

# Annual statement on Research Integrity

## 2023/24

### **Introduction**

De Montfort University (DMU) has a responsibility to ensure that all research conducted under its auspices is undertaken ethically, responsibly and with integrity. DMU is a signatory of the UK Concordat to Support Research Integrity, and part of the commitments made as a result is to publish an annual report concerning how the institution meets those responsibilities.

### **UKRIO Self-assessment tool outcome**

As a research-active institution, it is important that we identify and build upon our areas of strength, as well as being sensitive to changes in society, and so conscious of areas where we can still improve. The UKRIO self-assessment tool for research integrity provides a framework for accounting for all the research integrity supporting processes, workflows, policies, and expertise at the university, and identifying potential areas for improvement across four areas: Policies and Systems, Communication, Culture, Development and Leadership, and Addressing Research Misconduct. As part of the preparation for this statement, we have completed a self-assessment for the 2023-2024 period with the following key insights:

#### [Policies and Systems](#)

Principles of research ethics and research integrity are well represented in DMU's policies and systems, with some potential areas for improvement and upgrading. The Research Ethics Code of Practice remains a vital tool for setting forth the principles and processes of research ethics in the institution, though it could be improved by clarifying that the policies it sets forth apply to all steps of the research process. There are policies available for many specific ethical challenges, but a more targeted policy focusing on NHS-related research would likely support what is an increasingly important area of research for the institution. Other important areas which require further expansion are internet mediated research, dual-use and responsible dissemination practices.

#### [Communication](#)

Policies and procedures are available online on the public-facing website. Faculty ethics websites are particularly rich in detail and are integral to the dissemination of ethics information. Ethics and integrity form a key part of the mandatory training, and the new staff induction processes. Research governance, however, could take a more active role in disseminating up-to-date information from external sources, such as the UKRIO, as they are published.

#### [Culture Development and Leadership](#)

DMU has a well-defined leadership and committee structure, and it is clearly stated on the website that the senior officer responsible for research integrity is the Vice Chancellor.

Responsibility for developing policy and procedure then falls to the various committees in specific areas, with the University Research and Enterprise Ethics committee being a pivotal group in research ethics and integrity.

An important insight derived from the culture, development and leadership section of the self-assessment was the importance of a defined research strategy in guiding the development of new policy and procedures. Critically, 2023 saw the end of a 5-year research strategy which ran from 2018 to 2023, and a new strategy should help to guide these efforts.

### Addressing Research Misconduct

DMU has a well-established research misconduct investigation procedure which aligns with external guidelines and requirements from UKRIO. This policy, however, was first written in 2016, and though it has received regular review, it requires some updating ensure it remains in alignment – as such it should be renewed in 2025.

The outcomes drawn from the UKRIO Research Integrity Self-Assessment will be reassessed in the 2024/25 annual research integrity statement.

## Research Integrity Initiatives, Events and Improvements 23/24

### New Appointments

2023 saw new appointments into several key roles in Research Governance: Research Governance Manager and Research Ethics and Integrity Officer, as well as several new Data Analysts to support across the Research, Business, and Innovation directorate.

### Policies and Procedures

We continually review and improve policies and procedures which support our researchers to conduct their work responsibly, ethically and with integrity. One key aspect of this support is continuity, and so a great deal of effort in 2023 and 2024 went towards the development and deployment of Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for several key processes across the research governance remit. Prior to this effort, knowledge of processes was reliant on specific persons being available, and so expertise could be lost if an instrumental member of staff either left the institution or was not available to advise their colleagues. We have since worked up a centralised SOP management process within Research, Business, and Innovation (RBI), such that all essential research functions and workflows are supported by an SOP. In addition, SOPs relating to regulated or high-risk areas are owned by committee, ensuring retention of institutional knowledge and the regular review thereof. SOPs can be tied to accountability and continuous improvement and the maintenance of exacting standards, as well as ensuring compliance within regulated remits.

### The DMU Research Ethics Code of Practice (ReCOP) Updates for 23/24

The DMU Research Ethics Code of Practice is the primary ethics policy document for the institution, detailing expectations for all research active staff and students across the university, as well as the ethics review and committee structures within faculty, and the broader ethics governance structure across the university. The ReCOP is regularly reviewed and updated to ensure that it meets the requirements of an ever-changing and growing DMU research community. During the 23/24 year, the following changes were made to the ReCOP:

- Guidance was added to clarify the status of secondary research data being brought into the university by staff when they commenced their employment at DMU. Section 5.10 now clarifies that though data collected at a previous institution and then brought to DMU by a new member of staff will be considered secondary data, and so might not be subject to the same governance oversight as primary data collected at the

university, the Faculty Research Ethics Committee (FREC) under which the data will be analysed at DMU may conduct a light-touch ethics review to ensure that DMU guidelines are followed.

- The governance structure was updated to accurately reflect changes in the committee layout.
- Links to other policy documents in the text have been updated, replaced, and removed.

The annual review of the document was conducted in December 2024, with the next review planned for the same time in 2025.

### Expanded ethics training support

Research culture at DMU is comprised of the activity of both staff and students, and so regular ethics up-skilling on both fronts is an important part of ensuring that the university maintains its exacting standards of research integrity.

Research Governance regularly holds broad Introduction to Research Ethics and Integrity training sessions. These sessions are directed primarily towards new post-graduate research students and so are timed to occur near the PGR intake dates, but they are open and applicable to, and accessible by, all staff and students, from new undergraduates through to experienced academics looking for a top-up. The sessions cover an introduction to the concept of ethics and integrity, a walk-through of the university research ethics processes and committee structures, and then a step-by-step guide to submitting an application for ethics approval through Worktribe.

In addition to that broad introduction, more focused sessions have also allowed us to explore specific topics. Research governance ran several sessions detailing the HRA and NHS REC approval processes, to support students and staff who are looking to conduct research involving the NHS. The DMU NHS research remit has been gradually maturing for several years, and so research governance, colleagues from the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences, and other experts from across the institution have been working to develop tools, workflows, and training in support of this burgeoning research area.

Other areas of particular focus have been training sessions in support of academic colleagues pursuing an ESRC Accelerator scheme, where training was tailored to bolster their applications with a focus on research ethics, integrity and data management, and joint ethics and data protection training, where the two closely related topics could be explored.

### Artificial Intelligence

Horizon scanning is an important part of ensuring that our research community is equipped to deal with new challenges which they might be faced with in the coming years. In 2023/24, we started to consider what policy and guidance changes would be needed considering advancements in generative AI.

- DMU library services developed a website to support students in their responsible use of generative AI: [Welcome - Using Generative Artificial Intelligence - LibGuides at De Montfort University](#).
- DMU ITMS began work developing policy for the responsible use of AI, with a plan for publication during the 24/25 academic year.
- DMU was represented at the UKRIO Roundtable “AI and research integrity” on Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> June.

### Expansion of the NHS Remit

DMU has close links to the local NHS trusts in Leicester, and its post-graduate research students and staff are encouraged to explore potential avenues of research which involve the NHS. This kind of research necessitates a certain degree of governance oversight, and so this year we have concentrated on ensuring that our NHS research governance processes are meeting the requirements expected of a research-intensive institution. This has included:

- Review of the existing sponsor process, and improvements to supporting tools. Staff and students looking to apply for approval from the HRA for their research should find that the process is much better supported.
- Development of resources to assist governance team and researchers to manage pre-award and post-award NHS governance processes. These resources include standard operating procedures, tracking tools and better-established sponsorship workflows.
- Sending research governance staff to events to help to broaden their experience and develop a network, including RD24 NHS research and development forum, Celtic Manor.
- We have also developed the pathway for research students to carry out research with the NHS, including establishing good processes for supporting students and supervisors in their pursuit of such research and clarifying the limitations on masters-level students carrying out NHS research.
- Provision of targeted training for staff and students on the HRA, NHS Research Ethics Committee and IRAS processes.

### Overseas Campuses and Ethics

DMU has opened a new campus in Dubai. This campus focuses on teaching, but there is the expectation that there will be a research component in the future, DMU Leicester is working to support colleagues in Dubai to establish a responsible ethics and integrity governance process and structure – such that there is parity between Dubai and Leicester processes. To achieve this, we:

- Developed an ethics pack including DMU ethics policies and supporting documents to share with DMU Dubai colleagues.
- DMU Dubai colleagues have been given access to the ethics and integrity training available on Learning Zone. This will ensure that colleagues engaged in ethical review should have ethics training in parity with the UK.

### Trusted Research and Research Security

One area of particular focus with regards to ethical and responsible research practice at DMU in 2023/24 was Trusted Research. Colleagues from the UK Government's Research Collaboration Advice Team (RCAT) came to deliver a Research Security Training session on Wednesday 20th March 2024 to raise awareness of the potential risks associated with international research collaborations and how best to mitigate these in alignment with the UK national security framework. This training session was well attended by researchers from across the university, and we expect that Trusted Research will be a critical area for development in the institution's governance requirements in 2024/25.

### Worktribe

Worktribe remains a crucial tool in ensuring that our ethics review processes are effective, transparent, and rigorous. All undergraduate and post-graduate student research, as well as all staff research ethics, continues to be managed through the Worktribe systems.

In addition, research governance staff at DMU have connected with other institutions in advance of their adoption of Worktribe as a research management system, to advise them, share knowledge and experience, and support their adoption of the platform.

### **Reflecting on Progress**

This was a year of quite significant improvement in support for integrity and ethics at DMU. A great deal of effort has been put towards the identifying gaps in process, triaging based on necessity, and then providing a foundation for future developmental work. We have provisioned several new Standard Operating Procedures, which has given us a chance to review core workflows, improve and systematise, and ensure that institutional knowledge is retained.

### **Allegations of Research Misconduct**

DMU has in place a Misconduct in Research – Investigation Procedure which sets out a procedure 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. This document clearly states that: "Allegations of research misconduct are potentially serious both for the university and the Respondent and such allegations will be investigated fairly, objectively, confidentially and in accordance with the principles of natural justice." (section 2.1).

#### [Staff Cases:](#)

No staff cases of research misconduct were reported during the 2023/2024 academic year.

#### [Research Student Cases:](#)

No research student cases were reporting during the 2023/2024 academic year.

As no specific cases were raised this year, there is no targeted learning which can be drawn from the investigation processes or outcomes. In the 2024/25 academic year, however, the intention is to update the Research Misconduct Investigation Procedure with a view to bring the entire process in line with recent developments in the research integrity landscape, and with UKRIO Guidance with regards to research misconduct. The proposed completion date of this review and update is January 2026.