

Heriot-Watt University Annual Statement on Research Integrity 2025/26

Question	Response
1A. Name of organisation	Heriot-Watt 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)	15 th , October 2026
1D. Web address of organisation's research integrity page (if applicable)	research integrity page
1E. Named senior member of staff to oversee research integrity	Name: Professor Chris Turney
	Email address: C.Turney@hw.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: Carolyn Brock
	Email address: c.brock@hw.ac.uk

Introduction

Heriot-Watt is committed to supporting and promoting the highest standards of research integrity across all disciplines. We align our policies and practices with the principles of the UK Concordat to Support Research Integrity (2025), ensuring that all research is conducted with honesty, rigour, transparency, care, and accountability. This statement provides an overview of our activities during the reporting year, including training and development, governance arrangements, summary information

on any formal investigations of research misconduct, and future priorities for strengthening research integrity.

2. Promoting high standards of research integrity and positive research culture.

2a. Policies and Systems

Heriot-Watt University is committed to supporting and promoting the highest standards of research integrity across all disciplines. The University aligns its policies and practices with the principles of the [UK Concordat to Support Research Integrity](#), and [Scottish Funding Councils Research Integrity Policy](#) ensuring that research is conducted with honesty, rigour, transparency, care and accountability.

This commitment is underpinned by a comprehensive framework of research integrity, ethics and governance policies that are readily accessible to staff and students, including:

- [Research Ethics Policy](#)
- [Research Ethics Procedures](#)
- [Research Integrity: Procedures for Investigating Research Misconduct](#)

These provide a clear foundation for responsible research conduct and support researchers in meeting the highest professional and ethical standards. Research integrity is embedded throughout the University's research governance framework and is integrated into research ethics and approval processes, ensuring that responsible research practice is considered at every stage of the research lifecycle.

The University maintains and regularly reviews its Research Integrity and Ethics policies to ensure alignment with evolving best practice, regulatory requirements and sector expectations. Institutional oversight is provided through the **University Committee for Research & Innovation (UCRI)**, that shapes related institutional research integrated related policy, and the **Research Integrity and Ethics Committee**, which promotes consistency of approach across Schools and supports robust and effective ethical review processes.

Communications and Engagement

The University provides a range of resources and guidance to help researchers understand and apply principles of research integrity in their day-to-day activities. Comprehensive online resources are available to all staff and students, covering

areas including research ethics, data protection, research governance and open research and AI practices.

Recognising that maintaining research integrity requires ongoing engagement and awareness, the University promotes discussion of responsible research practices through its governance structures, training provision and research support mechanisms. Researchers are encouraged to consider not only compliance requirements but also the broader values and behaviours that underpin excellent research.

The University recognises that contemporary research environments present increasingly complex challenges relating to authorship, collaboration, data management, artificial intelligence, conflicts of interest and responsible innovation. Through guidance, training and institutional support, researchers are equipped to make informed decisions and navigate ethical and professional dilemmas with confidence.

Culture, Development and Leadership

Research integrity is fundamental to the University's wider commitment to fostering a positive research culture. The University seeks to create an environment in which openness, accountability, collegiality and continuous improvement are actively encouraged and supported.

Support for researchers is provided throughout all career stages. Early career researchers benefit from mentoring and supervision arrangements that promote good research practice and responsible conduct from the outset of their careers. More experienced researchers are supported through ongoing professional development opportunities and access to specialist advice and guidance where required.

In recognition of the importance of research integrity to research quality and culture, Senate has approved mandatory Research Integrity training for all research staff (effective from the start of the academic year 2026/27). This reflects the University's commitment to meeting the expectations of funders, collaborators, regulators, SFC Research Integrity Policy and the UK Concordat, while strengthening a shared understanding of responsible research practice across the institution.

The University delivers this training through its partnership with Epigeum, a recognised provider of research integrity training used across the higher education sector. The training is fully online, self-paced and designed to accommodate the differing responsibilities and experience levels of researchers. Three training pathways are available, enabling staff to complete a programme appropriate to their role and career stage. Importantly, the training is positioned not as a

compliance exercise, but as an investment in professional development, research quality and positive research culture.

The University also emphasises that completion of research integrity training complements, rather than replaces, project-specific ethics review processes, governance requirements and any specialist training necessary before research activity commences.

Monitoring and Reporting

The University maintains robust arrangements for monitoring and reporting on research integrity. Research integrity is overseen through established governance structures that provide institutional scrutiny and support continuous improvement.

Reporting is provided to UCRI, ensuring oversight of research integrity matters, emerging issues and ongoing developments in policy and practice. This reporting supports institutional transparency and enables the University to monitor the effectiveness of its arrangements whilst identifying opportunities to further strengthen its research culture.

2B. Changes and developments during the period under review

During the reporting period, Heriot-Watt University continued to strengthen its approach to research integrity through a combination of policy development, enhanced researcher support, new guidance, and expanded training provision. These developments reflect the University's ongoing commitment to the principles of the UK Concordat to Support Research Integrity, particularly Commitment 3, by promoting a positive research culture and supporting researchers to undertake high-quality, ethical and responsible research throughout their careers.

A significant development during the period was the University's decision to introduce mandatory Research Integrity training for all research-active staff. Following approval by Senate, the University commenced implementation of an enhanced institutional training programme designed to establish a consistent baseline understanding of research integrity principles and responsible research conduct across the research community.

The training is delivered through partnership with Epigeum, a recognised provider of research integrity training used across the higher education sector. The programme consists of online, self-paced learning pathways tailored to different career stages and research roles, enabling researchers to engage with content relevant to their responsibilities and experience. While full implementation is

ongoing, the introduction of mandatory training represents a significant enhancement to the University's research integrity framework and reinforces research integrity as a shared institutional responsibility.

Another significant development during the reporting period was the revision of the University's approach to handling allegations of academic misconduct involving postgraduate research (PGR) students. All cases of academic misconduct involving PGR students are now considered under the **Global Student Academic Misconduct Policy** as opposed to the **Research Integrity: Procedures for Investigating Research Misconduct**, and are referred through the established University Student Conduct Office processes for consideration by the University Discipline Committee.

This change ensures a consistent and transparent institutional approach to the investigation and management of academic misconduct across the student community, regardless of mode or level of study. The policy applies to misconduct arising from any aspect of a student's research activity, including progression reports, publications, research ethics matters, theses, viva examinations and other research outputs. By aligning PGR academic misconduct processes with those used for other students, the University has strengthened consistency in decision-making, investigative procedures and the application of sanctions, while ensuring appropriate consideration of the specific context of research-based misconduct.

A further area of development during the reporting period has been the University's work to support the responsible use of artificial intelligence (AI) in research. Recognising the growing use of AI and generative AI technologies within the research environment, Heriot-Watt developed and published comprehensive institutional guidance for researchers on the responsible use of AI throughout the research lifecycle. The guidance, developed collaboratively by Information Services and Research Engagement colleagues, provides practical support for researchers from project design through to dissemination and impact generation.

The guidance explicitly frames AI use through the lens of research integrity, emphasising transparency, reproducibility, accountability and critical evaluation. It addresses a range of issues including compliance with funder and institutional requirements, research ethics and data protection considerations, copyright and intellectual property implications, biases and inaccuracies in AI-generated outputs, responsible prompt design, record keeping, and the transparent reporting of AI use within publications and research outputs. Researchers are encouraged to maintain clear documentation of AI use, critically assess generated content, ensure appropriate ethical approvals are in place, and remain responsible for the accuracy and integrity of all research outputs. The guidance also reinforces the University's position that AI tools cannot be recognised as research authors and that

researchers retain full responsibility for the conduct and communication of their work.

The introduction of this guidance represents an important development in ensuring that the benefits of AI can be realised while maintaining the highest standards of academic rigour, transparency and ethical practice. It complements the University's wider Responsible AI principles and AI literacy initiatives and provides researchers with a practical framework for making informed decisions about AI use in ways that uphold research integrity.

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provides researchers with a practical framework for making informed decisions about AI use in ways that uphold research integrity.

2C. Reflections on progress and plans for future developments

During the reporting period, Heriot-Watt University has made substantial progress in strengthening its research integrity framework through the introduction of mandatory Research Integrity training and the development of institutional guidance on the responsible use of AI in research, both highlighted as key activities in the University's report last year as being priority areas of development.

While both developments are relatively recent, they provide important foundations for strengthening awareness, consistency and confidence in the application of research integrity principles across the research community.

The University recognises that embedding these developments into day-to-day research practice will require sustained effort over time. As implementation of the mandatory training programme progresses, monitoring arrangements will be developed to evaluate participation and identify opportunities for further support and enhancement. Likewise, the University's AI guidance will continue to evolve in response to emerging technologies, sector developments and researcher feedback to ensure it remains relevant and effective.

Looking ahead to the next reporting period, the University will;

- Evaluate the extension of mandatory research integrity training to the postgraduate research (PGR) community.
- Undertake a thorough review of the current Research Integrity procedures to ensure full alignment with the updated Concordat and Scottish Funding Council requirements, with a particular focus on the efficiency and effectiveness of investigation processes, including the necessity of the current two-stage process and the timeliness of investigations.
- Continue to promote and embed open research practices, including open access publishing, responsible data sharing and initiatives that support transparency and reproducibility. During the reporting period, the **Open Research Steering Group (ORSG)** has undertaken significant work to advance the University's open research agenda, bringing together

colleagues from across the institution to develop a shared vision and approach. This work will culminate in the publication of an institutional Open Research Statement, co-developed with members of the Steering Group from across the University.

The Statement will articulate Heriot-Watt's commitment to open research principles and provide a framework for future activity, helping to strengthen the transparency, accessibility, reproducibility and impact of the University's research. Its publication will also bring Heriot-Watt into line with a growing number of UK institutions that have adopted institution-wide statements to demonstrate their commitment to open research and responsible research practices. These activities complement the principles of research integrity and contribute to enhancing the trustworthiness and wider value of research outputs.

- In addition, the University will continue to raise awareness of the mechanisms available for reporting concerns relating to research integrity, with the aim of ensuring that staff and students feel confident in seeking advice, raising concerns and contributing to a culture of openness and accountability.

2D. Case study on good practice

Case Study 1. Embedding Research Integrity in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

Challenge

As the use of artificial intelligence (AI) and generative AI tools increased across the research community, the University identified a need to provide clear guidance to ensure researchers could take advantage of emerging technologies while maintaining the highest standards of research integrity, transparency and ethical practice. Researchers required practical support to navigate issues relating to data protection, ethics, reproducibility, copyright, responsible authorship and the reliability of AI-generated outputs.

Approach

A cross-functional group involving research support and information services colleagues developed institution-wide guidance on the responsible use of AI in research. The resource is designed to support researchers throughout the entire

research lifecycle, from project planning and ethics approval through to conducting research, publishing findings and communicating impact.

The guidance adopts a research integrity lens, encouraging researchers to critically evaluate AI-generated outputs, maintain clear records of prompts and outputs, ensure transparency in publications, comply with funder and institutional requirements, and consider ethical and data protection implications before using AI tools. It also reinforces the principle that researchers retain full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity and reporting of their research and that AI tools cannot be recognised as authors. Guidance on appropriate acknowledgement and citation of AI use was also made available to support openness and transparency in research outputs.

Impact

The guidance has provided researchers with a practical framework for making informed decisions about AI use while aligning with institutional expectations for research integrity. Importantly, it has enabled the University to move proactively in addressing an emerging area of research governance, supporting responsible innovation rather than treating AI solely as a compliance issue.

Section 3: Addressing research misconduct

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

- Heriot-Watt University maintains clear and accessible processes for raising and addressing concerns relating to research integrity and potential research misconduct. The **University's Research Integrity Procedures** provide multiple routes for reporting concerns, allowing individuals to seek advice or raise issues through their Schools senior management, or directly with the named contacts identified within the procedures. This approach is intended to be supportive and flexible, recognising that individuals may feel more comfortable approaching different points of contact depending on the nature of the concern. The University's wider framework is underpinned by related policies and procedures covering areas such as whistleblowing, dignity and respect, and student conduct.
- The University keeps its research integrity arrangements under review to ensure they remain effective, proportionate and aligned with sector expectations. During the next reporting period, a comprehensive review of the Research Integrity Procedures will be undertaken in response to the revised Concordat to Support Research Integrity and the new Scottish Funding Council Research Integrity Policy. The review will also reflect on institutional experience from the increased number of concerns and allegations managed in recent reporting periods. Particular attention will be given to the effectiveness and proportionality of current investigation processes, including the continued need for a two-stage investigation model, opportunities to reduce the time taken to conclude cases, and ways to minimise the burden placed on those involved in investigations while maintaining fairness, robustness and due process.
- Experience gained through recent cases has highlighted both strengths and areas for further consideration within the current arrangements. The availability of multiple reporting routes has generally provided individuals with accessible and supportive mechanisms for raising concerns, while established processes have enabled allegations to be investigated thoroughly and appropriately. At the same time, several cases have reinforced the importance of ensuring that investigations are progressed as efficiently as possible, recognising the impact that lengthy investigations can have on complainants, respondents and those responsible for conducting investigations. These lessons will inform the

forthcoming review and support the continued development of a research integrity framework that is transparent, supportive and proportionate.

3B. Information on investigations of research misconduct that have been undertaken				
Type of allegation	Number of allegations			
	Number of allegations reported to the organisation	Number of formal investigations	Number upheld in part after formal investigation	Number upheld in full after formal investigation
Fabrication				
Falsification				
Plagiarism	5	1		1
Failure to meet legal, ethical and professional obligations				
Misrepresentation (eg data; involvement; interests; qualification; and/or publication history)	2			
Improper dealing with allegations of misconduct				
Multiple areas of concern (when received in a single allegation)				
<i>Other*</i>				
Total:	7			
*If you listed any allegations under the 'Other' category, please give a brief, high-level summary of their type here. Do not give any identifying or confidential information when responding. N/A				