

## ANNUAL STATEMENT ON RESEARCH INTEGRITY 2022-2023

### MIDDLESEX UNIVERSITY

Name of organisation: **Middlesex University**

Type of organisation: **Higher education institution**

Date statement approved by governing body: (DD/MM/YY)

Web address of organisation's research integrity page: <https://www.mdx.ac.uk/our-research/research-integrity>

Named senior member of staff to oversee research integrity: **Prof Anne Boddington**

Email address: [a.boddington@mdx.ac.uk](mailto:a.boddington@mdx.ac.uk)

Named member of staff who will act as a first point of contact for anyone wanting more information on matters of research integrity: **Dr Mark Gray**

Email address: [m.gray@mdx.ac.uk](mailto:m.gray@mdx.ac.uk)

#### **Description of current systems and culture**

The University was an early adopter of the Concordat to Support Research Integrity and continues to adhere to the principles and practices set out in that document. All staff and students engaged in research are required to conduct their activities in line with the Concordat, including any visitors who make use of, or are supported by, the University and/or its facilities. Staff are reminded of obligations in respect of research integrity at induction and on subsequent occasions.

##### *Policies and systems*

The University's research and ethics policies (<https://www.mdx.ac.uk/about-us/policies>) are overseen by a university Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee (RKEC) which reports to the University's Academic Board, which in turn reports to Governors. Policy development and enhancement is the result of periodic review, with regular field reviews of policies and their interaction. Faculties have their own RKECs which report to the university RKEC, and these are a key mechanism for distilling themes in the operation of policies related to research integrity and ethics and bringing them to attention.

The University's Registry managed processes for the reporting and investigation of allegations of research misconduct through a clear and well publicised Policy and Procedures for Academic Integrity and Misconduct, which presumes and inculcates the positive virtue of academic integrity as a valued characteristic of an academic community rather than merely outlining the procedures and penalties for misconduct. Our approach to misconduct derives from a notion of 'positive integrity' – that is, the celebration and presentation of good practice as an essential characteristic of good academic practice. Investigations are coordinated by a Deputy Academic Registrar.

Ethics committees at faculty and subject level report to a University Ethics Committee, which in turn reports to RKEC and Academic Board. Our ethics processes have been through a substantial period of review – both in relation to governance and operation. The former has been part of a baseline review of governance in relation to research and knowledge exchange; the former the result of changes to the operation of ethical review via a new integrated ethics system associated with a new information system. A university Ethics Framework (<https://www.mdx.ac.uk/about-us/policies/university-ethics-framework>) sets out guiding principles, expectations and the machinery for the operation of policy.

### *Communications and engagement*

Communications and engagement are essential to ensuring research integrity at the university. A regularly updated intranet site holds periodically reviewed and updated policy documents as well as guidance, procedure guides and an Academic Staff Handbook. Expectations with regard to research integrity and the ethical conduct of research are communicated on appointment through an induction process (now under revision to improve further this element), through mentoring and through engagement with faculty and university committees. Student engagement with research integrity is achieved through detailed student-specific Unihub pages on academic integrity (<https://unihub.mdx.ac.uk/study/academic-integrity>), briefings on the university's Regulations and Policies, supervision guidance, preparatory content in taught elements of research degrees as well as in taught research degrees. Undergraduate and graduate student tutorial and pastoral support provide a further opportunity to communicate the importance of these subjects. Further, university microsites (such as a popular Yammer channel on Research, Engagement and Impact, and the MdxMinds blog (<https://mdxminds.com>)) periodically touch on issues related to research integrity in their discussion of research practice.

### *Culture, development and leadership*

The development of a culture of research integrity is led by a University Executive Team which places integrity at the heart of research practice. A PVC (Research and Knowledge Exchange) [currently filled by an Interim appointment pending a permanent appointment] leads assurance and governance through the mechanisms described above – for example, the PVC chairs the RKEC, and sets the framework for research governance in the university. Development of the framework for research integrity is led through RKEC, through the ethics committees and via a periodic review of all policies conducted by Academic Board. Reports on research, including research integrity, matters are made to Governors periodically. The PVC is supported and assisted in ensuring fit-for-purpose governance of research integrity by faculty Deputy Deans (Research & KE) [x4], and by a Director of Research [appointment pending]. Ethics committee chairs receive training, and are involved at faculty and university level in the development of the landscape of research integrity.

### *Monitoring and reporting*

Monitoring and reporting of student misconduct is undertaken by Registry, with a dedicated Academic Misconduct Team of considerable experience leading both the 'positive integrity' messaging discussed above and the enforcement action necessary to ensure compliance with the dictates of policy. Annual reporting on research integrity at university level is coordinated and routed through RKEC and onwards to Academic Board.

### **Changes and developments during the period under review**

During the year under review the following developments were worthy of note:

1. The PVC (Research & KE) undertook a thorough governance review of research, including a review of the terms of reference of the ethics committees, their role and operations;
2. The university began to enshrine some of these changes in the development of a new current research information system (CRIS), including a thoroughgoing review of workflow models for ethical approval, the management of ethics cases and information/reporting flows to faculties and RKEC. The Ethics element of the CRIS system is in development as a software tool;
3. A Director of Postgraduate Students (Professor Midgelow) continued to focus work on student support for research integrity through a review of induction and other support courses, through a Research Student Summer Conference, and through active discussions on matters related to research integrity with supervisors.
4. RKEC received and discussed a report on research integrity, and considered the steps toward improved arrangements. Minutes of that discussion were shared with Academic Board.

### **Reflections on progress and plans for future developments**

Progress has been considerable, not least because the governance review discussed has brought to light ways in which the design of mechanisms to assist with the maintenance of academic and research integrity can be improved. This has constituted a 'ground up' approach which, alongside the CRIS workflow modelling at the 'micro' level, had enabled the university to plan improvements in process – not just policy. Policy revisions included the updating of 17 key research related policies, some of which revisions included enhancements to policy mechanisms or clarity in statements related to research integrity. Our progress has only been hindered by staff departures (e.g. Professor Midgelow mentioned above left in the course of 2022-23) – although new appointments in 2023-24 will further transform our capabilities; by reasoned delays in CRIS system development (notably in the postgraduate student management module); and by the pressures of the post-covid transition for student researchers.

### **Case study on good practice**

Middlesex's successful development of a new approach to student misconduct is an interesting development. During the course of 2021-2 Registry staff undertook a review of academic misconduct, including student research misconduct, from the point of view of how the communication of academic integrity as a key feature of community conduct could reshape perceptions. The University's new Strategy (<https://www.mdx.ac.uk/about-us/our-strategy-to-2031>), implemented during the year under review, focused heavily on integrity as a key community value for both staff and students – and this led and informed the work in Registry. Guidance to students in the regulations ([https://www.mdx.ac.uk/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0034/759256/FINAL-Regulations-2023-24.pdf](https://www.mdx.ac.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0034/759256/FINAL-Regulations-2023-24.pdf) Section F4) resulted from this review and, together with a more thoroughgoing approach to communicating a positive model of integrity (as a positive virtue to be presumed and modelled rather than a thing to be checked and detected), this has changed minds among student researchers. Detection of misconduct (as reported below) has remained as thoroughgoing: we have not suspended judgement, but we have sought to change perceptions positively. Placing trust and integrity at the heart of our approach to research is not itself a new commitment, but its role here is to recognise that if the university's research is to have impact in the world and achieve the ambitions of the wider university Strategy, trust in the conduct of research itself must be maintained and its openness enhanced.

### **Statement on processes that the organisation has in place for dealing with allegations of misconduct**

The policy architecture of the university is set out on the university website (<https://www.mdx.ac.uk/our-research/research-integrity>) and relevant policies include the thirteen documents mentioned therein. A revision of the Definition of Research statement, and revisions to the Research Ethics Policy Framework Statement and the Code of Practice for Research were all undertaken in 2022/23. Periodic review is on a five year cycle (e.g. the Ethics Framework was reviewed in 2019 and will next be reviewed in 2023/24).

The University continues to maintain and develop training for research students and staff related to research integrity, the conduct of research and research ethics. Courses for staff covering research integrity include 'Managing externally funded research', 'Viva Chair Training', 'Viva panel training', 'Research supervisor training' and 'The role of the supervisor'. For postgraduate researchers, research ethics and Integrity are covered both in the research induction course ("Kickstarting series") and in regular researcher development sessions focussing on 'Planning and organising research', 'Being a resilient researcher', 'Ethics', 'University processes and research', 'Working across Boundaries: Multi and Trans Disciplinary research', and 'Research integrity in practice'. Postgraduate researchers are also invited to use the app Dilemma, which gamifies engagement with research ethics issues. At both University and Departmental level staff and students are trained in the use of MORE (Middlesex Online Research Ethics) form, through which ethical approval for research projects is

submitted for approvals of the ethics boards. In 2022-23 new postgraduate research regulations have been introduced that require postgraduate researchers to submit a MORE application in their first review panel and update it as they progress through their research project.

These courses, the arrangements discussed above relating to communication and engagement, and the informal mechanisms for discussing good practice (such as the microsites) all foster an openness toward matters of good conduct and misconduct. Genuine errors are accepted; self-critical practise is celebrated and supported.

**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	2 (partner institution)	2		2
Failure to meet legal, ethical and professional obligations				
Misrepresentation (eg data; involvement; interests; qualification; and/or publication history)				
Improper dealing with allegations of misconduct				
Multiple areas of concern (when received in a single allegation)				

<i>Other*</i>				
Total:	2	2		2

MAG/NP 06.12.2023