RCA Research Integrity Report 2020/21

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 2020/21 Academic Year
Reports of Misconduct
There were 0 reports of research misconduct at the RCA in 2020/21.

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. Some 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 of 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 135 applications for research ethics approval were received in 2020/21, compared to 99 the previous year. The vast majority of these (110) were graded Green or Yellow (no or low risk), and the small number of applications (25) 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 73 staff and research students undertook the Epigeum online ethics training during 2020/21. The vast majority of these (60) were research students, with 13 staff undertaking the training course this year.

Applications for Ethics Approval

	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19	2017/18
Total Research Student & Staff applications	**135**	**99**	105	21
Total Research Student Applications	117	89	97	18
Total Staff Applications	18	10	8	3
Purple	5	1	1	1
Red	20	22	6	2
Yellow	83	65	85	18
Green	27	11	13	0

Epigeum Online Research Ethics Training

	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19	2017/18
TOTAL	**149**	**100**	135	127
Research Students	121	90	124	103
Staff	28	10	11	24

Reflection and Summary Comments

In 20/21, the Ethics Committee and sub-Committee contributed to the development of key policies and processes which support the RCA's commitment to delivering high-quality, ethical research with integrity. These include: input into the RCA's refreshed safeguarding policy; guidance for researchers on non-verbal consent; starting the review of approaches to payments to participants with best practice guidance to follow; refreshing participant information and consent forms; and developing gatekeeper information/consent forms.

In 21/22, the RCA will offer new ethics training for both staff and research students (working in partnership with UKRIO) in addition to requiring the completion of the Epigeum ethics module. In line with the College's action plan for the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, the College will make improvements to the recording of training, including ethics and integrity training, and will also integrate research ethics and integrity into appraisal and development discussions between researchers and their managers.

Dr Emma Wakelin
Director of Research & Innovation
November 2021