

Research Integrity Report 2020/21

Lancaster University has continued to uphold its culture of high research integrity in 2020-21. Lancaster’s Faculty Research Ethics Committees (FRECs) review all ethical applications within 7-8 weeks, and all applications are overseen by the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC). The total number of FREC applications received in the period 2017-18 to 2020-21 are shown in Table 1, together with those funded projects identified by the researcher as not needing ethical review via the research costing governance checklist.

Table 1: Submitted Research Ethics Applications

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
Total FREC reviewed	590	586	588	551
FREC review not needed	232	154	139	146

Face-to-face research e.g. interviews, field-based research involving others or requiring access to sites, and laboratory-based research was paused in March 2020 due to Covid-19. In order to allow the continuation of research activities where possible, amendments to adjust to virtual research protocols were fast tracked by the FRECs. Researchers were given permission to restart face-to-face activities from August 2020, however only where necessary and activity was regularly assessed against updated government advice. Researchers are also required to ensure the reassessment of health and safety risks prior to ethical review. All communications on process adjustments during this period were publically available on our [webpages](#) and were communicated directly to researchers via their departments. Researchers could have two protocols ethically approved, for both face-to-face and virtual research, to enable them to adjust their activities appropriately during the pandemic to protect both researchers, PhD supervisors and participants.

UREC oversight work has included discussions on the review of archival and social media based research. [Social Media Guidance for Researchers](#) has now been created and communicated through our webpages and as guidance in the digital system for ethical review. Implementation of a digital system for ethical review “Research Ethics Application Management System” (REAMS) progressed over the last year and was launched in August 2021. Additional university plans to support and strengthen the understanding and application of research integrity issues in 2020-21 includes: a review on integrity training across the institution and the proposed expansion of UREC to be a University Research Ethics and Integrity Committee (UREIC) with expanded terms of reference and oversight of all research integrity issues.

Lancaster University is committed to the highest standards of research integrity and takes any concerns raised about the conduct of research undertaken by any staff or research students very seriously. In order to ensure that both internal staff and students and individuals external to the University feel able to report suspected instances of research misconduct we ensure that all our research webpages are publically available to encourage an open environment, this includes information about our research misconduct procedure, which was updated in 2021 in line with the [procedure published by the UK Research Integrity Office](#). The [Procedure for the Investigation of Misconduct in Research](#) provides a transparent, timely, robust and fair process for dealing with allegations of misconduct.

Training is offered to all new research staff at Lancaster which covers a range of topics including research integrity, and specific online research integrity training is available to all staff and students via our webpages.

Three research misconduct complaints were raised in 2020-21 (Table 2). The first incident was externally investigated by the Home Office Animal in Science Regulation Unit (ASRU) and concluded with a letter directed to the researcher involved but required no further action. As a result of the incident, an internal investigation was conducted to evaluate the procedures in place and this evaluation resulted in a revised procedure to ensure no future incidents of a similar nature could occur. A second case of research

misconduct is currently in progress, and a third case was deemed not to be research misconduct according to our Procedures.

Table 2: Record of Research Misconduct Complaints

Academic Year	Complaint Raised	Formal Investigation Completed	Allegations Upheld (whole or in part)
2017-18	1	0	0
2018-19	4	0	0
2019-20	2	0	0
2020-21	3	1	1