I would like to start by thanking you for inviting Universities UK to give oral evidence to the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee on 24 October 2017. While Professor Sir Ian Diamond was able to provide answers to most questions during the session, I know there were a few issues which the committee has indicated that it would like follow-up information on.

**Universities UK: relationship with members on research integrity**

Universities UK is proud to have a leading role on behalf of the higher education sector on issues of research integrity, in close partnership with the seven other co-developers and signatories to the 2012 Concordat to support research integrity. Research is one of the UK’s greatest strengths, and it is vital that there is public confidence in the way it is conducted in our world-class institutions. We welcome the Science and Technology Committee’s attention on this subject: we recognise that although significant progress has been made in recent years on ensuring integrity is a central focus of research institutions, there is still more we can do on ensuring effective transparency and effective systems and processes.

While the committee focused on one figure around annual narrative statements, the same 2016 progress report on the concordat had more positive findings: 85% of universities have publicly accessible policy documents or handbooks relating to research integrity, ethics, and/or research misconduct procedures. Universities UK does, however, recognise that more needs to be done to improve transparency through the provision of publicly available information relating to the promotion of research integrity and investigations into alleged misconduct, and this was something noted in the same progress report conducted last year.

All Universities UK members are signed up to the concordat, and compliance with the concordat is a condition of funding of major research funders including the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and Research Councils UK (RCUK). We hope that this requirement will exist under their successor research-funding bodies, Research England and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), and that we can work with these new bodies alongside the other signatories to explore how further progress can be made. Universities were informed of the progress report and its key recommendations upon its release in November 2016 in a newsletter to all members, and the report was covered in the Chief Executive’s report to our members’ meeting in December 2016. Subsequent blogs and bulletin items have kept universities and wider stakeholders informed of our work on research integrity.
To reflect the committee’s concerns, Universities UK will again write to all its members later this month on the topic of research integrity. In this letter, we will emphasise the importance of public confidence in university research and the consequential need for transparency. We will remind institutions of one of the key recommendations of the progress report, that they should ‘have a dedicated and discoverable webpage on research integrity; have a named point of contact for research integrity and misconduct enquiries; and produce a publicly available annual narrative statement setting out the steps they have taken to promote a positive culture of research integrity’. We would be happy to provide the committee with a copy of this letter once it is sent. I am also aware that you have written to members of Universities UK to request information relating to compliance with the commitments of the Concordat, and Universities UK will be encouraging responses wherever possible.

The committee has also asked for an indication of Universities UK’s position on confidentiality clauses in compromise agreements to terminate employment contracts in cases of research misconduct. Universities UK understands that there may on occasion be circumstances where confidentiality clauses are appropriate due to legal and HR-related considerations, but these are very much matters for individual institutions to consider as autonomous universities. However, Universities UK would be happy to work with the public and charitable funders of research on any potential future reporting requirements, to ensure they can have full confidence on these issues – and we will work with universities in support of compliance.

We would be happy to discuss this subject further at the upcoming meeting of the Universities UK Research Policy Network, and it can also be something considered at the Research Integrity Forum mentioned below.

**Further action on research integrity**

In addition to writing the letter mentioned above, in response to the enclosed letter sent by Professor Sir Ian Diamond to Professor Paul Boyle, an extraordinary meeting of the Research Policy Network will be held in December. This meeting will discuss many of the issues raised at the oral evidence session, particularly around how to encourage institutional transparency on research integrity.
Following this, the Research Integrity Forum will be convened in early 2018 which will bring together sector representatives, wider stakeholders and research funders to discuss many of the topics being examined by the committee. Ahead of this meeting, Universities UK will be conducting a survey of how institutions are providing public information relating to research integrity, in line with the commitments of the concordat. As part of this exercise, we will search for publicly available data pertaining to allegations and investigations into research misconduct, and the outcomes. The results of this exercise will help identify any ongoing challenges in the sector for discussion at the Forum.

The Research Integrity Forum will be an opportunity for the eight signatories of the concordat to discuss existing challenges and how to overcome them through collaborative action. Universities UK will continue to champion ever higher standards of integrity in research, and show leadership in this agenda alongside our partners. We would be happy to send to the committee information about any key actions which come out of this event, and share the data from the survey of members’ websites mentioned above.

**Other issues**

During his evidence, Professor Sir Ian Diamond mentioned a meeting at Keele University in 2008. I believe he was referring to the two-day *Promoting good research conduct* workshop at the institution in April 2008, which considered the extent of research misconduct issues. I have enclosed a copy of the report which was published following this meeting to give the committee a better idea of the content of the event.

As requested by the committee, Professor Sir Ian Diamond has also provided information on research misconduct investigations and outcomes at the University of Aberdeen over the last five years. The university has confirmed that no formal proceedings were brought against any member of staff within the last five years. However, two allegations made against a researcher were investigated:

- In 2015–16, a researcher was investigated for financial misconduct and formal proceedings were instigated under the university’s financial regulations, but not under the research governance framework.
Supplementary written evidence submitted by Professor Paul Boyle, Chair, Universities UK Research Policy Network (RES0020)

- In 2012–13, the university’s Department of Human Resources investigated an allegation that a researcher had published work without reference to collaborators or gaining appropriate ethical approval for the publication of the data. The outcome of the investigation was that no formal action was taken but recommendations were made regarding the process for gaining approval to publish collaborative work and transfer samples.

The committee also asked for more information on instances where research misconduct could constitute a criminal offence. There are a range of civil and criminal offences which could potentially be committed under the auspices of conducting research, and such actions would also be research misconduct. A non-exhaustive list by way of example is provided below:

- Human Rights Act 1998
- Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986
- Human Tissue Act 2004
- The Human Tissue (Scotland) Act 2006
- Data Protection Act 1998
- Mental Capacity Act 2005 (in England and Wales)
- Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Act 2000
- Medicines for Human Use (Clinical Trials) Regulations 2004
- Fraud Act 2006

I hope this letter answers any questions which the committee has, and demonstrates Universities UK’s continued commitment to working with other concordat signatories to show leadership on issues of research integrity. I would also be pleased to facilitate a visit to one of our member universities, so that the committee might see first-hand the dedicated efforts in institutions to support the very highest levels of integrity. Please let me know if you would like any more information about any subjects covered in this letter.

9 November 2017
Letter from Professor Sir Ian Diamond FBA FRSE FAcSS, Member, UUK Research Policy Network to Professor Paul Boyle, Chair, Research Policy Network

I am writing to you following my oral evidence to the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee on Tuesday 24 October 2017 as part of the committee’s inquiry into research integrity.

From our work together on the Universities UK Research Policy Network, I know that you share my view about the importance of our world-class universities upholding the highest standards with respect to research integrity. Significant progress has been made in recent years on ensuring robust and effective approaches to supporting research integrity across the higher education sector, but it is important that we are never complacent about any challenges.

The oral evidence session with the Science and Technology Committee focused on a range of issues, including the content and implementation of *The concordat to support research integrity*. In particular, several of the committee members expressed concern about the number of institutions signed up to the concordat which publish annual narrative statements on research integrity. While this is only one way to monitor the success of the concordat, it is vital that information is consistently made publicly available, so that widespread public trust in the way university research is conducted can be maintained.

I therefore hope you will consider convening an extraordinary meeting of the Research Policy Network before the end of the year, to discuss the committee inquiry, the concerns raised, and how to improve transparency around research integrity issues.

This will also be an opportunity to discuss the upcoming Research Integrity Forum taking place early next year, and our priorities for future collaborative action with the seven other signatories of the concordat.

30 October 2017