Research Integrity Annual Report 2023-24

LSTM is a subscriber to the Concordat on Research Integrity. We are required to compile an Annual Report following the headings set out below. This Report will be discussed at Research Integrity and Governance Committee and shared with LSTM Executive as well as UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO), as per the terms of our membership.

This report covers the period 01 August 2023 – 31 July 2024.

A. Summary of actions and activities to support research integrity

1. Communication across LSTM has improved with strengthened links between research integrity-related Committees, working groups and initiatives.

    a. Research Integrity Champions initiative was launched in summer 2023. There are 23 RI Champions based across LSTM, as well as representatives from our key African partner organisations MLW (Malawi Liverpool Welcome) in Malawi, LSTM Kenya, CeSHHAR (Centre for Sexual Health and HIV AIDS Research Zimbabwe and CRID (Centre for Research in Infectious Diseases), Cameroon. RI Champions meet monthly to share good practice. A recent policy update added that RI Champions can form a panel as a route for authorship dispute resolution.

    b. Work is underway with MLW to create a parallel Research Integrity Champions initiative in the first instance, for adaptation to suit their staff membership. It is hoped that all LSTM Hubs will eventually adopt/adapt this initiative.

    c. LSTM Research Governance, Ethics & Integrity Team introduced drop in sessions to give another avenue for colleagues to get in touch. These take place in person and via Teams to enable Hubs/PhD students and other overseas staff to participate.

2. Research Integrity Induction & Training

    a. All new starters attending 'LSTM Welcome Event' access an introductory presentation on research integrity at LSTM.

    b. Two core modules made mandatory for Principal Investigators of LSTM-sponsored studies. Role-specific compliance with mandatory training is being monitored by Learning & Development with high levels of compliance across LSTM.

    c. In 2023-24, a programme of research integrity workshops was rolled out. Eleven workshops were attended by 171 colleagues joining in person or via Microsoft Teams, where numerous attendees attended multiple workshops. This equates to approximately a quarter of research active staff. A high proportion of attendees were PhD students and Early Career Researchers.

    d. PhD and Masters course programmes include an introductory session on research integrity.

    e. Work is ongoing to share the package of research integrity training with MLW in the first instance, for adaptation to suit their staff membership. It is hoped it will be further rolled out across all LSTM Hubs in due course.

3. Research Culture

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a. The Concordat for Research Career Development action plan in 2023/24 focused on providing clarity for staff and managers on a) implementation of policies of particular relevance to ECRs, including maternity policy and redundancy and redeployment, b) developing career development guidance for the programme administrator/manager cohort of staff and c) working with the HR department to evolve the 'career track' pathway to core funded academic positions (including devolving decisions to departmental level, providing greater transparency on expectations and increasing the support and mentorship available for this cadre of staff). Priorities for the next 12 months include increasing the research management support and reviewing how we incentivise successful high quality research delivery.

b. PROSPER: Recognising the importance of providing broader career guidance and support for our ECRs (Early Career Researchers), LSTM ran it first cohort of the PROSPER programme for individuals to work alone, in groups, and with a career coach to 'Explore, Reflect and Act' in 2024. We are also spotlighting case studies of alumni who have transferred to careers outside of academia.

c. In 2023 a series of training aimed specifically at Research Group Leaders, was introduced. This will be further refined in 2024 into 16 sessions under three themes: Creating a positive culture, delivering results, and supporting others. A proposal has been submitted to Research Committee to consider a minimal level of engagement with these workshops.

d. The academic promotion criteria have been revised to better reflect our mission and values and include expectations around research culture (internal citizenship, inclusivity and collegiality and research integrity).

4. Animal Research

a. LSTM fulfilled the criteria to being a signatory of the [Concordat on Openness in Animal Research](#)..

b. A process ensuring ethical approval of animal projects led or funded by LSTM researchers at international sites has been reviewed and implemented, accompanied by a specific guidance document. This is in line with our policy and funder expectations.

c. A research integrity workshop on animal research was be held in 2024. Partners were invited to attend, noting that partners conducting animal research are also required to comply with UK regulations in this area therefore it is important that training is provided to these groups.

5. Equity

a. In 2022, LSTM adopted a Consensus Statement led by LSTM-based authors on equitable partnership within international collaborations involving low and middle income countries (LMICs) ([PMC34647323](#)). Compliance with the Consensus Statement at LSTM is not currently monitored but, as part of LSTM's project to update our research information systems, we are actively discussing ways to incorporate this at the conception and publication stage of research projects partnering with LMICs.

b. Action was taken to promote compliance with LSTM Taking and Storing of Videos and Photographs Policy, where images on LSTM's walls displayed identifiable research participants/wider participant communities without their consent. This was a research integrity issue relating to Care & Respect as well as a contravention of GDPR. A gap was highlighted, whereby policy compliance mechanisms should be strengthened.

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c. An Equitable Partnerships Guidance Document is being developed, led by a research team with input from Research Integrity Working Group. It has been shared with LSTM Hubs Council for input. Next steps are piloting, promotion, and roll out. Additionally, indicators of equitable partnership in practice will be captured on LSTM's research management system PURE, currently in development.

Guidance on decolonising research, education and employment practices have been developed and shared with all researchers.

6. Reproducibility

   a. LSTM joined UK Reproducibility Network. Actions bringing more awareness of Open Research practices will follow this coming year as this has been identified as a gap.

   b. LSTM Research Integrity Working Group requested improved central research data management, noting that a lack of infrastructure is detrimental to data integrity. This request is being taken forward by the Research Data Manager and the Information & Data Committee.

   c. It was identified that colleagues are using a range of Electronic Laboratory Notebooks (ELNs) platforms, and this was determined to be disadvantageous. There is an intention to bring ELNs under central control at LSTM.

7. UKRIO Self-Assessment Tool

   a. LSTM continues to review its progress against the UKRIO Self-Assessment Tool. In pursuit of this, LSTM has introduced research integrity principles as standard text in consultancy agreements, to ensure that external consultants are aware of our expectations with regards to integrity.

B.   Statement on process for dealing with research misconduct

As there have been no new cases of misconduct, the process has not been tested in practice.

The Policy for Handling Misconduct Allegations is under review.

C.   Statement on formal research misconduct investigations

There were no formal research misconduct investigations in 2023-24.

D.   Statement on what the institution has learned from any formal investigations of research misconduct

There were no cases of misconduct to learn from.

E.   Statement on how the institution creates and embeds a research environment in which all staff, researchers and students feel comfortable to report instances of misconduct

Conducting research to the highest ethical standards, embedding equity in all our partnerships, and seeking to influence others to do the same, are key behaviours underpinning LSTM's refreshed values (Vision, mission and values | LSTM (lstmed.ac.uk). The use of Reading Panels to assess the quality of papers (thereby reducing the reliance on unfair metrics), the introduction of workshops to informally discuss concerns over questionable research practices, the commitment from LSTM Executive to make research integrity training mandatory for all staff, regardless of seniority, work of the Research Integrity & Governance Committee and the Research Integrity Working Group, all speak to LSTM's commitment to

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value research quality over quantity and create an environment in which all are empowered to question poor practice.

Results from the CEDAR survey indicated a concerning level of mistrust in Our Freedom to Speak Up portal and this led to the implementation of a new, externally managed, anonymous reporting platform ; we hope that this, plus the introduction of Research Integrity Champions will increase the level of reporting of questionable research practices enabling us to identify areas that need action. The Champions will also serve to increase awareness of misconduct, provide advice, flag questionable practices and increase visibility of support and resources promoting adherence to the principles of research integrity.

F.   Gaps identified and being addressed

1. Policies are not currently accessible via the website, to be remedied.

2. A programme of internal monitoring of LSTM-sponsored studies conducted by Research Governance, Ethics & Integrity Office is to be continued and expanded focussing on high risk studies. This will be particularly relevant when the Human Challenge Facility opens in 2025.

3. Expand training programme to be inclusive of staff based in Cameroon, Kenya, Malawi, Nepal and Zimbabwe.

4. Establish links with LSTM KEF (Knowledge Exchange Framework) group to build research integrity into public engagement and dissemination work.

5. Research data management is being considered as gaps in this area are detrimental to data integrity.

6. Improve package of online resources providing guidance on research integrity.

7. Policy on data and sample archiving is not fit for purpose and needs updating

8. Implement a unified system, and guidance, for use of electronic lab notebooks.

Compiled by Lindsay Hunt, Research Compliance Officer with input from Professor Hilary Ranson, Dean of Research Culture & Integrity

Authorised by Denise Watson, Research Governance & Integrity Manager

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