Compliance with the Concordat to Support Research Integrity

**Introduction:**
In July 2013, HEFCE (whose duties in relation to research have now been taken over by Research England) introduced an expectation that each university complies with the UK Concordat to Support Research Integrity. The Concordat contains 5 commitments, each of which specifies actions for universities as employers, for individual researchers and for research funders.

A specific requirement of the Concordat is set out under Commitment 5; namely, that employers of researchers present a short annual statement to their own governing body that:

- Provides a summary of actions and activities that have been undertaken to support and strengthen understanding and application of research integrity issues;
- Provides assurances that the processes they have in place for dealing with allegations of misconduct are transparent, robust and fair, and that they continue to be appropriate to the needs of the organisation;
- Provides a high-level statement on any formal investigations of research misconduct that have been undertaken.

The summary statement provided in this paper, and the associated full statement (available in the Council Reading Room) aims to meet the requirement set out under Commitment 5.

**Current context and potential risks:**
Research integrity has been increasingly under the spotlight, partly as a result of a number of high profile cases of research misconduct, which have led to retractions of research papers, and have been damaging to the reputation of the institutions which employ those individuals. Scrutiny has come from the press, research funders and UK and EU Governments over the past year. Research Integrity was the subject of a House of Commons Science and Technology Select Committee enquiry this year, the report of which was published in July 2018.

As part of that enquiry, universities’ compliance with the Concordat has become a live issue. As a result of the inquiry, a revised Concordat is under development by Research England, and is due to be published for consultation in late 2018. It is likely that this will introduce more explicit expectations for universities and that sanctions will start to be deployed for institutions which are not in compliance. There is also potential for reputational damage should universities be seen to be taking insufficient action to address the requirements of the Concordat.

For all these reasons, it is essential that the University continues to be open and transparent about its commitment to research integrity, and demonstrates this by meeting the requirements of the Concordat, and by the publication of this statement. The publication of the statement is an opportunity to set out the extent of the measures we take at Sheffield to ensure that research integrity is supported and valued. We have a good reputation in this regard and wish to maintain that. With the increasing focus on Research Integrity, it is increasingly likely that stakeholders such as policy makers, funders and the press will look for these statements on HEI websites.

**Summary of the statement:**
The statement has been prepared for this purpose by Research Services on behalf of the Research & Innovation Committee, in consultation with Corporate Information and Computing Services (CiCS), HR, Student Support Services, The University Library, The University Secretary’s Office, and the Named

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1 UUK published the UK RIConcordat in July 2012 (co-signed, inter alia, by RCUK, Wellcome, HEFCE, Dept of Health): [https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2012/the-concordat-to-support-research-integrity.pdf](https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2012/the-concordat-to-support-research-integrity.pdf)

Information Officer. The statement will be made publicly available as required by the Concordat, on the University’s central Research Ethics and Integrity website: https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/rs/ethicsandintegrity/index

A short summary of the information provided in response to each of the remaining 4 commitments of the Concordat is provided below. The full statement is available in the Council Reading Room.

Commitment 1: We are committed to maintaining the highest standards of rigour and integrity in all aspects of research
- A range of University policies set out standards and expectations for research activities (e.g. Good Research & Innovation Practices Policy; Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblowing) policy; Procedure for Investigating and Responding to Allegations of Research Misconduct).
- A range of training is in place to communicate standards and expectations (induction processes, compulsory research integrity training for all PGR students; online research integrity courses available to all staff and students.
- A range of specific developments have taken place during 2017/18 including policy updates and guidance on changes in data protection legislation, and projects aiming to improve data management practices and to clarify processes for staff and students to raise concerns about research integrity.

Commitment 2: We are committed to ensuring that research is conducted according to appropriate ethical, legal and professional frameworks, obligations and standards
- An institutional level Code of Ethics provides an overarching framework within which distinct policies and procedures sit, including research ethics and Whistleblowing.
- A well-established Policy Governing Research Involving Human Participants, Personal Data and Human Tissue, and associated Ethics Review Procedure, training and awareness raising activities, are overseen by the University Research Ethics Committee.
- Well-established procedures exist to meet the requirements of the UK policy framework for health and social care research, and for ethical review of animal research.
- Research support and guidance contributing to research integrity is provided in a range of areas including technical infrastructure, open access and research data management.
- Recent developments include a considerable number of changes in response to changes in data protection legislation in 2018; a new policy and process for managing security sensitive research.

Commitment 3: We are committed to 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
- Many of the actions and activities outlined under Commitment 1 also address this Commitment.
- The University has agreed that the Vice-President for Research & Innovation has overarching responsibility for research integrity. A first point of contact for queries or concerns relating to research integrity has been identified (the Research Ethics & Integrity Manager based Research Services).
- The University Library provides guidance, training, tools and infrastructure to support excellent research management and to enable outputs to be widely discoverable, accessible to all and preserved for the long term (e.g. the University has subscribed to DMP Online, a customisable tool helping researchers to manage data effectively and meet funder requirements)

Commitment 4: We are committed to using transparent, robust and fair processes to deal with allegations of research misconduct should they arise
- Comprehensive policies and procedures are in place for managing allegations of research misconduct against staff and students, developed in line with the requirements of the Concordat. These are reviewed and updated as required.
- For the academic session 2017/18, 5 allegations against staff were investigated under the Preliminary phase of the research misconduct procedure (Stage 1); 1 of these progressed to a formal (Stage 2) investigation, and was upheld. Whilst this case was very specific to the individuals concerned, it has been recognised that this and a number of the other recent Stage 1 investigations relate to disputes over authorship of papers and/or ‘ownership’ of ideas/concepts. The potential need for a separate dispute resolution process for such cases is therefore being considered.
- For the academic session of 2017/18 there were 6 cases of research misconduct involving students; 4 of these were upheld. Specific recommendations arising from upheld cases are implemented at a local level. An overview of cases are provided to Senate annually for review.

Research Services
Human Resources
Corporate Information and Computing Services
Student Support Services
The University Library
The University Secretary’s Office
The Named Information Officer