Bath Spa University Annual Statement on Research Integrity

If you have any questions about this template, please contact:
RIsecretariat@universitiesuk.ac.uk.

Section 1: Key contact information

Question	Response
1A. Name of organisation	Bath Spa University
1B. Type of organisation: **higher education institution/industry/independent research performing organisation/other (please state)**	Higher Education Institution
1C. Date statement approved by governing body (DD/MM/YY)	12/12/2024
1D. Web address of organisation's research integrity page (if applicable)	https://www.bathspa.ac.uk/research-and-enterprise/research-strategy/integrity-and-ethics/
1E. Named senior member of staff to oversee research integrity	Name: Professor John Strachan, Pro Vice Chancellor, Research and Enterprise
	Email address: j.strachan@bathspa.ac.uk
1F. Named member of staff who will act as a first point of contact for anyone wanting more information on matters of research integrity	Name: Joe Fort, Research Projects and Governance Manager
	Email address: ethics@bathspa.ac.uk

Section 2: Promoting high standards of research integrity and positive research culture.
Description of actions and activities undertaken

2A. Description of current systems and culture

Please describe how the organisation maintains high standards of research integrity and promotes positive research culture. It should include information on the support provided to researchers to understand standards, values, and behaviours, such as training, support, and guidance for researchers at different career stages/ disciplines. You may find it helpful to consider the following broad headings:

- Policies and systems
- Communications and engagement
- Culture, development, and leadership
- Monitoring and reporting

Policies and systems

The University's commitment and approach to the highest standards of research ethics and integrity is subject to ongoing evaluation and review through discussions at the University Ethics Committee (UEC) and reported through the Research Ethics Committee (REC) for oversight and approval of proposed developments. Our commitment is articulated through clear policies, central resources, and consistent messaging around research integrity across our academic community, and we have enabled successful engagement by creating meaningful platforms for our community to discuss matters of research integrity both formally and informally as part of our governance and team structures.

The University continues to operate an Ethics Peer Review College (EPRC) within each academic unit, led by a designated School Ethics Lead who serves as School representative to the UEC and manages a team of reviewers within each academic unit. Ethical approval processes, mechanisms, and support are harmonised through clear intranet resources, signposting of scaffolding policies, and internal/external training and opportunities to engage with the wider research integrity community.

Communications and Engagement

A focus noted in previous statements has been on embedding the role of School Ethics Lead as a local point of contact and knowledge within each School, an individual embedded within operations and wider work of the school, and therefore

creating an integrated access point for researchers for informal and formal engagement in Research Integrity matters. This ensures that our research community can access appropriate advice and guidance on ethical issues and standards organically whilst fulfilling their academic duties within their existing team structures. The School Ethics Lead is then in turn able to ensure that key emerging themes from such discussions can be escalated to the UEC for consideration and action within our wider institutional development planning. School-based ethics teams are supported centrally by the Research Projects and Governance Manager within the Research Support Office (RSO), who provides bespoke advice, support, and operational resource to deliver key initiatives across the University alongside the wider RSO team.

Key messages around research integrity best practice, areas of focus, support, and guidance, are coordinated via the Research Support Office to ensure consistency of messaging and clarity of information – and disseminated through multiple channels, including but not limited to staff meetings, induction, in-person and online training, newsletter communications, handbooks and central intranet resources for our staff and students. Feedback collated via School Ethics Leads and the RSO is actively sought to be fed back as standing agenda items on the UEC, ensuring that any staff or student across any level of the institution can raise concerns/suggestions/feedback for consideration by the committee and provide a direct line of access to the wider development of our institutional practices.

Culture, development, and Leadership

The work of the University Ethics Committee is reported directly to the Research and Ethics Committee (REC) on a quarterly basis for formal scrutiny, in parallel with less formal mechanisms to develop an ethics peer community and to enable platforms for dialog between staff and students at different levels of the organisation and capitalising on the role of School Ethics Lead to help coordinate activities, share best practice across disciplines, coordinate review processes and ensure that our wider academic community has the ability to engage with developments around training, support and policy. This has been enabled through ethics drop-in sessions, as well as UEC member attendance at existing core teaching staff meetings within individual schools. This has been successful in allowing RI matters to be incorporated into curriculum design organically from the ground up as our student offer develops, as well as providing "nuts and bolts" discussions on process and operational matters to best enable ethical review and ethical discussions amongst our student and staff community. This in turn has opened up new channels of discussion around ethical matters and contributed towards our wider RI culture – ensuring that standards are upheld evenly, staff and students know who they can discuss any challenges or concerns with, and overall ensuring that RI matters are embedded within new

developments upfront and any complexities have opportunity to be discussed and addressed openly at inception.

Monitoring and Engagement

Activity in-year led by the UEC is monitored and scrutinised via the Research Ethics Committee (REC) on a quarterly basis, with our activity plan and work centred around three interlinked thematic areas for the University Ethics Committee which have been designed to enable a broad articulation of our ambition for our RI culture in a way that is accessible to staff and students across all levels of our academic community:

- Training and Development

- Resources, Guidance and Policy

- Embedding ethical research practices into the curriculum and all the academic activities we deliver

We believe that external scrutiny and rigour is key towards quality-assuring and driving our ambition to continually strengthen research integrity at Bath Spa. Dr Alastair Niven is an active external member of the University Ethics Committee (UEC) - continuing to offer invaluable help and support, as well as robust external scrutiny.

The Research Support Office actively monitors submissions for ethical approval centrally for Staff and PhD Students – providing opportunity for intervention and support as required, with the same role for other student groups devolved to course teams and overseen directly by the School Ethics Lead.

2B. Changes and developments during the period under review

Please provide an update on any changes made during the period, such as new initiatives, training, developments, also ongoing changes that are still underway. Drawing on Commitment 3 of the Concordat, please note any new or revised policies, practices, and procedures to support researchers; training on research ethics and research integrity; training and mentoring opportunities to support the development of researchers' skills throughout their careers.

- During the 2023/24 academic year, the former University Ethics Panel (UEP) was re-cast into a formalised sub-committee within the University's governance structure as the University Ethics Committee (UEC). Whilst the previous UEP was already a de-facto committee, this formalisation within our institutional governance structure better reflects and visibly embeds the nature of our ambition for our culture of research integrity into the wider business of the institution and allows for more formalised mechanisms for reporting and connectivity with other formal governance structures within the University and our wider research environment.

- The University has invested in a Postdoctoral Research Assistant (PDRA), who has been tasked with mapping and assessing our institutional public engagement activity and has developed a new Public Engagement Toolkit for academic staff to best incorporate ethical practice into the design of public engagement activities. This new guidance has gone live and been shared as a resource for university staff ready for the 24/25 academic year. The process for creating it serves as an exemplar of our wider strategic approach of utilising the modelling of best practice to engage with our community around RI developments – allowing us to use the creation of the PE Toolkit to model best practice in engagement with our own community, in and of itself making the process a development opportunity. A case study around the creation of this toolkit is enclosed under Section 2.D.

- The University has reviewed and mapped its processes relating to ethical approval across all levels of the institution and has used this to develop a business case to procure a new online ethics management system for staff and students. Subject to budget approval, this is due to go live during the 24/25 academic year and enhance both accessibility and visibility of our ethical processes via a central resource, whilst also reducing the administrative burden of the ethical approval process for our community.

- The UEC has capitalised on the University's implementation of MS365, taking the opportunity provided by the new functionality to add new resources, guidance, reading lists, and collated training opportunities to a new dedicated Research Integrity SharePoint site, enabling a "one-stop shop" approach to all aspects of Research Integrity for all staff and students alike. Copies of slide decks and resources from training webinars/sessions are included as resource to maximise engagement for all staff and students, even those who have not attended the training.

- In addition to all of the expanded training and platforms for dialog implemented last year, which have continued to grow and expand during

2023/24, further training sessions have been formalised and added to our Researcher Development Programme, expanding the number of sessions run per year to maximise opportunity for staff to engage, and introducing a new session dedicated solely to research data management. Overall institutional compliance with our mandatory online training has remained at over 90% of academic staff institutionally. The University is taking part in the pilot of the new UKRIO-produced "Introduction to Research Integrity" online training provision, with the view to reviewing this provision and an eye towards maximising our mandatory training offer for all staff whilst reducing time-commitments where possible.

- The Research Projects and Governance Manager has contributed towards the University's task and finish group relating to development of the academic misconduct policy, ensuring rigour in relation to ethical approval and wider research integrity matters, and revising this guidance to better articulate requirements to university staff and students with up-to-date examples of best practice and common pitfalls and in particular to emphasise guidance around the integrity challenges arising from the use of Artificial Intelligence within research and academic works. A key re-positioning of this policy has been around positively emphasising expectations through modelling of best practice to demonstrate expectations, whilst retaining rigour and clarity on potential sanctions and mechanisms for misconduct.

- The Research Projects and Governance Manager has worked closely with the University's Student Wellbeing Services team and an external consultant to enhance our Safeguarding Guidance for researchers, resulting in a draft guidance toolkit for researchers supporting them in reflecting upon and articulating their approaches to Safeguarding in their research proposals. This new guidance is in draft with the view to launching during the 2024/25 academic year.

- The University has invested funding via internal Creativity and Curiosity seed-funding towards a project led by the Research Support Office aimed at mapping and analysing research and knowledge exchange within our curriculum offer, with the view to utilising this data to better inform course development offer but to also better understand the research being carried out by our student community institutionally. This is with the view to using these learnings to develop bespoke guidance and support in relation to research integrity across our taught offer, and to harmonise inputs where possible more strategically across the institution. This work will commence during the first quarter of the 24/25 academic year, with the view to bespoke

inputs being developed during the year and beyond capitalising on the research findings.

- Three formal academic career pathways to help scaffold career development and identify staff for the purposes of the Research Excellence Framework (REF), the Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF) and the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) have been launched. Consequently, all academic staff with research and scholarly activity hours in their contracts have been asked to select one of the three pathways listed below:

1. Teaching and Scholarship
2. Teaching, Scholarship and Research
3. Teaching, Scholarship and K3E (Knowledge Exchange, Enterprise & Employability)

- 5 year career planning sessions, supported by the Co-Director of our strategic research centre for Cultural and Creative Industries, have been introduced, to better support academic colleagues across these pathways to develop bespoke developmental plans and to identify training and support needs institutionally – enabling staff to express their ambitions, their requirements for achievement, and supporting decision-making in regards to researcher support and general academic development. In-line with the career development outlined within the three pathways, the UEC has begun to consider specific resources and guidance that supports staff engaged across each pathway in enhancing and maintaining best practice in relation to RI, an example of which being the new Public Engagement best practice toolkit.

- The University successfully launched the new Research & Enterprise Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Working Group (REEDIWG), made up of academic and non-academic representatives across the University in order to amplify opportunity for staff and student voices to be heard within our wider research community, and to develop and review equality and diversity requirements for research and enterprise activities for the University. The group's role is to review research equality impact assessments and make recommendations for action to the University Ethics Committee, the Equality and Diversity Steering group, and to the Research Ethics Committee.

2C. Reflections on progress and plans for future developments

This should include a reflection on the previous year's activity including a review of progress and impact of initiatives if known relating to activities referenced in the previous year's statement. Note any issues that have hindered progress, e.g. resourcing or other issues.

- Thematically, the focus on culture and enabling platforms for dialog has already started to bear fruit – with academic staff positively engaging with new developments such as the REEDIWG and the opportunities for progression outlined within the new career pathways, as well as continued success with our community embracing and engaging with the contact points and opportunities the UEC has created to discuss matters of research integrity openly, formally, and informally.

- Support has organically become more tailored to suit the ambitions and career aspirations of individual staff, re-focusing our institutional commitment to research integrity by building platforms of opportunity on the strong foundations of policy, resources, and operational support in place whilst continually enhancing and expanding these resources. An organic willingness to engage with matters of research integrity across broader contexts – from project inception, through to course design, through to matters of culture – has started to emerge, suggesting that our academic community is embracing the new opportunities, and particularly the informal mechanisms to engage, that have started to be put in place.

- Resourcing of the operational processes related to ethical approval have remained a key challenge, which has resulted in the UEC proposing to invest in an online ethics platform to help facilitate these operational processes across our staff and student communities. In line with our institutional Strategy for Digital Transformation, this is essential if we are to streamline and further enhance the bureaucratic elements of the ethical approval process, in order to free up staff engaged in the strategic development of our RI processes by reducing administrative burden, and therefore produce a more productive student and staff experience that also frees up time and resources better facilitate opportunities for learning, development, and wider enhancement of our RI culture.

- Alongside digitisation, review of best practice guidance and process flows relating to specific activities – as modelled by our work around public engagement during 2023/24 - will continue into 2024/25 to ensure that processes remain robust but reduce administration where possible in favour

of maximising and emphasising the learning opportunities of engaging with matters of RI for our academic community.

- Utilising our review of Public Engagement best practice in relation to research integrity and Safeguarding as examples, the UEC aims to continue this work across other specifically targeted areas for our academic community – particularly in relation to Knowledge Exchange and business and community-led research, with the view to streamlining processes and reduce administrative burden for all, whilst better visibly celebrating and sharing best practice and allowing our community to focus time on academic development over administration of these processes.

- Going forward into 2024/25 academic year, alongside furthering the implementation of the online ethics management system, a key strategic focus will be on tailoring the support and opportunities around career development in RI best practice to suit the unique curriculum needs of BSU, utilising the outcomes of our mapping work to better analyse the individual needs of particular disciplinary staff, and student groups to ensure that support and resource can be better targeted and sharpened to these groups.

- In summary, the strength of BSU during the 2023/24 has been the willingness and enablement of our academic community to engage with developments within our wider research integrity culture, with many positive developments during the year bearing fruit quickly and a clear roadmap for further work emerging to continue this engagement, enhance opportunities for embedding and developing our RI behaviours, whilst reducing administrative pressures where possible in line with our wider Digital Transformation programme of work.

2D. Case study on good practice (optional)

Bath Spa University's Public Engagement Toolkit is a digital resource aimed at supporting researchers and research support professionals across the university to reflect on and determine actionable strategies for effective public engagement and publicly engaged research. The Toolkit's central page will be located under the Knowledge Exchange subsection of the university's intranet and will host a series of downloadable mini 'kits' that focus on various key sets of PE principals and practical considerations, such as 'Defining Public Engagement' and 'Delivering Ethical Engagement'.

The Toolkit itself is shaped through engagement - exemplifying the UEC's wider approach in using the modelling of best practice in the development to both create the resource and at the same time ensure that the experience of creating it was in and of itself a learning and development opportunity for our community. The project actively engaged BSU staff to help identify areas for confidence and capacity-building, to inform the contents and format of the kits and the framework around which they are structured, which in turn enabled them to feel ownership in the development and ultimately ensure what was produced felt relevant as a "ground-up" development in our RI culture rather than a "top-down" policy being imposed.

Across various public and internal events, including the university's annual Research Festival, Postdoctoral Research Assistant CJ Turner-McMullan engaged fellow staff to consider their research and projects in relation to public audiences and participants, community partnerships, engagement forms and formats, research ethics, and practical approaches. The project found that a lack of standard definitions of what public engagement is, or what it could be in the contexts of different research contexts and disciplines, presented a major barrier to effective PE at Bath Spa, which the Toolkit aims to address, based specifically on the experiences and reflections of the staff within our community that were engaged.

These inputs contributed to the building of case studies of best practice – enhancing our celebrating of successes - as well as a series of practical templates that will ensure the Toolkit can continue to develop staff and maximise engagement with ethical practice in this area.

Section 3: Addressing research misconduct

3A. Statement on processes that the organisation has in place for dealing with allegations of misconduct

Please provide:

- a brief summary of relevant organisation policies/ processes (e.g. research misconduct procedure, whistle-blowing policy, bullying/harassment policy; appointment of a third party to act as confidential liaison for persons wishing to raise concerns) and brief information on the periodic review of research misconduct processes (e.g. date of last review; any major changes during the period under review; date when processes will next be reviewed).

- information on how the organisation creates and embeds a research environment in which all staff, researchers and students feel comfortable to report instances of misconduct (e.g. code of practice for research, whistle-blowing, research misconduct procedure, informal liaison process, website signposting for reporting systems, training, mentoring, reflection and evaluation of policies, practices and procedures).

- anonymised key lessons learned from any investigations into allegations of misconduct which either identified opportunities for improvements in the organisation's investigation procedure and/or related policies / processes/ culture or which showed that they were working well.

- The University has clear policies relating to Research Misconduct, Academic Misconduct Procedures, Whistleblowing, Bullying and Harassment, Research Data Management, and Data Protection, which are available and actively signposted to all staff and student groups through communications, materials, and resource listings to maximise engagement with best practice and to signpost formal mechanisms within the institution to support research development.

- The Academic Misconduct policy has been reviewed during the 2023/24 academic year via a task and finish group, with input from the University Ethics Committee via the Research Projects and Governance Manager. The revised policy is due for launch during the 24/25 academic year

- A key focus of the review of this policy has been an emphasis shift towards modelling of best practice over emphasising punitive/policy-driven

processes, better highlighting examples of excellent and expected practice institutionally – ensuring that expectations are made clear, as well as effectively modelled and articulated for our community to engage with whilst retaining clarity on mechanisms and policy frameworks in place. This in turn has been reinforced through specific inputs within our training provision that aim to platform best practice and stimulate open discussion as to how common pitfalls can be avoided and how our planning can mitigate these risks. Templates have also been revised to more clearly articulate contact points for discussion and reporting of RI concerns.

- The University has not been made aware of any allegations of research misconduct during the 2023/24 academic year