

## Research Integrity Annual Statement Sept 2020 – August 2021

Bishop Grosseteste University complies with the Concordat to Support Research Integrity (2019) and strives to achieve the highest standards of research integrity.

In accordance with the UK Concordat for Research Integrity's Commitment #5, BGU reports on activity in 2020-21.

1. Summary of actions and activities that have been undertaken to support and strengthen understanding and the application of research integrity issues (for example postgraduate and researcher training, or process reviews)

Following extensive consultation and review, a Research Ethics Clearance Form was developed over 2019-20 and implemented for use across the University in September 2020, for all staff and student research projects. Previously, a short-version application form was in use for most undergraduate and PGCE projects, and a longer application form was in use for Masters and doctoral level student projects and staff projects alike. The new form aimed to replace these with one comprehensive document for all applicants, to ensure that GDPR and enhanced data management plans are in place where relevant, to ensure that all projects can be documented, even if a full ethics review is not required, to allow the option for reviewers to provide methodological feedback, as well as a core ethical review, should applicants request it, in order to support the integrity of individual projects, especially for developing researchers, to ensure that all core issues of ethics and integrity are considered consistently, and to provide outline approval for projects, to support research bids, where relevant, as well as to provide scheme level approval for programmes of research, such as student activities that is directed by a member of staff.

The revised Research Ethics Clearance Form was introduced alongside a range of training materials and events. Staff training was offered at several points across the academic year and training has also been offered to BGU's partner institutions. In addition, an extensive Research Ethics BlackBoard course was launched in September 2020, available for all staff and students. The course site features key institutional documents and information about the review process, as well as numerous external support sites and documents, with a particular focus on supporting and enhancing internet-mediated research, in the face of the recent and ongoing COVID19 pandemic. The site further comprises training videos, FAQs and links to key contacts.

The revised Research Ethics Clearance Form and engagement with new support materials has been monitored and reviewed over 2020-21. All members of the Research Ethics Committee and most nominated subject level research ethics representatives attended relevant training sessions and provided feedback on the utility of the clearance form in their subject groups or teams. Staff applicants found the revised form largely clear and comprehensive. Staff reported the form to be more onerous for student applicants, though recognised the need for comprehensive consideration of relevant ethical issues. In order to support taught student applicants (namely undergraduates, PGCE and Masters level students) with completing a detailed clearance application, staff responsible for relevant taught modules comprising a research element can partially complete the form in some circumstances, providing the partial-completion is offered fairly to all students in the cohort and that the partially completed form is checked, approved and recorded by the Chair of the Research Ethics Committee. In this way, responsibility for considering relevant ethical issues can be supported and shared, without comprising ethical standards. Colleagues have reported that this process has been supportive for students.

An additional change implemented in September 2020 is that Masters level projects can be reviewed at the local level, within and by subject teams, rather than at an institutional level, requiring review by staff and reporting to the Research Ethics Committee. Support has been offered to all colleagues

involved in Masters level project review, and training offered, to ensure that this process has been implemented fairly and appropriately.

These changes have been substantive over the past year and have been favourably received. The consistency of comprehensive review of all projects across the University provide confidence that BGU upholds the values and commitments outlined in the Research Ethics Policy, and the Concordat to Support Research Integrity, alike.

BGU continues to offer support and mentorship to researchers at all stages of their careers, providing opportunities to meet with the Chair of the Research Ethics committee and/or subject representatives to discuss project specific queries as required.

In 2020 a series of Research Ethics drop-in sessions have been offered and advertised to all staff and research postgraduates. Whilst engagement with these sessions has been limited, they will continue to be offered, to provide opportunities to discuss or query specific projects or local level review processes.

In addition to offering a bi-level training programme for staff, comprising an Introduction to the Essentials of Research Ethics and Integrity for all staff, and a more advanced Research Ethics Reviewer Training Session, training and discussion sessions have been delivered to PhD and EdD students, and offered to other subject groups where needed.

2. Statement to provide assurance that the processes the institution has in place for dealing with allegations of misconduct are transparent, timely, robust and fair, and that they continue to be appropriate to the needs of the organisation

BGU has accessible policies on misconduct for both staff and students, which outlines how allegations of such misconduct can be raised and are subsequently handled. [The Code of Practice for Academic Misconduct](#) is subjected to regular review to ensure that they are fit for purpose. Research misconduct is addressed explicitly within the Research Ethics Policy. Furthermore, concerns regarding misconduct, complaints, training requests or broader queries regarding integrity and ethics are directed to the Chair of the Research Ethics Committee: Dr. Caroline Horton ([caroline.horton@bishopp.ac.uk](mailto:caroline.horton@bishopp.ac.uk)).

Independent concerns can be raised to the Head of Research, Dr. Andrew Jackson ([Andrew.jackson@bishopp.ac.uk](mailto:Andrew.jackson@bishopp.ac.uk)), via BGU's complaints process for [students](#) or for [staff](#) via the whistleblowing policy.

The Participant Information Sheet template includes a recommendation that participants in research projects can be directed to an independent contact point, should that be required.

An action arising from BGU's Integrity Statement 2019-20 concerned collecting feedback concerning the transparency, accessibility and suitability of institutional policies concerning misconduct. Staff colleagues with a responsibility for research ethics responded to an online survey. Of those, 63% indicated that they knew how to report any cases of research misconduct, should that be required. The remaining 37% indicated, "I think so". 88% indicated that they would know where to find information about relevant policies and/or procedures concerning research misconduct, should they need to? The remaining participant (12%) indicated, "I think so". 100% of respondents indicated that they felt they have access to colleagues or information that could provide them with advice on research misconduct, should they need it. 88% indicated that there is a research environment at BGU in which all researchers can work safely. One respondent (12%) indicated, "I don't know". 88% indicated that processes for handling research misconduct - formal or informal – are *transparent* at BGU, and 75% indicated that these processes are *sufficient*. 63% indicated that these processes would be processed and managed suitably. 25% indicated, "I think so". One other (12%) provided a comment that it would depend on the nature of the misconduct. Indeed, this sentiment was echoed

in open-ended comments, whereby it seems that BGU processes are sufficient, however it is difficult to be certain of this when the processes haven't been applied regularly (due to limited misconduct being identified and processed). Indeed this seems to reflect a wider point, albeit one offered by very few respondents, that they assume the processes are reliable and sufficient, but with limited opportunities to test those processes, it may be that they are simply unable to detect any misconduct rendering the Institution unaware of it. Indeed, responses to the question, "Are you confident that research misconduct, should it occur, it would be detected by BGU's processes and procedures?" were more mixed, with 50% responding, "Yes" and 12% responding, "No". Others were unsure, and one elaborated that it would depend on the nature of the misconduct.

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Taken together there seems to be great confidence in the institutional processes and procedures for handling, reporting and dealing with research misconduct, however with such limited experience with applying them, it is very difficult to be sure that they are working. The full confidence in the feeling of accessibility to supporting information and/or colleagues is reassuring to see, however, and likely reflects the close-knit and small-scale network of BGU. Indeed, one respondent offered the final comment, *"I think BGU provides a very safe environment in which every member of staff can feel confident and is empowered to use the appropriate ways to report any misconduct"*. This captures the ethos of the institution, as a small and specialist University, with its environment for supporting researchers at all phases of their research career, as well as providing a network of communication should anyone – staff, student or external user of research – feel they would like to raise an issue concerning a research project.

Taken together, this feedback indicates that policies and processes concerning research misconduct and for upholding high standards of integrity more broadly are transparent, accessible, and fit for purpose at BGU. Nevertheless, a full institution-wide audit of research ethics policy compliance is scheduled to take place over 2021-22 and will be reported in the Integrity Statement for that year.

3. High-level statement on any formal investigations of research misconduct that have been undertaken, which will include data on the number of investigations. If no formal investigation has been undertaken, this should also be noted

In 2020-21, as previously, there were no formal incidents of research misconduct or complaints of process raised or investigated at Bishop Grosseteste University. These can be listed as: Fabrication 0, falsification 0, plagiarism 0, misrepresentation 0, breach of duty of care 0, improper dealing with allegations of misconduct 0, other 0.

4. Statement on what the institution has learned from any formal investigations of research misconduct that have been undertaken, including what lessons have been learned to prevent the same type of incident re-occurring

Whilst no formal investigations of misconduct have been conducted over the past year, an institution-wide audit activity is planned for 2021-22, to document the application of the Research Ethics Policy and associated review processes at the local, or subject-group, level, as well as compliance with staff training in research ethics and integrity as offered by the University.

5. Statement on how the institution creates and embeds a research environment in which all staff, researchers and students feel comfortable to report instances of misconduct

Policies are in place and are accessible for both staff, via the Whistleblowing Policy and associated procedures, and for students via the Complaints Procedure, to raise any issues of research integrity or concern.

In addition are in the process of formally recruiting for an Integrity Officer. In the meantime, issues pertaining to research integrity continue to be supported and managed by the Chair of the Research Ethics Committee, Dr. Caroline Horton, in the first instance, in consultation with the Head of Research, Dr. Andrew Jackson, as required.

Template consent forms and participant information sheets are available to all staff and students. Within the latter, we recommend including the contact details for an independent contact, specific to the project. For instance, for an undergraduate project this might refer to the module leader. For a staff project this might refer to the Integrity Officer or, in cases of a conflict of interest, the Head of Research.

Members of the Research Ethics Committee, comprising colleagues representing activity and disciplines across the University, have been asked to provide feedback on the suitability of processes by which staff, researchers and students feel comfortable to report instances of misconduct.