

# Brunel University London annual statement on research integrity

## Section 1: Key contact information

Question	Response
<b>1A. Name of organisation</b>	Brunel University London
<b>1B. Type of organisation:</b>  higher education institution/industry/independent research performing organisation/other (please state)	Higher education institution
<b>1C. Date statement approved by governing body (DD/MM/YY)</b>	3 <sup>rd</sup> December 2025
<b>1D. Web address of organisation's research integrity page (if applicable)</b>	<a href="https://www.brunel.ac.uk/research/Research-Integrity">https://www.brunel.ac.uk/research/Research-Integrity</a>
<b>1E. Named senior member of staff to oversee research integrity</b>	Professor Hua Zhao, Pro Vice Chancellor - Research
	<a href="mailto:Research-Integrity@brunel.ac.uk">Research-Integrity@brunel.ac.uk</a>
<b>1F. Named member of staff who will act as a first point of contact for anyone wanting more information on matters of research integrity</b>	Professor Christina Victor, Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research - Culture & Governance.
	<a href="mailto:res-ethics@brunel.ac.uk">res-ethics@brunel.ac.uk</a>

## Section 2: Promoting high standards of research integrity and positive research culture.

### Description of actions and activities undertaken

#### 2A. Description of current systems and culture

Please describe how the organisation maintains high standards of research integrity and promotes positive research culture. It should include information on the support provided to researchers to understand standards, values and behaviours, such as training, support and guidance for researchers at different career stages/ disciplines.

#### Policies, governing structure and leadership

Brunel University London has adopted the Concordat to support research integrity and is committed to upholding the essential elements of the concordat in an effective and transparent manner.

We have a Research Integrity Code which draws together our policies regarding research integrity matters. The principal responsibility for Research Integrity compliance rests with Senate and is monitored through annual review on behalf of Senate by the Research and Knowledge Transfer Committee. The Chair of this Committee is the Pro Vice Chancellor – Research.

We have clear policies regarding Research Ethics and Governance at Brunel embedded into the research integrity code and these are overseen by the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) which is chaired by the Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research - Culture & Governance.

UREC oversees all ethics and governance matters concerning research conducted by Brunel University London staff and students which involves human participants, their tissue, and their data or animals. UREC reports on compliance annually to Executive Board and Council in a short statement relating to progress in research integrity.

UREC is accountable to the Council of the University and Senate for the provision policies, processes and procedures that ensure that all research conducted with people, human tissue or animals complies with the university 's ethical standards and relevant concordats and legal requirements. Animal research is overseen by a sub-committee of UREC-AWERB. Both UREC and AWERB include lay representatives from our local community

UREC also has responsibility for embedding a culture and awareness of ethics in research within the University, with particular reference to staff and student

development in research ethics.

UREC meets twice per term and provides an annual report to Council and regular reports to each meeting of Senate. It has established and maintained a series of policies, processes and procedures in order to ensure that appropriate ethical standards are upheld.

UREC is supported by Research Ethics Committees in our 4 constituent colleges lead by the Vice-Deans for Research.

Responsibility for ensuring that the policies within the code are embedded within the 'local' structure and rest with the Dean, appropriate Vice-Dean and Director of Research. Responsibility for supervision and monitoring of local compliance in research integrity lies with the College Research Committees. Issues of Research Ethics are determined through College and Research Ethics Committees who have a direct relationship with UREC (University Research Ethics Committee).

The senior member of staff to oversee research integrity is Professor Hua Zhao, Pro Vice Chancellor – Research.

The first point of contact for anyone wanting more information on matters of research integrity is Professor Christina Victor, Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research - Culture & Governance.

### **Communications & Engagement, Culture and development**

We provide training for academic supervisors and research ethics reviewers through the central Research Ethics team and facilitated by the Organisational Development team, which affords better visibility and recording of attendance across the University. Reviewers must attend at least one training session before undertaking review and must attend refresher training every 12 months thereafter. It is recommended that supervisors with responsibility for supervision of student research projects be mandated to attend a training workshop, as we continue to see issues around supervisors' understanding of the importance of the process in some areas, and competing demands on supervisors' time which detract from their engagement with the process. We offer online research Integrity training to all academic and research staff. We offer early career researchers training which includes an overview of ethics and integrity policies and requirements.

Training for students includes lectures, clear course guidance, web-based learning and engagement with research integrity training where the proposed research involves human participants. A discussion of ethics and data management is specified in the Research degree code as part of the 4-week progression review

and review points include discussions around research management skills. Details of the contact point for queries around research misconduct is on the 'my research' page of the e-vision portal for post graduate research students. Students on taught programmes receive guidance from supervisors in relation to ethics and misconduct as part of teaching provision.

Internal websites have been developed to increase access and visibility of research integrity matters to research staff, particularly to new starters. These contain links to research ethics pages and training and information on the Frameworks and Concordats. We have also included information on how the Research Ethics Committees operate, the standards of review, the risk categories reviewers work to, and linkage to relevant University policies.

We have increased engagement through the inclusion of lay members drawn from the local community in our UREC and AWERB committees and, as part of our commitment to openness and transparency in research, visits to research facilities are included in our annual research festival programme. We have a research integrity email address where research participants and others can provide feedback on our processes and procedures and their experiences of being a research participant.

## **2B. Changes and developments during the period under review**

Please provide an update on any changes made during the period, such as new initiatives, training, developments, also ongoing changes that are still underway. Drawing on Commitment 3 of the Concordat, please note any new or revised policies, practices and procedures to support researchers; training on research ethics and research integrity; training and mentoring opportunities to support the development of researchers' skills throughout their careers.

We embedded a significant change to our research ethics processes in the 24/25 cycle. As noted in our 23/24 report all cases of research misconduct were from UG/PGT students. Investigation of these cases identified a range of factors underlying this including the limited amount of time to obtain ethics in taught programmes. In 24/25 we introduced a system whereby dissertation module leads obtain ethics approval for a cohort of dissertation students and sets out the study parameters in terms of topic, methods to be used and population that can be studied all of which must be low risk. Students complete a study pro-forma to demonstrate that their dissertation fits these established parameters and develop their own consent forms and participant information sheets using standard templates. Whilst we have not yet completed a full year of implementation,

initial results suggest that this change has reduced potential misconduct cases-see section 3A- and enhanced student experience. It has also markedly decreased applications from approximately 5,500 in 23/24 to an estimate of 800-1000 for 25/26.

Additional process changes introduced relate to the clarification of study types that do not require ethics review such as secondary data analysis. There is a template that applicants complete setting out the study parameters and data sets to be used. The algorithm then evaluates if the project falls within the No Ethics Review category. This facility is very useful for staff/students wanting to publish from secondary data studies as the system generated NER (no ethics review) evaluation can be used to support articles submitted for publication and where the journal requires evidence of ethics review.

The academic year 24/25 saw a significant restructuring of the university in academic, technical and professional staff. A substantial proportion of our college-based research support staff and a senior member of our centralised ethics support staff left the university. There has been a restructuring of research roles and our primary organisational unit is now departments of which there are 28 grouped into 4 colleges. We have retained the role of Vice Dean Research who has overall responsibility for research governance in their college supported by departmental research directors who have responsibility for research ethics and governance at local level including reviewing low risk research projects with medium/high risk studies reviewed at university level. This has influenced the availability of staff to develop new training and events, so this area has not developed as quickly as we had hoped.

We have recognised the potential impact that these changes have had across our research community and have increased our communication across research leadership to include a regular meeting between all College-based leadership roles, Research Centre leadership and central research teams. We have also started a programme of surveys to understand and develop our research culture.

## **2C. Reflections on progress and plans for future developments**

This should include a reflection on the previous year's activity including a review of progress and impact of initiatives if known relating to activities referenced in the previous year's statement. Note any issues that have hindered progress, e.g. resourcing or other issues.

The introduction of the NER (no ethics review) route and development of module level applications has substantially reduced the demand for the BREO system from

UG/PGT students and substantially reduced misconduct cases. The communication and training required around implementation was higher than had been anticipated, potentially due to the changes coming at a time of wider structural change, but overall feedback has been positive and the process is well embedded in most areas.

We are monitoring the implementation of the staff and structure changes on the ethics and research integrity culture within the University and will evaluate what, if any, further changes to the system are required.

Following the staff changes we intend to start a research integrity working group which will report jointly to Research and Knowledge Transfer Committee and UREC in order to develop this and identify and monitor actions. We will revise our research integrity code in line with the new structure and this group will lead the process. We also plan to look at developing our guidance on use of AI and questionable research practices which arise due to a lack of knowledge or attention to detail, negligence, or deliberate action, and may occur where there is no evident intention to deceive.

Our research misconduct code includes the whole research cycle and we will be running training on research authorship and reviewing the work of others in 2026. We continue to foster a culture of open research, ensuring publications, data and other outputs are shared openly wherever possible, with the library providing dedicated expertise and infrastructure, offering guidance, training and support for open access, rights retention, managing and sharing research data and repository services.

Alongside our 'in-house' research ethics training we have obtained 700 licenses for the UKIRO 4 module Research Integrity course to our academic staff. We will seek feedback from colleagues on our training provision. We aspire to the inclusion of research ethics training as one of the suite of compliance training modules mandated for all academic staff as a medium-term objective.

.

## Section 3: Addressing research misconduct

### 3A. Statement on processes that the organisation has in place for dealing with allegations of misconduct

Please provide:

- a brief summary of relevant organisation policies/ processes (e.g. research misconduct procedure, whistle-blowing policy, bullying/harassment policy; appointment of a third party to act as confidential liaison for persons wishing to raise concerns) and brief information on the periodic review of research misconduct processes (e.g. date of last review; any major changes during the period under review; date when processes will next be reviewed).
- information on how the organisation creates and embeds a research environment in which all staff, researchers and students feel comfortable to report instances of misconduct (e.g. code of practice for research, whistle-blowing, research misconduct procedure, informal liaison process, website signposting for reporting systems, training, mentoring, reflection and evaluation of policies, practices and procedures).
- anonymised key lessons learned from any investigations into allegations of misconduct which either identified opportunities for improvements in the organisation's investigation procedure and/or related policies / processes/ culture or which showed that they were working well.

The senior officer responsible for dealing with cases of suspected misconduct is Mr Tristan Foot, University Secretary and General Counsel.

Any person engaging in research in the name of Brunel University London is expected to observe the highest standards of conduct. The general principles in relation to research are addressed in the Brunel University London Research Integrity Code and in the University Code of Research Ethics.

The University has established and maintains standard procedures for the investigation of misconduct in research, ensuring that such allegations are thorough, fair and conducted in a timely manner.

Definitions of research misconduct and processes for investigation are outlined in **Council Ordinance 18 Procedures for Investigation of Research Misconduct**. Any allegation of research misconduct should be reported confidentially to the

Secretary to Council or, in the event of a potential conflict of interest or absence, his/her nominated representative appointed by the Chair of Council. Any allegations of fiscal malfeasance or irregularity in relation to research activity should be reported confidentially to the Director of Finance.

Our **whistleblowing policy** covers all employees, Members of Council, consultants, contractors, volunteers, interns, casual workers and agency workers.

The aims of this policy are: (a) to encourage individuals to report suspected wrongdoing as soon as possible, in the knowledge that their concerns will be taken seriously and investigated appropriately; (b) to provide individuals with guidance as to how to raise those concerns; (c) to reassure individuals that they should be able to raise genuine concerns without fear of reprisals, even if they turn out to be mistaken.

Our **dignity at work policy** aims to assist in maintaining a healthy working environment where unacceptable behaviour is identified, challenged and stopped. It aims to: • ensure the dignity of all employees at the University; • ensure that differences are respected and valued; • demonstrate our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion; • set out the responsibilities of all parties in preventing bullying, harassment and victimisation; • outline the process to seek support if bullying or harassment occurs.

All three of these policies, together with a copy of our research integrity code can be accessed from our webpage

<https://www.brunel.ac.uk/about/administration/documents-and-policies>

They are also clearly displayed on the University external research integrity webpage and the University internal research policy page and flagged on central staff research pages and linked to each College research page.

Contacts for reporting research misconduct are displayed on our webpages and colleagues are assured of the provisions for anonymity in our research misconduct policy.

### **Allegations of Research Misconduct**

During the academic year 24/25 we received 1 research misconduct referral relating to a PGT student and which was resolved after investigation with a formal warning.

This represents a substantial reduction from the 66 reported during the previous

academic year and reflects the introduction of a module level approval process for UG/PGT projects. This process involves dissertation module which leads into obtaining ethics approval for a cohort of dissertation students and sets out the study parameters in terms of topic, methods to be used and population that can be studied all of which must be low risk. Students complete a study pro-forma to demonstrate that their dissertation fits these established parameters and reduces the occurrence of cases arising from students incorrectly engaging with the ethics process prior to starting their research.

### 3B. Information on investigations of research misconduct that have been undertaken

Please complete the table on the number of **formal investigations completed during the period under review** (including investigations which completed during this period but started in a previous academic year). Information from ongoing investigations should not be submitted.

An organisation's procedure may include an initial, preliminary, or screening stage to determine whether a formal investigation needs to be completed. These allegations should be included in the first column but only those that proceeded past this stage, to formal investigations, should be included in the second column.

Type of allegation	Number of allegations			
	Number of allegations reported to the organisation	Number of formal investigations	Number upheld in part after formal investigation	Number upheld in full after formal investigation
Fabrication				
Falsification				
Plagiarism				
Failure to meet legal, ethical and professional obligations	1	1		1
Misrepresentation (eg data; involvement; interests; qualification; and/or publication history)				
Improper dealing with allegations of misconduct				
Multiple areas of concern (when received in a single allegation)				
<i>Other*</i>				
<b>Total:</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>		<b>1</b>

**\*If you listed any allegations under the 'Other' category, please give a brief, high-level summary of their type here. Do not give any identifying or confidential information when responding.**