report on cases dealt with at the Initial Assessment stage. This would allow for increased governance of the Named Person's decisions taken at the initial stage of the process. It was also intended that individual screening panels be set up as sub-groups of the committee to consider any allegations referred for screening in detail.
41. UCL is also keen to ensure that its scientific record is correct. While it is considered that UCL should publish information where it has requested retractions of publications following a misconduct verdict at the formal investigation stage, discussions continue on the feasibility of doing this.

### *Lessons learned*

42. Discussions continue on how best to draw out lessons to be learned from investigations of research misconduct (regardless of the outcome) in order to provide additional support and guidance for researchers and to further embed a strong culture across the institution. It is intended that the screening committee draw out any lessons to be learned from its screening of allegations (regardless of outcome) at this earlier stage of the process and discussions continue on the best way to do this.
43. This earlier work and consideration is essential to ensure that relevant information is drawn out to support the consideration and embedding of lessons learned, whilst being able to maintain the confidentiality of the process. It also ensures that the essential distinction between the processes for (and staff involved in) investigating allegations of research misconduct from those responsible for enhancing and embedding a culture of integrity remains.

### *Summary of investigations*

44. Two cases that were carried forward from 2019-20 and were referred for formal investigation have completed their work. In both cases it was determined that the allegation was upheld and research misconduct was determined to have been found proven. The recommendations arising from each case are being followed up as necessary that include seeking corrections and/or retractions be made to the papers in question to ensure the scientific record is correct by the journals. One further case that was referred for formal investigation in 2019-20 is still in progress and will complete in 2021-22.