DE MONTFORT UNIVERSITY LEICESTER

Annual Statement on Research Integrity
2020/21

Introduction and Context

As a signatory to the Concordat to Support Research Integrity, De Montfort University (DMU) has a responsibility to ensure that all research conducted under the auspices of the university is undertaken with integrity. We set out our commitment 'to improve accountability, and provide assurances that measures being taken continue to support consistently high standards of research integrity'.

As employers of researchers, and signatories of the Concordat to Support Research Integrity, it is highly desirable to use the UK Research Integrity Office's Self-Assessment Tool, and publish an annual statement outlining:

- A summary of actions and activities undertaken to support and strengthen the understanding and implementation of research integrity;
- Confirmation that we have provision for dealing with allegations of misconduct and that all procedures follow a transparent, robust and fair process;
- Details of any formal investigations of research misconduct and outcomes.

Through compliance with the Concordat, DMU are able to demonstrate a commitment to promoting good research practice, as set out in the Statement of Governance.

Self-Assessment

DMU continues to be a member organisation of the UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO), and we have engaged regularly with the online webinar and training offered by them. We were also fortunate enough to receive an excellent training session from UKRIO for our Ethics Committee members during this period, which has fed into a Univeristy-wide review of our ethics processes (see below). We also continue to engage with the ARMA Special Interest Group (SIG) in research ethics.

Research at DMU covers a wide spectrum of areas, and faculties provide support and subject specific guidance for researchers, including ethical considerations (https://www.dmu.ac.uk/research/ethics- and-governance/research-requiring-ethical-approval.aspx). It is imperative that ethical approval is applied for *prior to the commencement of research* and routed through the appropriate Faculty Research Ethics Committee (FREC), meetings of which are held quarterly. FRECs report to the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC). During this period we have particularly focused on strengthening the following areas:

- Governance structures for health-related research, introducing Standard Operating Procedures for projects requiring Health Research Authority approval. We will be looking to introduce further project monitoring procedures during academic year 2021/2022.
- Student regulations have been amended to clarify the requirement for ethics approval for students conducting research at undergraduate and taught post-graduate levels. Conducting research without such approval is now regarded as an academic offence.

DMU are looking to further strengthen provision of ethics training, particularly for staff, potentially through an online platform that we hope will be available for staff and students in the next academic year (2021/2022). We have continued to deliver mandatory training in research ethics and integrity via our Researcher Development Team to postgraduate research students and staff. This session is well attended and feedback from attendees has been positive. This has been complemented by Faculty-specific and ad-hoc ethics training, and sessions for staff and students focused on the ethics application process where external approvals are required.

Systems and Processes

A number of new systems and processes have been introduced during this period that will help ensure quality and consistency of ethics applications, their review and approval. In March 2021 we introduced a new online system, WorkTribe, for managing ethics applications, following comprehensive efforts to unify the ethics processes that were in place in our Faculties. Work is ongoing to explore the use of the same system for Undergraduate and Taught Postgraduate student applications.

Our University Research Ethics Committee further refined our new Research Ethics Code of Practice, including the introduction of a new ethics risk framework to help the proportionate management of applications. A new reporting and investigation procedure for breaches of our expectations related to research ethics was also introduced. We have also taken significant efforts to facilitate data compliance amongst the research community, with guidance and plans in place to review relevant processes to ensure they are clear to researchers.

Policies and Initiatives

DMU has continued to review policies and guidelines that inform and guide research practice in line with current legislation.

Policies

- Guidelines on the ethics of research conducted online and research with children and young adults have been developed and are awaiting finalisation and approval.

- Work has continued on the Sensitive Research Policy to ensure it facilitates compliance with our duty to prevent staff and students from being drawn into terrorism or extremism.

- The Research Ethics Code of Practice received final approval from UREC in July 2021 and is now available on the DMU Ethics and Integrity webpages.

- Research undertaken in partnership with the NHS by researchers at the university requires DMU to act as a sponsor. Recent developments around this area of research highlighted the requirement of a robust system ensuring full governance and compliance with NHS requirements. As such DMU has developed a new system for the approval and monitoring of NHS sponsored projects, governed by a series of Standard Operating Procedures.

- Animal Welfare and Ethics Review Body (AWERB) Governance – In order to facilitate better integration of AWERB matters into research ethics and governance structures, any applications for research projects involving animals would now be submitted via the new online Worktribe system, requiring the appropriate review by AWERB members and approval by the Chair.

- In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, all face to face research was suspended during academic year 2019-2020 and where possible and with approval, moved to online data collection methods. The situation was reviewed following the lifting of restrictions by the UK Government in July 2021, allowing researchers to apply for ethical approval to undertake face to face data collection. Applications were considered on a case by case basis, to be closely monitored and reported to UREC. The process remained under review pending future updates from the UK Government.

- Work continues updating the DMU webpages for Ethics and Integrity, which will allow for greater transparency of policies and processes, and to make key documents more visible and accessible to staff and students.

- DMU offers dual awards in collaboration with Asia Pacific University of Technology and Innovation in Malaysia and it is important that each institution is able to assure themselves of the robustness of the ethics procedures at the other. As such a set of agreed ethics processes for dual award students have been developed.

Investigations of misconduct during academic year 2020/21

DMU clearly states that "within a framework of good governance and appropriate training, responsibility for the conduct of ethical research must ultimately lie with the researchers themselves." DMU has in place a Misconduct in Research – Investigation Procedure to allow for allegations of research misconduct to be investigated in a fair, objective and confidential manner, by implementation of a three stage process: (i) preliminary consideration, (ii) screening and (iii) formal investigation. Informal resolution (without the need for formal investigation) may be appropriate for allegations that are not considered of a serious nature.

Staff Cases:

None

Research Student Cases:

There was one case (HLS) that was raised in 19/20 but had its hearing in 20/21, after a delay due to COVID and the student's health. The student was alleged to have falsified data, but the hearing in February 2021 determined that the offence could not be proved and the student was allowed to continue.