Annual statement on research integrity

If you have any questions about this template, please contact: RIsecretariat@universitiesuk.ac.uk.

Section 1: Key contact information

Question	Response
1A. Name of organisation	Royal Conservatoire of Scotland
1B. Type of organisation: **higher education institution/industry/independent research performing organisation/other (please state)**	Higher Education Institution
1C. Date statement approved by governing body (DD/MM/YY)	
1D. Web address of organisation's research integrity page (if applicable)	N/A
1E. Named senior member of staff to oversee research integrity	Name: Professor Stephen Broad, Director of Research and Engagement
	Email address: directorofresearch@rcs.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: Dawn Forrest, Research and Engagement Office Manager
	Email address: d.forrest@rcs.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.

Policies and systems

At the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, the principles of Research Integrity build upon and are supported by a wider culture of artistic integrity: the value system that underpins every action of the Conservatoire and its community. A commitment to integrity supports decisions at all levels. This is reflected in policies that range from Dignity at Work and Study, to our Performance Ethics policy. This wider context of integrity is also reflected in our current strategic plan, which includes a supporting plan for Research and Ethical Practice that sets out projects to support and enhance our standards of ethical practice across the institution. Research Integrity at the Conservatoire is overseen by the Ethics Committee, which is overseen directly by the Academic Board. The Ethics Committee is convened by the Director of Research and Engagement ex officio, who has overall responsibility for research integrity.

Integrity is underpinned by clear Ethics policies, setting out expectations for practice in the spheres of research and performance, together with policies for Research Misconduct and Responsible Research Assessment. Specifically, the Performance Ethics policy sets out expectations for ethical practice in the context of performance, recognising that all participants in a performance (from performers, to audiences, to stage management, to authors and composers) should be treated with respect, and given the information they need to make an informed decision on their participation. It sets out protocols for ensuring good practice, including a complaint resolution and appeals process. Similarly, the Research Ethics policy establishes expectations for research that involves human participants, or a foreseeable risk to the researcher, and proceeds from the same fundamental principles of respect and informed consent. It also sets out the process whereby a researcher will seek and gain formal approval for proposed

work from the Ethics Committee of the Conservatoire, or one of its delegated authorities.

All research undertaken at the Conservatoire which involves human participants or a foreseeable risk to the researcher is subject to review by the Ethics Committee or its delegated authorities. The Conservatoire recognises the significance of research-based learning in our programmes, and the particular issues of research projects in teacher-education programmes where participants are usually under the age of 18, subsequently all undergraduate and taught postgraduate research projects are subject to ethical approval, as well as doctoral and staff projects. This approach is philosophically consistent and means that ethical considerations form part of the learning at an early stage. It also ensures that staff teaching and/or supervising research projects on taught programmes are aware of the requirements of good ethical practice.

In practice, the Ethics Committee delegates some approvals to specially constituted Programme Ethics Committees, which approve individual projects according to the same criteria as the main Ethics Committee. All research involving children and/or vulnerable people, all research that involves a foreseeable risk to the participant, and all research that poses particular ethical problems (for example, research involving sensitive material, or a procedure that involves deception) are referred directly to the main Ethics Committee. Each devolved Ethics Committee keeps records that are reviewed annually by the main Committee.

In view of the Conservatoire's particular status as a community of artists, we receive many requests for students and/or colleagues to participate in research programmes conducted by researchers in other institutions. The Conservatoire takes the view that by advertising for participants on behalf of a third party, or in any other way promoting the research of a third party, it is effectively sponsoring that research. Mindful of its duty to uphold high ethical standards, all such requests are reviewed as applications to the Conservatoire's Ethics Committee and require approval. In practice, the Committee will normally receive the application that the researcher(s) submitted in their home institution and will make a judgement based on that information, unless it is deemed incomplete or insufficient. In all cases, research by a third party proceeds only on the basis of a formal approval from the Conservatoire's Ethics Committee. An exception to this rule is applications from external students which have approval from the Conservatoires UK (CUK) Ethics Committee, when that blanket approval covers a project for research at all UK Conservatoires (see below).

Other ethical issues are also passed to the Ethics Committee from time to time for consideration. The outcome of such consideration can include, where relevant, a decision on behalf of the institution, a recommendation to a particular body (such

as the Academic Board or Development and Fundraising Committee), or advice to an individual manager or Director.

The operation of the Ethics Committee, including consideration of any instances of research misconduct and any other matters referred to it, is overseen by the Academic Board of the Conservatoire, chaired by the Principal. The Academic Board receives summary updates from the Ethics Committee at each of its meetings.

Communications and engagement

The Conservatoire's approach to Research Integrity is underpinned by the same values-based approach that supports all our policies, and close alignment with our overall Strategic mission. This is especially clear in the close relationship between our Research Ethics Policy and the policies for Performance Ethics and Dignity at Work and Study. Such synergies underpin our approach to communication and staff engagement in matters of integrity.

The Director of Research and Engagement, and other members of the Ethics Committee, engage directly with senior and school management teams, programme teams, research supervisors and students on both taught and doctoral research programmes. Communication strategies include annual policy reminders, development sessions for staff and students, and active engagement of staff with policy development in research integrity. In this work, we are strongly assisted by our small scale, which allows staff at all levels to be directly engaged in matters of research integrity, and by the strong values-based approach that places research integrity in a wider institutional ethos. The decision to undertake ethical review of all relevant research (and proto-research) undertaken by taught students also supports communication and understanding of research integrity.

Members of the Ethics Committee are readily on-hand to offer support to staff undertaking and/or supervising research that requires ethical review. Support is strongly integrated into a number of taught programmes that include a compulsory proto-research component where ethical review is required, and the feedback loop to student applicants for ethical review always includes their supervisor, further building a common understanding of good practice across the Conservatoire community.

The ethics@rcs.ac.uk email in-box acts as a single point of contact for all matters of ethics and research integrity, and this is monitored to ensure that all issues raised are logged and actioned.

Culture, development and leadership

The membership of the Ethics Committee is drawn from across the institution, recognising that diverse expertise is necessary in the process of ethical review, and the fact that participating in the Committee is an important strand of professional development for selected staff. This supplements the wider development of staff and students mentioned above.

Policies and practice around ethics and wider integrity are kept under continuous review by the Ethics Committee, overseen directly by the Academic Board of the Conservatoire, which approves changes to formal policy and holds the institutional leadership for research integrity, overseeing the Ethics Committee and directing the work of the Director of Research and Engagement in discharging their responsibilities for research integrity. The Academic Board includes representation from across the institution, with elected members from the staff and student body alongside ex officio senior staff.

The Conservatoire is a signatory to the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) and sets out expectations for research assessment in a Policy on Responsible Research Assessment. Furthermore, the demonstration of socially responsible leadership of research and research activities within the Conservatoire is an institutional priority. This is reflected in our initiatives that are specifically designed to support the development and maximisation of research impact, focusing on today's global challenges. For example, the Conservatoire's Athenaeum Awards provide internal funding (£500-5000) for staff to responsibly broaden networks and initiate projects involving health, wellbeing, and social improvement. Moreover, our REF 2021 impact case studies, featuring the achievements of senior academics, are illustrative of our focus on orchestrating measurable social benefits in fields such as widening access, inclusion and equality.

A Policy on Research Misconduct explains the procedures to be followed in the event of an allegation of research misconduct, or Questionable Research Practice, and is fully integrated with staff and student disciplinary policies.

Monitoring and reporting

The reporting of the Ethics Committee to the Academic Board (and not, for example, the Research Committee) reflects its wider responsibilities for ethical practice and integrity seen, for example, in its locus in the Performance Ethics Policy.

In all matters of research ethics and integrity, there are clear lines of reporting. Programme Teams with devolved authority for the review of taught students' research report all outcomes of review and all breaches of research integrity to the main Ethics Committee. The Ethics Committee, in turn, reports a summary of reviews, and all substantive matters of policy, to the Academic Board, which receives a summary at each of its meetings and, in turn, approves this annual statement for consideration by the Board of Governors of the Conservatoire.

There is, therefore, a direct line of reporting that ensures that all matters of research integrity can be dealt with at the appropriate level and with the appropriate oversight, with formal registration of actual and potential breaches of research integrity at all levels.

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.

In the course of AY 2025-26:

The Research Ethics Policy has been comprehensively reviewed by the Ethics Committee and approved by the Academic Board. The revised Policy has been reworked for clarity and the following substantive updates included:

- Working practices of the Ethics Committee are set out in greater detail, including the codification of existing practice around conflicts of interest.
- Sections on the particular challenges of autoethnography and research in clinical settings have been included, providing specific guidance in these areas of growing significance for Conservatoire researchers.
- Further examples of ethical issues relating to specific areas of interest for Conservatoire researchers have been included, grouped according to the Conservatoire's Research Clusters.

A Research Misconduct Policy has been developed and approved by the Academic Board. The Conservatoire has very few instances of alleged research misconduct among staff or students and its existing conduct, disciplinary and whistleblowing policies provide effective protocols for addressing such cases when they arise. The newly approved Research Misconduct Policy

- formally codifies these processes in the specific context of research misconduct, drawing on existing policy
- deals specifically with conflicts of interest that may arise in the course of investigations, and
- includes protocols for allegations of Questionable Research Practice, to bring the Conservatoire into line with the expectations of the updated Concordat on Research Integrity.

Following a review of the requirements and expectations of signatories, the Academic Board agreed that the Conservatoire should seek to become a signatory of the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment. As part of that process, a Policy on Responsible Research Assessment, codifying existing practice, was developed and approved by the Board. The Director of Research and Engagement participated in the steering group of the Scotland-wide Responsible Research Assessment training consortium, which commissioned a specialist team to develop and deliver 'train the trainer' training for relevant colleagues across Scotland. Having participated in this training, the Director will cascade that training to relevant groups in the Conservatoire prioritising, in the first instance, the REF 2029 Working Group.

The Review of compliance with the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers was discussed at the Conservatoire's People and Culture Committee at RCS in October 2025 and again in Spring 2026 and it has been agreed that this will be reviewed periodically, with the Research and Engagement team looking for opportunities to deepen our compliance with the Concordat, bearing in mind the specific context of the Conservatoire.

Following further development, the Policy on Good Academic Practice for doctoral students has been approved by the Research Degrees Committee.

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.
In our previous annual statement (2025) on research integrity, approved by our governing body in alignment with SFC requirements, we noted the further work we needed to undertake in respect of research integrity. Much of that work has been undertaken this year, with our new Research Misconduct Policy, Policy on Responsible Research Assessment, comprehensively revised Research Ethics Policy and our signing of the San Francisco Declaration. As previously noted, we do not encounter many instances of research misconduct or breaches of research integrity, meaning that the opportunity to test our new policies will be limited. For this reason, it will be important that we continue to review these policies regularly. It is also important that we continue to raise awareness among staff of how instances of potential breaches can be reported. Participation in external bodies continues to inform our work. One member of the RCS Ethics Committee continues to sit on the Conservatoires UK (CUK) Research Ethics and Integrity Committee; CUK is a central body representing eleven UK Conservatoires. Applications approved by the CUK Committee are accepted by all eleven institutions, and the organisation provides ethics training as part of the general aim of promoting best practice. This year, our participation in sectoral work on Responsible Research Assessment has been particularly fruitful in offering wider perspectives on this key issue.

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, whistle-blowing 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, whistle-blowing, 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 Conservatoire's newly approved Policy on Research Misconduct sets out in detail the process for reporting research misconduct or Questionable Research Practices, including a statement of responsibilities and principles to guide responses, and definitions of key concepts to support potential reporters of misconduct. Misconduct is exemplified for work in each of the Conservatoire's Research Clusters.

The Policy sets out in detail:

- How a concern or allegation may be raised, including for cases where a conflict of interest may exist.

- How an initial assessment of the allegation will be made.

- The processes of formal investigation, including the appointment and operation of the investigating panel, should this be considered appropriate after the initial assessment.
- The outcomes and actions that may arise from the investigation.
- The process for appeals, for monitoring and reporting
- The intersections with all other relevant policies.

The Policy notes that "the Research Misconduct Policy does not itself impose disciplinary or academic sanctions. Such sanctions are determined only through the appropriate employment or academic policy frameworks, such as the Staff Disciplinary and Dismissal Policy".

The Policy refers to a suite of policies which may be applicable. Specifically,

- The Disciplinary and Dismissal Policy and Procedure sets out the processes for staff found to be in breach of professional obligations, including instances of research misconduct;
- A Dignity at Work and Study Policy, which stipulates standards that apply to all staff and students and provisions that aim to cultivate a fair, respectful culture, untainted by harassment, bullying or discrimination. The document covers RCS's Code of Professionalism and Conduct and details how unacceptable behaviour will be addressed. It references and recommends engagement with our Disciplinary and Dismissal Policy; Student Disciplinary Regulations and Complaints Handling Procedure and Anti-Racism Action Plan. Moreover, it explains procedures for making a complaint, accessing advice and counselling, and the grievance process. Appropriate briefing and training is provided to managers and staff representatives to enable them to deal with issues arising under this policy;
- Data management is supported by the Records Retention and Data Protection policies, and the Data Protection Breach Investigation Template offers clear guidance on data management. Specific data management training for researchers is compulsory, complementing the generic data management training undertaken by all staff (although no post-training assessments are currently undertaken, and this is an area for development);
- A Whistle-blowing Policy and Procedure sets out the process whereby staff can safely report instances of research misconduct. It aims to protect current and former staff against being penalised for disclosing serious concerns regarding

malpractice or wrongdoing. This includes research misconduct as well as matters such as child protection, inappropriate behaviour, suspected wrongdoing, and fraud. The policy facilitates staff to raise concerns using clearly described procedures.

No investigations have yet taken place under the approved Policy, but it includes mechanisms for reporting and lesson-learning after any investigations.

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**			
	Number of allegations reported to the organisation	**Number of formal investigations**	**Number upheld in part after formal investigation**	**Number upheld in full after formal investigation**
Fabrication	0	0	0	0
Falsification	0	0	0	0
Plagiarism	0	0	0	0
Failure to meet legal, ethical and professional obligations	0	0	0	0
Misrepresentation (eg data; involvement; interests; qualification; and/or publication history)	0	0	0	0
Improper dealing with allegations of misconduct	0	0	0	0
Multiple areas of concern (when received in a single allegation)	0	0	0	0
*Other**	1	0	0	1
Total:				

***If you listed any allegations under the 'Other' category, please give a brief, high-level summary of their type here. Do not give any identifying or confidential information when responding.**
The Ethics Committee noted that work commenced on a research project in advance of approval of the Ethics Committee. The researchers were advised that this constituted a breach of the Ethics Policy and the research did not proceed further.