

Nottingham Trent University
Annual Statement on Research Integrity, 2016/17

A) Overview

Since its publication some five years ago NTU has been a strong advocate of the Concordat to Support Research Integrity and the commitments which underpin it. While support for the Concordat may be a requirement of some external bodies, such as HEFCE, NTU believes that research integrity goes far beyond a compliance issue and should be embedded within the institutional research culture. Enhancements to support this culture are continuously being made and, in line with a recommendation in the Concordat, a synopsis of these developments over the last twelve months has been codified in this statement. This is the fourth consecutive year that NTU has published such a publically available statement.

B) Review of institutional policies:

1) NTU Research Ethics Policy

The policy was the subject of a review by the Research Office and chairs of research ethics committees across the institution. The review resulted in minor revisions being made to the policy. The updated policy is publically available on the NTU website.

2) Code of Practice for Research

As with the Research Ethics Policy, the code was the subject of a review by the Research Office and chairs of research ethics committees across the institution. Following this review minor revisions were made. The updated code is publically available on the NTU website.

C) Revision of related institutional systems

A number of enhancements to the research ethics environment have occurred during the previous academic year. The key developments are summarised below:

1) Pedagogic Research and Learning Analytics:

The recommendations of the working group established in October 2015 to examine ethical issues around pedagogic research and learning analytics were accepted by the University Research Committee (URC) in March 2017. The recommendations had three principal areas of focus:

- Approval mechanisms for the use of pre-existing student data.
- Use of student data collected for non-research purposes.
- Collection of data from students in classroom environments.

Relevant institutional documentation has been updated following the endorsement of the working group's recommendations by the URC.

2) Projects approved by external research ethics committees:

Relevant research ethics documentation was updated to reiterate the responsibility of researchers to remain vigilant for unethical behaviour of any members of the project team, regardless of institutional affiliation and the location of the ethics committee approving the research. This proactive step was undertaken to reiterate institutional expectations governing those undertaking research in the University's name.

3) Annual Statement of Positive Confirmation:

Flowing from recommendations in an internal audit, the Statement of Annual Positive Confirmation provides a mechanism for all research-active staff and postgraduate research students to signal their understanding and agreement to abide by the principles, values and terms of Nottingham Trent University's requirements for research practice. A system is currently in the process of being operationalised, to be rolled out in the 2017/18 academic year, where postgraduate research students will endorse the statement during the annual enrolment process while for staff this will be achieved during the completion of individual research plans.

4) Retention of Research Ethics Applications:

A guidance document on the retention of research ethics applications was produced to augment and enhance institutional processes. The document committed NTU to the indefinite retention of all research ethics applications and associated documentation. The purpose of this is to ensure maximum protection both for the University and individual researchers with regard to future questions on ethicality of NTU-sponsored research. The guidance stipulated that the following documents should be retained:

- A copy of the approved application form.
- Associated documentation such as Participant Information Sheets and Consent Forms.
- Copies of questionnaires, interview questions or any other research instruments provided as part of the application.
- A copy of the notification sent to the applicant advising that the application has received approval.

Additionally a separate list should be maintained which details all approved projects in which the following information is contained:

- Project name.
- Name of the Principal Investigator.
- Unique (internally generated) identification number.

D) Inclusion of relevant external requirements and guidance into institutional or local process

No external requirements were incorporated during the 2016/17 year.

E) Dissemination and awareness-raising activities that have been undertaken, including any training or education provision and the audiences that have been reached

During the 2016-17 academic year online training modules have been developed, covering holistic research ethical issues and institution-specific matters. The modules are available to NTU staff and research students. A communication and dissemination schedule is being developed by NTU's Organisational Development team to facilitate effective promotion and engagement with the resource. This will be actioned in the 2017/18 academic year.

Guidance provided by individual research ethics committees is continually updated to maintain currency. Training sessions at a local level are provided to meet demand. Postgraduate research students are provided with appropriate training upon enrolment at the University.

F) Description of internal auditing and monitoring processes, including information on any revisions or developments, plus summary data

A spot-check audit of research ethics committees reviewing staff and postgraduate researcher was undertaken across the institution. The audit did not uncover evidence of any misconduct with regard to research ethics. It did highlight one area where business process improvement was needed. This concerned

minor amendments to approved projects, such as increasing the number of research participants, not being re-authorised by relevant research ethics committees. To mitigate against such issues arising in the future a statement was added to appropriate documentation making clear that all amendments to approved projects should be resubmitted to the relevant research ethics committee for approval.

G) Summary of outcomes of any external inspections/audits

A project led by a PGR student and which had received favourable ethical opinion from an NHS Research Ethics Committee was the subject of a substantial audit in July 2017. The audit was carried out by a Health Care Foundation Trust in line with their new research governance arrangements. The nature of the research involved working with vulnerable individuals in forensic settings, with commensurate associated risks. The review was conducted by a panel of auditors who examined in close detail the processes used for obtaining data at research sites, as well as the actual data itself. The audit panel commended the student for having implemented 'gold star standards' in relation to the organisation and integrity of research data and have asked the student to present to other researchers in the Trust to share good practice.

H) Research Misconduct

NTU is committed to a policy of openness on research misconduct. On the rare occasions where those acting under the auspices of NTU, whether staff or students, are alleged to have committed research misconduct these allegations are rigorously investigated. Where such allegations have been upheld NTU will publish anonymised top-level information on these cases, in addition to any resulting policy or procedural enhancements.

- **PGR Student Research Misconduct**

Allegations of research misconduct are investigated under the Procedure for Investigating Alleged Research Misconduct, as detailed in the NTU Quality Handbook. The procedure applies to all postgraduate research students undertaking a research degree (MPhil, MProf, PhD and Professional Doctorate courses). Several relatively minor but important enhancements were made to the procedure this year, with these largely coalescing around clarifying, streamlining and simplifying processes.

Over the period July 2016-July 2017 no cases were considered under the Procedure for Investigating Alleged Research Misconduct.

- **Staff Research Misconduct**

Allegations of staff misconduct are investigated under the NTU Disciplinary Policy and Procedure, which is maintained and subjected to annual review and update by Corporate HR.

Over the period July 2016-July 2017 no cases were considered under the NTU Disciplinary Policy and Procedure.