

RCA Research Integrity Report 2019/20

Background

The RCA refreshed and updated its Research Ethics Policy in 2017, ensuring it met the good practice set out in the UUK Concordat to Support Research Integrity and in the UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO) Code of Practice for Research. The RCA became a UKRIO subscriber in 2016.

A new Ethics Committee was established in 2017/18, co-chaired by the Director of Research and Innovation and the Director of Academic Development. The Committee meets termly, and reports to the Research & Knowledge Exchange Strategy Committee (which reports to Senate). The Research Staff & Students Ethics Sub-Committee, co-chaired by the Head of Postgraduate Programmes and the Head of Research Development, and the Taught MA Ethics Sub-Committee, chaired by the Deputy Director of Academic Development, report to the Ethics Committee.

In 2017/18, the RCA introduced the Epigeum online “Ethics: Good Research Practice” training course to all research staff (including doctoral supervisors) and to MRes and first year PhD students. All research staff and research students are expected to have undertaken the Epigeum course prior to submitting a request for research ethics approval to the Ethics Committee. Additional research ethics training is also provided to research students through the College’s MRes and doctoral training provision and to research staff through Research Supervisor training.

Report on 2019/20 Academic Year

Reports of Misconduct

There was 1 report of research misconduct concerning a member of research staff at the RCA in 19/20 that is currently being processed as a student complaint.

Applications for Research Ethics Approval

Applications for Research Ethics Approval are made using a standard self-assessment form. For research students and staff projects, applications presenting a low risk (green and amber) are assessed by the Co-Chairs of the Research Students and Staff sub-committee, and those presenting a higher level of risk (red and purple) are assessed by the Co-Chairs of the College Ethics Committee. 3 applications self-assessed as low risk are found on assessment to involve a potentially higher level of risk. These are referred for further assessment as though they were a red/purple risk level, following the principle on erring on the side of close consideration where there is any doubt about the potential level of ethical risk involved in a project.

A total of 99 applications for research ethics approval were received in 2019/20, compared to 105 the previous year. The vast majority of these (76) were graded Green or Yellow (no or low risk), and the small number of applications (23) graded Red or Purple (higher risk, e.g. involving work with children or vulnerable adults, with security sensitive materials, with human tissue, etc.) were assessed by the Co-Chairs of the College’s Ethics Committee, and referred for specialist advice where appropriate. A total of 100 staff and research students

undertook the Epigeum online ethics training during 2019/20. The vast majority of these (90) were research students, with 10 staff undertaking the training course this year.

Applications for Ethics Approval

	2019/20	2018/19	2017/18
Total Research Student & Staff applications	99	105	21
Total Research Student Applications	89	97	18
Total Staff Applications	10	8	3
Purple	1	1	1
Red	22	6	2
Yellow	65	85	18
Green	11	13	0

Epigeum Online Research Ethics Training

	2019/20	2018/19	2017/18
TOTAL	100	135	127
Research Students	90	124	103
Staff	10	11	24

Reflection and Summary Comments

As in 18/19, the RCA would like to continue to see an increase in the number of research-active staff engaging with Epigeum training, as an integral part of good research practice, and also so that these staff can provide robust advice to doctoral students they supervise. However, research ethics feels increasingly well understood and embedded in the College, with research students and staff routinely undertaking self-assessment of the level of ethical risk, and of the proposed approach to managing those risks, at the start of a project. The process for seeking ethical approval for staff and research student projects is running smoothly, with more timely submissions of applications and turn-around on assessments. This has allowed the Ethics Committee to turn its attention to developing new guidance and processes, such as the new checklist for assessing the ethics of funding sources, which was approved by the Research & Knowledge Exchange Strategy Committee.

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 November 2020