Annual Statement on Compliance with the *Concordat to support research integrity*: 2021-22

Background

The University of Salford is committed to excellent research with integrity. We promote individual researcher accountability for good research practice, supporting this through our policies, procedures and culture of transparency, respect, honesty and rigour.

This statement outlines the University's commitment to promote and fulfil the requirements of the Universities UK *Concordat to support research integrity*. The University's Academic Ethics Committee, a committee of Senate, reviews and approves the content of this statement for publication and it is shared with the Research & Enterprise Committee for information and final comment.

The summary of commitments from the Concordat, which set out the ways and means in which researchers, employers of researchers and research funders are expected to meet those commitments, is included as an appendix.

This statement discusses work under the headings of each commitment but there is naturally some crossover. Under each commitment we outline the activities or developments the University has made in each area of the last academic year to improve our performance and reaffirm our commitment to the principles of the Concordat.

Commitment 1: upholding the highest standards of rigour and integrity in all aspects of research

The University continues to work with its researchers to ensure they are equipped with the skills and information required to conduct their research in accordance with expected standards of rigour and integrity. The Research & Enterprise Directorate (R&E) intranet site that we launched last year is used as a hub for accessing research policies, procedures and guidance, and for sharing internal and external news and developments for our institution, partners and external bodies including funders and other research bodies. The site has been expanded to include additional guidance and information on policy and legislative changes, including national security in research. Traffic to the site continues to increase and is improved by smart cross-referencing and regular management of content by a dedicated working group. We continue to communicate on academic ethics through the regular newsletter, and in April a weekly postgraduate researcher (PGR) newsletter was also launched.

The Quality, Impact and Skills team (R&E) has reviewed the researcher training offer for the 2022-23 academic year, with intention to run a regular programme of events and skills workshops throughout the academic year across disciplines and career stages. The same has been done for our PGRs and we will be introducing a trimesterly programme of induction training and events; an integral part of this training will be on the subjects of research integrity and ethics, building on the standing session that has been delivered to PGRs since 2019.

Living up to the expectations of the Concordat in difficult circumstances is supported by a dedicated email address for the confidential reporting of allegations of, or concerns about, misconduct in research, through which guidance can be sought. This year we are proud to have extended access to our Whistleblowing Policy to PGRs in accordance with sector practice; the same Policy remains open to staff to raise concerns about actions or behaviour when, owing the nature or severity of the issue, it would be inappropriate to use normal channels.

We have also introduced a functional account for non-confidential discussions, queries and thoughts about research governance and integrity matters. This heightens the profile of the Research Governance Team and encourages open communication between our researchers and professional services colleagues about research governance and integrity.

We actively promote a culture and environment of academic freedom free from discrimination and harassment. Our outward messaging on our websites, our modelled behaviours and content of our policies and procedures state the responsibilities of individual researchers to self-educate and comply with requirements.

The Ethics App was successfully rolled out to the final panel, meaning that all staff and student research requiring ethics review is now processed through the Ethics App with only a small number of exclusions. Since incorporating the Ethics review of all Taught Modules, a total of 299 modules have been reviewed and approved for delivery (a recurring requirement every 5 years). In the interest of transparency, a complete list of approved modules is uploaded each month to on the Academic Ethics intranet site, freely accessible by all academic and professional services staff.

Commitment 2: ensuring that research is conducted according to appropriate ethical, legal and professional frameworks, obligations and standards

The University has three primary policies to support research to be conducted to a high standard with integrity: the Research Code of Practice, the Academic Ethics Policy, and the Research Misconduct Policy & Procedure. These policies are available on both the internal and external University websites and are referenced at staff induction, PGR induction, supervisor training and in Academic Ethics panel training. They are additionally supported by other University policies, including the Academic Misconduct, Student Misconduct, Safeguarding, Health & Safety and University Whistleblowing policies, and the University Ethics Framework. Together, these policies define the University's commitment to ensuring its researchers are acting under best practice of ethical, legal and professional obligations and standards. The policies, complemented by guidance on the internal webpages, outline where and how our researchers can seek advice at every stage of their research journey.

Throughout 2021-22, the Research Code of Practice, the Academic Ethics Policy and the Research Misconduct Policy & Procedure have undergone extensive review by a dedicated working group, with diverse representation across the University, and have been submitted to the Academic Ethics and Research & Enterprise committees for sign off (publication anticipated in August). Changes have been made to procedures to align with current practice, to improve reporting and auditing methods, to align to the best practice of the sector (informed by discussion at sector engagement activities) and to draw clearer focus to our equality, diversity and inclusion priorities. To inform these changes and ensure that we are performing in accordance with appropriate obligations and standards, we have increased our attendance at, and engagement with, discussion groups, webinars, communities

of practice and other sector engagement activities this year. This has been greatly facilitated by the post-2020 lockdown shift to greater online presence for this type of event. We have taken heed of this benefit and intend to continue offering our own training and engagement internally online, with post-event resources made available to widen participation.

During this academic year the University has also been developing a National Security in Research Policy, which addresses the University's expectations for compliance with the National Security & Investments Act, and Export Control and associated licensing. To support our researchers through this complex territory, we have also developed our guidance around these areas, raising awareness of and promoting the principles of Trusted Research. We have two named Research & Enterprise colleagues providing guidance and advice in this area.

Commitment 3: embedding a culture of research integrity

We are proud to have become a subscriber institution to UKRIO this academic year, recognising the great value of this community that fosters an environment of good practice in research and continual development. We intend to continue to build on this relationship and mutually benefit in the future. We are exploring the potential to create institutional Integrity Champions using the UKRIO framework and incorporating this opportunity into our researcher development toolkit.

In our commitment to embedding a culture of research integrity, we encourage our research community to share ideas and examples of best practice from other areas in the sector and to give suggestions for improvements to process. We do this through our newsletters, our working groups and researcher forums. One suggestion we have pursued this academic year has been to join the UK Reproducibility Network and have started work to do so.

We have continued to see higher engagement with the academic ethics process and its inherent principles since the launch of the Ethics App. This has resulted in increased queries and request for bespoke training. The Governance and Ethics Team (R&E) continues to expand its toolkit for academic ethics applicants (across research and taught programmes) and is gathering resources for research skills that apply in this area. The Team offers bi-monthly drop-in sessions for staff and students, expanding its FAQ from these sessions. These Q&A sessions also provide a useful learning opportunity for research governance and academic ethics administrative staff, supporting development and succession planning.

The Academic Ethics Committee noted a marked improvement in the quality and detail of reporting from its Academic Ethics Panels this year. Each panel reports quarterly to the Academic Ethics Committee, celebrating successes and bringing issues for discussion and resolution. The increase in detail this year has ultimately led to more profound discussion and a heightened focus on meaningful data. These Panels produce an annual summary report at the last committee meeting of the academic year. The template for this annual summary has been altered this year to encourage strategic focus on priorities for the following academic year, framing the activities and objectives of the panel in line with developments and barriers encountered during the previous year. Last year, we noted the requirement to revisit the efficacy of research/academic governance processes through a unified approach; this year we have increased engagement between the Academic Ethics Panels and the Ethics Administration teams, using live examples and "on the ground" experience of applicants' and administrators' hurdles to improve the processes and guidance we provide.

We undertake an annual review of our research governance framework but between this, where processes are no longer fit for purpose, we encourage our researchers (including PGRs) to approach the Research & Enterprise Directorate to discuss and work together to find alternative solutions. One such example this academic year is our PPIE processes. We will work over the next academic year to remove barriers for our patient and public participants, recognising the immense value of their contribution to our research and our commitment to embedding public involvement with our research.

When reviewing our Research Code of Practice with the Equality, Inclusion & Diversity team, we have noted that although we made note to key commitments such as the Equality Act and Athena SWAN, we were less focused on how barriers might be practically addressed and mitigated. As such, the Research Governance & Policy Team is committed over the next academic year to work with the Quality, Impact & Skills team to review the action plan and recommendations to improve equality, inclusion and diversity for our researchers, looking at over and under representation and how we might address this for greater diversity in research for the future.

Senior responsibility for Research Integrity and Governance

Overall responsibility for research integrity, governance and ethics sits with the Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research & Enterprise. The Research Governance & Policy Manager (R&E) may be addressed as the first point of contact on research integrity matters. The Research Governance & Policy Manager is also the Named Person for reports of allegations of misconduct in research, with contact details available on the University's public and intranet websites.

Commitment 4: Dealing with allegations of research misconduct

As discussed earlier, the Research Misconduct Policy & Procedure has undergone major review and revision in 2021-22. The Policy & Procedure outlines a robust and transparent process for reporting and managing allegations of misconduct in research. As part of the review, the Policy & Procedure have been expanded to include additional, specific examples of research misconduct, using the definition given by UKRIO as the baseline. Additional guidance around expectations for collaborative research have been included, with a heightened focus on international collaborations. We have discussed the alignment of the Policy & Procedure alongside student-facing policies and have intentions next academic year to build upon existing structures to enhance thorough investigation into allegations. We continue to promote informal resolution of concerns where this is appropriate and offer opportunities to informally discuss confidential matters or concerns.

As part of the Policy & Procedure review, we have updated the Equality Impact Assessments. One recommendation from this assessment was to start collecting data on protected characteristics in allegations of research misconduct. The intention of this would be to identify if any patterns emerge and as such, look to address any barriers that might be contributing to these patterns. To ensure we address this in a sensitive and meaningful way, we will do so with input from the Quality Management Office who already analyse similar data from the Academic Misconduct Procedure, and with advice from the Data Protection Manager.

Allegations of Research Misconduct

During the academic year 2021-22 there have been no allegations of research misconduct received.

Commitment 5 has been addressed through the content and production of this statement, which has been presented to the Academic Ethics Committee for sign off, the Research & Enterprise

Committee for information (both committees of Senate) and will be published on the University's internal and external websites.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Re-emerging into a world with lifted Covid restrictions has presented its challenges, yet we strive to embed a culture of excellent research and integrity through all our actions. As a University we are committed to providing the service our researchers need to deliver innovative and transformative new knowledge and will continue to develop upon successes and increase our performance.

Each year we outline objectives for the following year and provide our responses to actions taken towards achieving these:

2020-21 Objective	2021-22 Action taking
We will continue to share research best practice between staff and students on matters of research integrity. We will build on the relationships developed with external partners and institutions during 2020-21 to facilitate this and reach a wider audience and collective expertise.	We have engaged with several external workshops and discussions throughout 2021-22 with UKRI, ARMA, UKRIO and others. These have informed our view of the research integrity landscape and its horizon and enabled us to engage with a broad range of institutions and consider practice from across the sector. We have become subscribers to UKRIO and have widely shared the valuable resources provided by the organisation with our researchers at all levels.
We will establish a renewed, sustainable training programme on research integrity and academic ethics that is accessible to researchers at all levels. This may initially need to build on existing resources, especially for training on use of the Ethics App and for reviewing Academic Ethics applications. We recognise that there is a pressing need to roll out suitable training to a large number of colleagues and students and will strive to find an easily implemented and managed solution that won't draw resource away from other areas.	Throughout 2021-22 the Research Governance and Ethics team has delivered 25 training sessions for staff and students at all levels. The team runs bi-monthly Q&A drop-in sessions, open to all staff and students and has a regular schedule of induction training for PGR and MPhil students. As of 2022-23, the Team will have a standing commitment to deliver PGR and supervisor induction sessions each trimester. Until that time, supplementary training videos and resources have been updated and made available via the Academic Ethics Hubs.
We will reconvene the Research Governance Review Group to undertake a major review and update of the Research Code of Practice, Academic Ethics Policy and Research Misconduct Policy.	The Research Governance Review Group succeeded in reconvening, reviewing and updating the Research Code of Practice, Academic Ethics Policy and Research Misconduct Policy & Procedure. At the time of writing, all three policies are going through a process of edits before anticipated publication in August. Major changes have included a rationalisation of processes based on changes to the Academic Ethics approval process, a

	review through an equality and diversity lens (with further suggestions for improvements recorded, upon which we will build) and a clearer process for Research Misconduct reporting.
We will review the efficacy of existing forms of communication of academic ethics and research integrity (including the newsletter) and will also commit to communicating summary changes of policies and procedures via email and online channels. We will start to develop a process for the ethics review of time-sensitive commercial research applications as well as developing appropriate guidance around research integrity and ethics in enterprise.	We have continued to produce the Academic Ethics newsletter this academic year and are looking at a more interactive platform for the following academic year. We have explored (and intend to pursue) the development of a podcast to engage a broader audience with research governance matters, developments and to share ideas and best practice. Work has started to develop a time-sensitive commercial research process for ethics review but has been deferred to next academic year. Where these cases have arisen before an agreed process, the ethics panels have supported their academic colleagues through reserve measures.
We will continue to record and address matters for resolution by users of the App and will work with the developer, Academic Ethics panels, and applicants to find workable solutions or alternatives.	2021-22 has again seen a year of intensive support of Ethics App users. There have been changes to the technology management of the App but the team has managed well. Small, progressive changes following requests and suggestions have been made, and continue to be.

Below we have outlined self-recommended next steps on which we intend to focus over the next 12 months and on which we will report progress in the 2022-23 statement.

- We are committed to an inclusive, supportive research environment free from discrimination and harassment. This will be ensured by addressing measures identified as part of our equality, inclusion and diversity commitments in research. We will highlight our position and key commitments in our research integrity policies.
- We will work to better integrate our misconduct policies with one another. Although they operate effectively on their own, we believe we can improve processes the rigour of investigation into allegation.
- We will revisit our interest in expanding how we communicate research integrity matters with our community. We have explored options for different and more accessible platforms and technologies with the intention of engaging harder-to-reach and time-poor audiences.
- To develop our environment that is underpinned by a culture of integrity, we will pursue the potential to create Integrity Champions within our different research areas. We hope this

will further conversation, heighten awareness of issues and developments, and encourage sharing of collective expertise.

Appendix

Summary of commitments (**full Concordat available through Universities UK**)

As signatories to the concordat to support research integrity, we are committed to:

1. upholding the highest standards of rigour and integrity in all aspects of research
2. ensuring that research is conducted according to appropriate ethical, legal and professional frameworks, obligations and standards
3. 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
4. using transparent, timely, robust and fair processes to deal with allegations of research misconduct should they arise
5. working together to strengthen the integrity of research and to review progress regularly and openly

Commitment 1. Employers of researchers are responsible for:
- maintaining a research environment that develops good research practice and embeds a culture of research integrity, as described in commitments 2 to 5
- supporting researchers to understand and act according to expected standards, values and behaviours
- defending researchers when they live up to the expectations of this concordat in difficult circumstances
- demonstrating that they have procedures in place to ensure that research is conducted in accordance with standards of best practice; systems to promote research integrity; and transparent, robust and fair processes to investigate alleged research misconduct

Commitment 2. Employers of researchers must:
- have clear policies on ethical review and approval that are available to all researchers
- make sure that all researchers are aware of, and understand policies and processes relating to ethical approval
- support researchers to adopt best practice in relation to ethical, legal and professional requirements
- have appropriate arrangements in place through which researchers can access advice and guidance on ethical, legal and professional obligations and standards

Commitment 3. Employers of researchers will:
- embed these features in their own systems, processes and practices
- reflect recognised best practice in their own systems, processes and practices
- implement the concordat within their research environment
- participate in an annual monitoring exercise to demonstrate that the institution has met the commitments of the concordat
- promote training and development opportunities to research staff and students, and encourage their uptake

- identify a named senior member of staff to oversee research integrity and ensure that this information is kept up to date and publicly available on the institution's website
- identify a named member of staff who will act as a first point of contact for anyone wanting more information on matters of research integrity, and ensure that contact details for this person are kept up to date and are publicly available on the institution's website

Commitment 4. Employers of researchers must:

- have clear, well-articulated and confidential mechanisms for reporting allegations of research misconduct
- have robust, transparent and fair processes for dealing with allegations of misconduct that reflect best practice. This includes the use of independent external members of formal investigation panels, and clear routes for appeal
- ensure that all researchers and other members of staff are made aware of the relevant contacts and procedures for making allegations
- act with no detriment to whistle-blowers who have made allegations of misconduct in good faith, or in the public interest, including taking reasonable steps to safeguard their reputation. This should include avoiding the inappropriate use of legal instruments, such as non-disclosure agreements
- take reasonable steps to resolve any issues found during the investigation. This can include imposing sanctions, requesting a correction of the research record and reporting any action to regulatory and statutory bodies, research participants, funders or other professional bodies as circumstances, contractual obligations and statutory requirements dictate
- take reasonable steps to safeguard the reputation of individuals who are exonerated
- provide information on investigations of research misconduct to funders of research and to professional and/or statutory bodies as required by their conditions of grant and other legal, professional and statutory obligations
- support their researchers in providing appropriate information when they are required to make reports to professional and/or statutory bodies
- provide a named point of contact or recognise an appropriate third party to act as confidential liaison for whistle-blowers or any other person wishing to raise concerns about the integrity of research being conducted under their auspices. This need not be the same person as the member of staff identified to act as first point of contact on research integrity matters, as recommended under commitment 3