Annual statement on research integrity 2023-2024

Section 1: Key contact information

Question	Response
1A. Name of organisation	Southampton Solent University
1B. Type of organisation: **higher education institution/industry/independent research performing organisation/other (please state)**	Higher Education
1C. Date statement approved by governing body (DD/MM/YY)	
1D. Web address of organisation's research integrity page (if applicable)	https://www.solent.ac.uk/research-innovation-enterprise/research-at-solent/support/ethics-and-integrity
1E. Named senior member of staff to oversee research integrity	Name: Professor Cathy Barnes
	Email address: cathy.barnes@solent.ac.uk
1F. Named member of staff who will act as a first point of contact for anyone wanting more information on matters of research integrity	Name: Georgia Croucher – Ethics and Impact Officer
	Email address: georgia.croucher@solent.ac.uk / ethics@solent.ac.uk

Section 2: Promoting high standards of research integrity and positive research culture. Description of actions and activities undertaken

2A. Description of current systems and culture

Please describe how the organisation maintains high standards of research integrity and promotes positive research culture. It should include information on the support provided to researchers to understand standards, values and behaviours, such as training, support and guidance for researchers at different career stages/ disciplines. You may find it helpful to consider the following broad headings:

- *Policies and systems*
- *Communications and engagement*
- *Culture, development and leadership*
- *Monitoring and reporting*

Policies and systems

The new ethics policy is a 16-page document broken down into chapters covering everything from risk categorisation to guidance on research abroad, use of AI or social media in research, and research involving minors or vulnerable adults. There is also information on data management, anonymity and consent. This policy applies to all staff and students conducting research of any kind at Solent, the first version was introduced in September 2023 and is updated each academic year.

Ethics applications are submitted through an ethics review system which sorts them into low/medium/high risk based on how the sorting questions are answered. The system allows documents to be added directly into the application and comments/amendments are easily made within the form itself upon review. Departmental ethics chairs can assign reviewers from their own department or another where there may be a conflict of interest or specialist expertise required.

Twice a year there is a training session for ethics panellists and deputy chairs to attend, either as a refresher or as a mandatory induction for new panel members. The sessions involve a demonstration on using the app as well as redacted examples of ethics applications in different risk levels, half of the session is set aside for allow time at the end for questions.

Communications and engagement

Solent has a number of ways to communicate ethical research practice. The Ethics and integrity portal pages for staff and students have information about making ethics applications and how to find ethics training. There are also links to the ethics policy document, example consent forms and participant information sheets.

For new academics at Solent the Research Office has created an induction pack which features a chapter on ethics and where to find portal pages, when to submit ethics applications, and definitions of the risk categories. This is a compulsory part of the staff induction process at Southampton Solent

There are also posters for Departments/Schools and the Research Office to display outlining key ethics updates and contacts details.

Culture, development and leadership

In 2023 the Research Hub was launched. This is a space for researchers to come and learn more about research, drop in for a session on ethic (and other research related topics) or get 1-1 advice and support on systems, submissions, or unusual cases, in a relaxed environment.

The Researcher Development Programme features a session on ethics in a more general sense than the panel-specific training, there is also ethics training available on Solent Online Learning to further knowledge of ethical practice.

Monitoring and reporting

The University Ethics and Integrity Committee meets three times per year, encourages and reviews reports from Departments/Schools of complex or very high-risk cases.

There is now a twice-annual audit by the Committee of a stratified sample of cases that have been through the ethics process across the University to ensure they have been reviewed in line with the ethics policy and Solent values.

A summary of misconduct cases is brought to committee and minuted, misconduct allegations or general ethics concerns will also be recorded in the annual ethics statement

2B. Changes and developments during the period under review

Please provide an update on any changes made during the period, such as new initiatives, training, developments, also ongoing changes that are still underway. Drawing on Commitment 3 of the Concordat, please note any new or revised

policies, practices and procedures to support researchers; training on research ethics and research integrity; training and mentoring opportunities to support the development of researchers' skills throughout their careers.

The Research Ethics and Integrity Committee (REIC) undertakes an annual review of the research integrity training provision as part of its programme of work. In 2023-2024, the University reviewed and updated its training provision, this involved embedding a set of research ethics training modules into staff and student SOL (Moodle) pages. The *Research Ethics in Practice* course from epigeum contextualises the importance of ethical research and ethics panels. Research ethics is now a session on the Researcher Development Programme which is an annual programme running development sessions for staff and PGR students throughout the year. This training is compulsory for any staff conducting or supervising research, and students of all levels producing research, final major projects, or dissertations

In addition to the above, training for new deputy chairs (Departmental/School ethics panel chairs) and reviewers are held in both the autumn and summer terms.

September 2024 saw the successful launch of the new ethics review system, developed by epiGenesys in conjunction with the University of Sheffield. This replaced the old Solent ethics app and has streamlined the review process by bringing all Departments/School under one system, tightening up areas of risk identified by the PwC audit in 2021/22, and allowing for cross-Departmental/School reviews. The risk levels were redefined in line with the 2023 policy update: all primary data research is now considered at least medium risk and staff can now no longer self-certify low risk projects.

During the October 2024 REIC the Research Ethics Policy and Procedure was reviewed as part of its annual update. Sections on AI, use of social media to recruit participants, and open access guidelines were all added, as well as updates to terminology to reflect the University name change and role title changes.

The University publishes named contacts for research integrity and for whistleblowers along with the relevant policies on its internal research integrity pages and emphasises best practice and the University's support for staff reporting research misconduct.

University wide relevant policies:

Ethics Policy and Procedure

https://students.solent.ac.uk/official-documents/quality-management/academic-handbook/2s-solent-university-ethics-policy.pdf

Open Access Policy
https://staff.solent.ac.uk/official-documents/research-innovation-and-enterprise/open-access-policy.pdf

Open research data policy
https://staff.solent.ac.uk/official-documents/research-innovation-and-enterprise/open-research-data-policy.pdf

Research misconduct policy
https://staff.solent.ac.uk/official-documents/quality-management/academic-handbook/4t-staff-research-misconduct-procedures.pdf

2C. Reflections on progress and plans for future developments

This should include a reflection on the previous year's activity including a review of progress and impact of initiatives if known relating to activities referenced in the previous year's statement. Note any issues that have hindered progress, e.g. resourcing or other issues.

The Research Office has achieved a lot in minimising the risk posed by research ethics since the PwC audit. Updating the policy, review system, and training has increased the awareness and understanding of research ethics at Solent.

As mentioned above the 2021/22 audit by PwC identified ethics as an area of risk, and our current research ethics and integrity policy and procedure is based on the recommendations that came from it. Bringing Research Ethics back under the Research Office was the first step, then hiring a dedicated member of staff to oversee ethics from a central research position to identify additional areas for change, and address these as well. The committee composition and Terms of Reference have been updated to align with the recommendations proposed in the audit these are also available on our internal ethics integrity pages

The main challenge is resourcing, particularly where Departmental/School panels are concerned. To process ethics applications as quickly and thoroughly as possible, the panels need to have enough reviewers and currently most do not. This is due to limitations on staff time and is an area that will be addressed centrally. Reviews can therefore sometimes take longer than is ideal, so researchers are encouraged to

ensure ample time when they submit.

In terms of future developments, we are gathering feedback on the new ethics review system to learn whether any minor changes could be made at annual review point. We are also introducing a single sign on option to our ethics training modules which will make registration easier and encourage uptake.

Section 3: Addressing research misconduct

3A. Statement on processes that the organisation has in place for dealing with allegations of misconduct

Please provide:

- *a brief summary of relevant organisation policies/ processes (e.g. research misconduct procedure, whistleblowing policy, bullying/harassment policy; appointment of a third party to act as confidential liaison for persons wishing to raise concerns) and brief information on the periodic review of research misconduct processes (e.g. date of last review; any major changes during the period under review; date when processes will next be reviewed).*

- *information on how the organisation creates and embeds a research environment in which all staff, researchers and students feel comfortable to report instances of misconduct (e.g. code of practice for research, whistleblowing, research misconduct procedure, informal liaison process, website signposting for reporting systems, training, mentoring, reflection and evaluation of policies, practices and procedures).*

- *anonymised key lessons learned from any investigations into allegations of misconduct which either identified opportunities for improvements in the organisation's investigation procedure and/or related policies/processes/ culture or which showed that they were working well.*

The Research Misconduct Policy covers staff and Post Graduate Research student misconduct, while the Academic Misconduct Policy covers all other students (failure to follow the ethics policy/obtain ethical approval is specifically listed under the policy, this was an update in the last review). Misconduct procedures are reviewed and updated annually, with the last review having taken place in Spring 2024. The next review will be Spring 2025.

Contacts for whistleblowing are listed on the Ethics and Integrity portal page, accessible to all staff and students, the misconduct policies and research ethics policy and procedure are also present on the portal page. Training is available on our VLE (SOL) for both staff and students, Departmental/School ethics chairs and Heads of Department/School are encouraged to signpost the portal and SOL pages to their Departments/School. Support is available in groups or 1-1 in the Research Hub with the Ethics Officer and may be requested at any time by emailing ethics@solent.ac.uk.

Allegations of misconduct in 2022/2023 led to the new training provision and pedagogical changes, specifically, teaching ethics earlier on in courses so that ethics is at the forefront of students' minds at the planning stages of final major projects or dissertations. The training has been well received, those who have completed it have reported that it helped contextualise research ethics and highlight its importance.

3B. Information on investigations of research misconduct that have been undertaken

*Please complete the table on the number of **formal investigations completed during the period under review** (including investigations which completed during this period but started in a previous academic year). Information from ongoing investigations should not be submitted.*

An organisation's procedure may include an initial, preliminary, or screening stage to determine whether a formal investigation needs to be completed. These allegations should be included in the first column but only those that proceeded past this stage, to formal investigations, should be included in the second column.

Type of allegation	Number of allegations			
	Informal concerns or questions raised to ethics officer	Number of formal allegations reported to the organisation	Number of formal investigations	Number upheld after formal investigation
Fabrication				
Falsification				
Plagiarism				
Failure to meet legal, ethical and professional obligations	3*	0	0	0
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)				
Other				
Total:	**3**	**0**	**0**	**0**

*The first case January 2024 – A student (Film and Media) proceeded to interview participants ahead of ethics approval. It was handled by the department in line with the academic misconduct policy. It did not progress to full academic misconduct within the dept. the student agreed to anonymise the interviews, and it was recorded as a misunderstanding of the rules due to English not being the student's first language.

The second case March/April 2024 – A student submitted their dissertation as a paper to be published and they did not anonymise one of the people they interviewed. This is the case that went all the way through to academic misconduct within the department (Business and Law). An anonymity policy doc was drafted by the department, which was so thorough that it will be added to the ethics policy annex in the next update

July 2024 - A staff member who was undertaking an MA (Science and Engineering). This person has now left the university, they were planning to use data that they had access to because of their position as a staff member for their MA dissertation as a student, the dissertation was to be presented at a conference as a paper. The outcome was that the paper was not to go to conference because Solent would be identifiable, and that the data may be used for the project if gatekeeper approval was given. Approval from gatekeeper depended on anonymising the data further. The project did not progress because the staff member left at the end of July, which was unrelated.