

Annual Statement for The Concordat to Support Research Integrity 2020-21

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Annual Statement is required as part of continued compliance with the revised Concordat to Support Research Integrity, 2019. The Concordat was devised to provide a comprehensive national framework for good research conduct and its governance, specifying the principles, commitments and standards which should be inherent in all good research. The Concordat encourages employers of researchers, funders and researchers to strengthen research integrity, building on a shared commitment that research that is produced or in collaboration with the UK research community, is underpinned by the highest standards of rigour, integrity and excellence.

2. ANNUAL STATEMENT TO SUPPORT RESEARCH INTEGRITY

2.1 Supporting and Strengthening Research Integrity

- (a) Vision 2028 is the University's ambitious 10-year strategy where UEL has placed increasing the diversity of the talent pipeline for a 4.0 economy at the heart of all aspects of its education & experience, careers & enterprise, impact & innovation, and sustainability strategic goals. The University aims to become the UK's careers-1st university, preparing its students for the jobs of the future and providing the innovation to drive the future sustainably and inclusively. In addition, UEL aims to create a 4.0 education for learners: producing graduates with the skills, tools and competencies sought by employers and entrepreneurs in a rapidly changing world. The University's 'Future Life' objectives are to increase the economic, social and cultural impact of UEL's education, and the research and enterprise activities for the communities the University serves and the planet.
- (b) The University achieved several improvements in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings, 2021, accomplishing increases in four of five major categories. The University's top score was in international Outlook, where it was placed in the top 25 per cent of institutions worldwide. The category considers the number of international staff and students at an institution, as well as international collaborations. Overall, UEL improved its scores in four areas: Teaching; Research; Citations; and International Outlook, and it fell slightly in Industry Income.
- (c) In the Guardian University Guide 2021, the University's overall score rose by 5.6 points, from 39.6 to 45.2. This was higher than the sector average increase of 4.9 and surpassed the 4.1 average increase

shown by post-92 institutions. Despite this, the University's overall ranking dropped by eight places to 112th position due to the heavier weighting of the averaged two-years of NSS results. However, the University recorded improvements in three of the Guardian's nine measures: overall score, value added, and continuation. UEL also showed improvement in a fourth measure – career prospects – but this was based on new methodology, making year-to-year comparisons difficult. The “value added” score, which is a measure of a University's ability to improve students' prospects, provided corroborating evidence that the core aims of Vision 2028 are feeding through to outcomes. UEL rose 29 places in the rankings for the Guardian's flagship marker, to 45th, one of the best performances in this category nationwide.

- (d) In November 2020, the University was shortlisted for The Times Higher Education Entrepreneurial University of the Year 2020. The University was also a finalist at the Learning Technologies 2020 awards for the best use of blended learning – public/non-profit sector, for a collaboration between Royal Docks School of Business and Law, IT Services and the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching, for the training provision of the University's new dual-delivery educational model.
- (e) In February 2021, Professor Verity Brown said that “The University has signed the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA), committing to not use journal impact factors for recruitment or promotion decisions, but rather to focus on other indicators of the quality and value of individual outputs, including citations of citable outputs as well as peer-review”.
- (f) At the end of March 2021, the University submitted to the Research Excellence Framework (REF). Professor Brown said “Academics who have ‘significant responsibility for research’ are morally and ethically obligated to do research that is rigorous, with the highest standard of methodology. Only rigorous research that is also original will ultimately be significant and have impact, but it is often difficult to predict the impact. For this reason, an assessment exercise – the REF – is conducted periodically to judge the quality of research in UK HEIs”. As such, signing the DORA agreement and submitting to the REF demonstrates the University's commitment to the rigour and high quality of research outputs, that can be attained by all researchers.
- (g) The University signed up to Research England's Knowledge and Exchange Framework (KEF) and submitted its first KEF narratives. KEF includes a set of activities, processes and skills that enables opportunities for collaboration between Universities and partner

organisations. The Director of Research and Knowledge Exchange, Professor Mansour Moniri, said that "...the narratives included the University's achievements in local growth and regeneration in collaboration with industrial partners as well as our public and community engagements in partnership with Charities and the Third Sector". In May 2021, the KEF assessment rated the University in the top 10% for public and community engagement in the English HE sector.

- (h) In February 2021, the University's Library, Archives and Learning Services team were re-awarded a Customer Service Excellence Certification, in recognition of the team's outstanding service to students and staff. Fundamental changes have been made to the University's research repository to increase the visibility of research and improve user experience. The team have also been instrumental in working with colleagues across the University, including the Graduate School and the Research Ethics office to embed Data Management plans into ethics and postgraduate research students' processes.
- (i) The University held its inaugural all staff University Development week in June 2021. There were a range of opportunities and activities across the week, including how the University will challenge itself to improve its teaching and educational outcomes, research and impact outcomes and its services. Staff teams discussed their School / Directorate /Institute priorities and how they link to the overall University strategy, through team-focused development days. Staff were also updated on essential compliance requirements required by regulatory bodies and time was devoted to the personal and professional development of staff members.
- (j) The Research and Development Support (ReDs) team produces an annual report on the University's research outcomes via the 'Researchfish' system. In July 2021, the ReDs team hosted a research funding workshop in collaboration with Grantcraft, specialists in grant writing and research funding support for Universities and industry. Grantcraft covered the different stages of research funding: identifying potential funding bodies, their requirements and key dates and specifying fundamental points about structuring funding proposals and managing the grant process from award to delivery.
- (k) The University conducts high quality, innovative research and is guided by the principles and standards specified in the Concordat. The University's policies, procedures and guidance support a sustainable, vital and ethical research environment that sets the benchmark for its researchers. The University has clear policies and practices which are regularly reviewed, to assist researchers to conduct their research to

high standards of integrity and ethical conduct. UEL's policies raise awareness and highlight researchers' obligations to ensure that their research projects are aligned with appropriate legal, ethical and professional frameworks.

- (l) The University's Information Assurance office provides comprehensive guidance on the Data Protection Act 2018, General Data Protection Regulation, (GDPR) 2018, and data management and governance policies. The University abides by the Office for Students (OfS) Regulatory Framework and compliance with the Information Commissioners Office (ICO). Data protection regulations are considered in all University systems and departments. Effective research data management supports the integrity and quality of research and encourages best practice to minimise the risk of data loss and enable data sharing and re-use. In addition to regulatory requirements, having robust, timely, accurate and reliable data is essential for ongoing operational efficiency and efficacy.

2.2 **The University Research Ethics Sub-Committee (URES)**

- (a) The University Research Ethics Sub-Committee (URES) and subsidiary School Research Ethics Committees (SRECs) are all validated and approved by Academic Board. The URES Committee supports the Impact and Innovation Committee (I&I), for the successful achievement of the Future Life strategic objectives and related transformational projects. Both URES and SRECs collate and monitor the annual reports of activity for all applications for ethical approval. An audit of the University's collaborative partners who conduct research with human participants, human material or personal or sensitive data was completed and continues to be monitored.
- (b) The Research Ethics Sub-Committees completed annual reports of the business of their Committees, detailing how they are maintaining research integrity and the Committees sampled ethics applications for moderation. Overall, the Research Ethics Sub-Committees were consistent in their review of research ethics applications and the University continues to advocate good research practice.
- (c) The University's Research Ethics Office, Research and Development Support office and the Civic Engagement office have been amalgamated to form an Office for Postgraduates, Research and Engagement (OPRE). These Services have been brought together to build a cohesive research strand for integrity and ethics, research impact, public and community engagement and postgraduate research.

- (d) The terms of reference for URES were reviewed and revised. URES has been changed to the Ethics and Integrity Sub-Committee (EISC). A reformed committee has been implemented to provide greater oversight of the applications for ethical approval from taught programmes. The terms of reference and name of the committee for the SRECs were revised and submitted for approval to the I&I committee. The proposed change of name from School Research Ethics Committees (SRECs) to School Ethics Committee (SECs) is to provide School Ethics Committees with a wider remit to discuss ethical issues, which may not fall entirely under the heading of research.
- (e) In accordance with the Concordat, associated policies and national and international codes of conduct and guidelines, EISC has oversight of the University's compliance with the mandates and frameworks for research integrity. EISC has a responsibility to ensure that all research, including that within taught programmes, is conducted to the highest standards of ethics and integrity to protect the interests and welfare of participants, or those affected by the proposed research project. Equity and inclusion are a priority for the University's community and the new EISC will ensure that research and impact are supported with this in mind.

2.3 Training and External Engagement

- (a) The University champions high quality research that is impactful and values creativity and innovative research projects. The University provides comprehensive research integrity and ethics training to assist all researchers and stakeholders in understanding their responsibilities and obligations, regarding responsible research conduct. The training ensures that researchers are equipped with the necessary skills to conduct high quality research. Training sessions, workshops and seminars have taken place throughout the academic year, with mandatory training for postgraduate research students and discipline-specific research integrity and ethics training conducted.
- (b) Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the University delivered most of its research integrity and ethics training provision online. An increased number of Schools and Services undertook the training and there was a significant uplift in the number of attendees. Topics included research rigour and ethics, being an ethical researcher, steps of the research process and its challenges, and effective data management.
- (c) OPRE welcomed Professor Andrew Grey from the University of Auckland, as a visiting speaker at a misconduct in research awareness webinar in April 2021. Professor Brown chaired the session and

facilitated the roundtable discussion. The seminar was attended by academics, early career researchers and ethics committee members.

- (d) David Carpenter, independent consultant and trainer from the UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO) and a member of the British Psychological Society (BPS) Ethics Committee, conducted two webinars during the academic year. The first webinar covered research integrity, ethics committees and their remit, and safeguarding research participants. The second webinar was a joint session held with the University's Data Protection officer on the importance of anonymisation of research data and GDPR.
- (e) In September 2020, the University's Law Centre were privileged to welcome Lady Hale, past president of the UK Supreme Court, to discuss the importance of diversity and integrity in the legal sector. The Law Centre also welcomed Imran Khan, UEL alumni, who is one of only three criminal solicitor advocate QCs in England and Wales.
- (f) The Researcher Development Programme, overseen by OPRE, provides in-house training and development opportunities to postgraduate research students (PGRs), research-active staff at all levels, and PGR supervisors. Training opportunities map onto the Vitae Researcher Development Framework, corresponding to the broad areas of knowledge and intellectual abilities; personal effectiveness, research governance and organisation, and engagement and impact.
- (g) The University has subscribed to the second edition of the suite of Epigeum's online Research Integrity Modules, which integrate the principles detailed in the Concordat. The Modules provide comprehensive research integrity training that informs users of the key concepts of research integrity. It is mandatory for all PGR students to complete the Research Integrity Modules before registering their research project.

2.4 ***Investigations of Research Misconduct**

- (a) The University has in place Codes of Practice for Research and for Research Ethics, Procedures for the Investigation of Misconduct in Research for both staff and students and the Student Code of Conduct.
- (b) There were two staff cases and two PGR cases of misconduct in research that were investigated under the University's Procedure. None of the allegations proceeded to a stage 2 investigation.
- (c) The University's Procedures for the Investigation of Misconduct in Research, for both staff and students have been reviewed by I&I committee and will be sent to the University's Academic Board for

adoption as policy in academic year 2021-22. The revised Procedure will be streamlined to ensure that allegations of misconduct in research are dealt with in a timely manner and has an expedient initial review process. The Procedure informs researchers of their responsibilities and the principles and standards that they are expected to meet and uphold with their research projects.

- (d) The provision of research integrity and ethics training at the University includes the topic of research misconduct, ensuring that researchers are aware of their individual responsibilities to comply with all legal, regulatory and ethical requirements, and signposting the relevant resources and guidance that are available to support them.

2.5 Equality Impact Assessment

- (a) The University puts the values of equality, diversity and inclusion at the heart of its transformation strategy, Vision 2028. The University has a comprehensive EDI Strategy with the key objectives of ensuring inclusion is embedded into its organisational culture and environment, promoting an inclusive staff experience, reflecting the University's approaches to the recruitment, development and progression of staff. The strategy also creates an inclusive student experience which celebrates diversity and enables the students to succeed. Institution wide EDI plans are embedded within the different Schools and Services' objectives and terms of reference, to improve accountability and have mechanisms in place to demonstrably support equality and inclusivity.
- (b) The University's Office for Institutional Equity (OIE), is the first of its kind in the UK that has specific responsibility for addressing inequalities within the University, by driving sustainable cultural changes which will positively impact the University's community. The new Dean of the OIE, Professor Bugewa Apampa, is one of only 35 Black British female Professors. The OIE supports Schools and Services in contributing to the HE sector 'charter marks,' as well as delivering the EDI component of the University's strategies.
- (c) The University holds an Athena SWAN Bronze award recognising the University's commitment to, and success in, supporting gender equality. The Royal Docks School of Business and Law was awarded the Athena SWAN Bronze award in November 2020, in recognition of its continued progress towards gender equality in HE. This recognition is timely as the Law School marks its 45th year, which was established in a spirit of activism.
- (d) One of the many distinctive features of the University is the

composition of its Board of Governors, with four of the twelve independent members drawn from the global Black diaspora: Anulika Ajufu, Chair, Michael Nartey, Doris Olulode and Gary Stewart.

- (e) The University has been awarded Advance HE's Race Equality Charter (REC) Bronze award. The University is committed to following the REC principles and works to address institutional and cultural barriers facing Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff and students.

2.6 Risk Assessment

- (a) The University is committed to enabling innovation and decision-making by having a clear understanding of the risks and opportunities that it faces. Efficient and effective risk management is necessary to support the University's core functions and activities, to comply with its legal and regulatory obligations and to contribute to the effective overall management of the institution.
- (b) The Information Assurance Office has oversight of the University's Information Governance framework, which clearly sets out the expectations for those individuals who have responsibility for managing risk on behalf of the University. A new risk register will be devised in academic year 2021-22 and reviewed by the University's Audit and Risk Committee. The Information Governance Framework and risk register are established mechanisms through which effective risk management are achieved.
- (c) The University has established an Ethics Advisory Committee to provide a set of principles and values under which the University will conduct its business. The University has a responsibility to identify potential integrity and ethics risks that could compromise its Vision and cause reputational harm. The Ethics Advisory Committee will also have oversight of the University's collaborative partners.

Appendix

*Investigations of Research Misconduct

Researcher

1. A UEL researcher made an allegation of research misconduct against a collaborator in an external institution. The UEL researcher stated that their contribution to the research project had been rejected by the collaborator and that their work should be used. The external institution stated that authorship credit on a paper is not automatic, nor based on the time spent on a project,

and certain thresholds needed to be met. The allegation of research misconduct was dismissed by the external institution.

2. A complaint was made against a UEL researcher who had contacted a former research participant to follow up on the participant's medical progress. The complainant said that they were not aware that the research data would be published. It was deemed that whilst the recruitment documents stated that the results of the research would be made public, the information was not explicit. The researcher withdrew the manuscript from the publisher and the allegation of research misconduct was dismissed.

Postgraduate Research Student

1. There were two incidences of PGRs failing to follow the University's research ethics procedures and not adhering to the methodology and data collection that was specified in their ethics application form. Both incidences were minor in nature and a letter of reprimand sent to both students, copying in their supervisors.