



Universities UK

Research integrity: the concordat and the role of annual narrative statements

Max Hastings

Policy Researcher, Universities UK

Max.Hastings@UniversitiesUK.ac.uk

- » What is research integrity and why does it matter?
- » The role of the Concordat to Support Research Integrity
- » The 2016 UUK progress review – findings and recommendations
- » Science and Technology Committee inquiry
- » The case for Annual Narrative Statements

What is research integrity?

- » **Honesty** in all aspects of research
 - » the presentation of research goals, intentions and findings
 - » reporting on research methods and procedures; in gathering data
 - » using and acknowledging the work of other researchers
 - » conveying valid interpretations and making justifiable claims based on research findings
- » **Rigour**, in line with prevailing disciplinary norms and standards
 - » in performing research and using appropriate methods;
 - » in adhering to an agreed protocol where appropriate
 - » in drawing interpretations and conclusions from the research
 - » in communicating the results
- » **Transparency and open communication**
 - » in declaring conflicts of interest;
 - » in the reporting of research data collection methods;
 - » in the analysis and interpretation of data;
 - » in making research findings widely available, which includes sharing negative results as appropriate;
 - » in presenting the work to other researchers and to the general public.
- » **Care and respect**
 - » for all participants in and subjects of research, including humans, animals, the environment and cultural objects.
 - » for the stewardship of research and scholarship for future generations.

What is research misconduct?

- » Research misconduct can appear in many guises:
 - » **Fabrication** involves making up results and recording them as if they were real;
 - » **Falsification** involves manipulating research processes or changing or omitting data;
 - » **Plagiarism** is the appropriation of other people's material without giving proper credit;
 - » **Other forms of misconduct**
 - » failure to meet clear ethical and legal requirements
 - » breach of confidentiality,
 - » lack of informed consent and abuse of research subjects or materials.
 - » improper dealing with infringements, such as attempts to cover up misconduct and reprisals on whistleblowers;

Minor misdemeanours may not lead to formal investigations, but are just as damaging given their probable frequency, and should be corrected by teachers and mentors.

Why does it matter?



Immunization rates in Britain dropped from 92 percent to 73 percent, and were as low as 50 percent in some parts of London. The effect was not nearly as dramatic in the United States, but researchers have estimated that as many as 125,000 US children born in the late 1990s did not get the MMR vaccine because of the Wakefield splash

Governance and regulation of research integrity in the UK

- » 75% of publicly funded research in the UK takes place in universities – therefore need to be at the heart of the system
- » Co-regulation at the heart of the approach – sensitive to UK HE
- » Universities, funders, government and other organisations all have a role to play
- » Concordat to support research integrity provides organising policy framework
- » No formal regulator – but that does not mean no regulation or legal frameworks to provide protection,

The Concordat to support research integrity



- » Work began on the concordat in 2011 – ahead of S&T committee report
- » Working group: UUK, RCUK, national funding councils, Wellcome, BIS, GO Science, DoH
- » Informed by ESF/ALLEA work on research integrity and consultation of members and other stakeholders
- » Published by UUK in July 2012

The signatories to the concordat commit to:

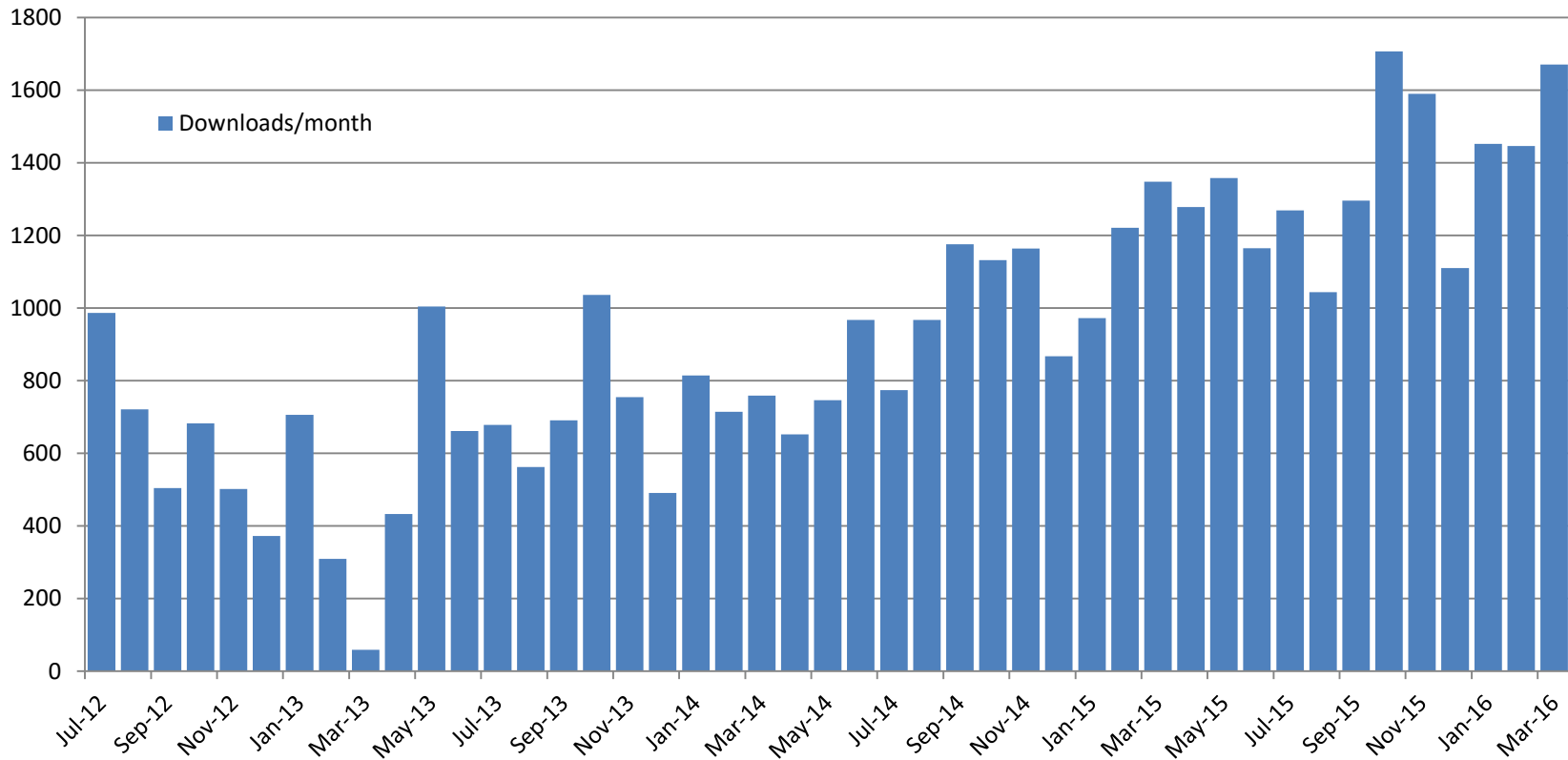
- » maintaining the highest standards of rigour and integrity in all aspects of research
- » ensuring that research is conducted according to appropriate ethical, legal and professional frameworks, obligations and standards
- » supporting a research environment that is underpinned by a culture of integrity and based on good governance, best practice and support for the development of researchers
- » using transparent, robust and fair processes to deal with allegations of research misconduct should they arise
- » working together to strengthen the integrity of research and to reviewing progress regularly and openly

Background to the progress report

- » UUK led the process on behalf of the signatories
- » Focus on universities and implementation
- » Evidence base:
 - » 19 interviews
 - » 7 case studies
 - » 49 written submissions
 - » website audit
 - » 19 annual narrative statements



Number of downloads of the concordat per month July 2012 – March 2016 (excluding UUK internal access)



Main findings (1)

- » Support for the concordat approach was strong – no desire from respondents for direct regulation
- » Awareness among key communities appears very good – but not among research active staff
- » Concordat broadly used as a framing policy document – helped promote/orientate local policy/support, but does not replace this
- » All respondents appear to have undertaken some form of gap analysis against existing process/policies
- » Link with funder policies and assurance processes not universally welcomed... but universally accepted as effective in focusing attention

Main findings (2)

- » Burden of implementation at the institutional level not considered significant – but impact on individuals tasked with leading implementation?
- » Compliance with funder requirements not seen as overly problematic – but lack of communication from funders was
- » Vibrant community has grown around the concordat – huge amount of positive work supported by key organisations (eg, UKRIO, ARMA)
- » Public information is an area that needs more work – 19 annual narrative statements identified (up to 34, Sept 2016)
- » Signatories need to take a more coordinated and engaged approach – support and build on the community that has developed organically

Integrity in Research



Integrity in research refers to the behaviours and values that result in "high quality, ethical and valuable research".¹ This POSTnote considers current approaches to fostering an environment conducive to good research in the UK, and detecting and preventing practice that falls short of expected standards. It also examines the mechanisms for supporting integrity and how this might be improved.

Overview

- There are concerns about how to maintain integrity in research, because of fears that the 'publish or perish' culture leads to poor or questionable research practices.
- Compromised research integrity can put public health at risk and waste resources, undermine public trust in science and damage reputations. High profile cases of deliberate misconduct are rare.
- Various mechanisms exist to promote good practice in research, including: institutional guidelines; a sector-wide concordat; regulatory bodies for some disciplines; peer review; and a variety of legal actions.
- There are differing views over whether these mechanisms are sufficient, or if another form of oversight, such as regulation, might be preferable.

» Release of POST Note on Research Integrity

» Parliamentary inquiry on RI announced:

- » The extent of the research integrity problem;
- » Causes and drivers of recent trends;
- » The effectiveness of controls/regulation (formal and informal), and what further measures if any are needed;
- » What matters should be for the research/academic community to deal with, and which for Government.

UUK response to the inquiry (1)

UUK key arguments:

- » The higher education sector has a long and successful history of co-regulation
 - » this is true for matters of research integrity
 - » the current balance of powers (legislation, regulation, and sanctions) is appropriate and proportionate
 - » all stakeholders take this very seriously

- » The concordat acts as the national policy statement
 - » brings coherence and coordination to all critical stakeholders involved in RI governance
 - » respects institutional autonomy – which is a critical factor in the success of the UK research base
 - » the UUK progress report found it is well received and has been effective – and is continuing to drive standards
 - » Willetts gave gov'n't endorsement, and other national systems are following suit

- » There simply isn't the data to form a view on the extent of the 'problem' of research integrity
 - » good policy interventions need robust supporting evidence
 - » the sector is already (voluntarily) working to improve the evidence base

- » No need for further regulation
 - » must focus instead on research culture and environment – regulation cannot help here anyway.
 - » well developed array of sector infrastructure and organisations – self-help groups, advice services (UKRIO) etc.
 - » the Open Science agenda is driving a fundamental change towards greater openness and transparency

UUK response to the inquiry (2)

UUK proposals:

- » **Keep the current approach: focus on culture**
 - » It is proportionate and complementary to other regulatory and policy frameworks, and is working well.
 - » All stakeholders should continue to work together to identify and promote best practice
 - » Sector should implement the recommendations of the UUK progress report
- » **Government should:**
 - » Continue to support of the concordat
 - » BEIS should continue engagement with sector working groups (e.g. Research Integrity Forum)
 - » Support of the Open Science agenda
 - » Keep the link between the concordat and funding and assurance processes as the sector landscape changes – eg with UKRI.
- » **Funders of research should:**
 - » Provide greater clarity around expectations of compliance: annual narrative statement on research integrity, dedicated webpage on research integrity, and a named point of contact for related enquiries
 - » Consider referencing research integrity in the *environment* section of the REF – but not as a compliance tool.
- » **Universities should:**
 - » Keep up the good work!
 - » Continue to focus on meeting the commitments of the concordat
 - » Keep policies and processes under regular review, and share best practice
 - » Be more open and transparent – and publish data on allegations and outcomes of misconduct investigations in annual narrative statements

The case for Annual Narrative Statements

- » The sector could more effectively promote the good work taking place in this area, and share best practice.
- » The lack of data on the prevalence of misconduct / the scale of the research integrity 'problem' has been raised as a challenge.
- » There is therefore a call from signatories for institutions to increase openness and transparency in order to maintain high levels of trust: a bit like the approach to animal research.



Universities UK

Thank you.

Download a copy of the progress report at:

www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Pages/concordat-research-integrity-progress-report.aspx