CAHSS Open Research Strategy, 2026-29

Introduction and context

Open Research refers to a collaborative and transparent approach to conducting and sharing knowledge and the production of knowledge. It emphasises accessibility of outputs, allowing data, methodologies, results, and publications to be freely available to everyone, often through open-access platforms, preprint repositories, or open data initiatives.[1] This includes open protocols, pre-registration, open materials, open analysis, software, code and publications. It also encompasses ways of working that reflect core values of equity, efficiency, innovation, public trust and accountability.

The benefits of open research have led to commitments and activities in the UK higher education sector by funders such as UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) and Wellcome, and as part of the Research Excellence Framework (REF), alongside grassroot initiatives such as the UK Reproducibility Network (UKRN). Open research is a core principle and focus of the University of Edinburgh Research Cultures strategy, reflecting its importance in fostering and reflecting positive research environments. It is also central to the University of Edinburgh's Research and Innovation strategy,[2] which commits to creating an environment where responsible research and openness is the norm.

Alongside a commitment to openness and transparency, ethical open research means attending to considerations such as confidentiality, sensitivity, and anonymity. Researchers must often make complex decisions to support open and ethical research, considering when and how to share research openly, and when considerations around the protection of participants, communities, or sensitive information takes precedence. This strategy supports researchers in making these contextual, ethically-grounded decisions.

The University has been successful in implementing Open Access for outputs, thanks to the early adoption of the Rights Retention Strategy in 2022.[3] Various types of support and training for aspects of Open Access, data management and data sharing are available. The University has also adopted policies, statements and action plans that support Open Research and FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable) practices. In developing this strategy, we have considered the aims and objectives of:

- The Research Publications & Copyright Policy - enables the University to disseminate its research and scholarship as widely as possible.
- The Open Research statement - outlines the University's commitment to Open Research, recognising its pivotal role in advancing academic knowledge and addressing societal challenges.
- The forthcoming University open research action plan, based on the "Checklist for universities on implementing the UNESCO recommendation on open science" which establishes a policy and practice framework.[not published yet]

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[1] Vitae skills for research: https://vitae.ac.uk/resource/skills-for-research/research-management/open-research/

[2] University of Edinburgh Research and Innovation: https://www.ed.ac.uk/research-innovation

[3] Research Publications & Copyright Policy: https://information-services.ed.ac.uk/about/policies-and-regulations/research-publications

- The Research Data Policy - clarifies the responsibilities of the University and its researchers for managing research data.
- CoARA (Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment) action plan - develops resources to ensure that open research practices are recognised and rewarded appropriately.
- The Research Ethics Policy - specifically section 4.2 on Integrity, openness and transparency.

The CAHSS Open Research strategy builds on our previous strategy (2018)[4] and on our successes and strengths to articulate aims for the 2026-29 period. There is a great deal of excellent practice and relevant policy to build on, and many of our colleagues, including in Schools, research groups and centres in CAHSS, are innovating in and contributing to Open Research discussions and adoption of principles, as appropriate to their disciplines, areas and modes of working. There are also a number of challenges facing institutions and researchers, as Open Research values and practices meet technological, economic and other pressures that aim towards privatising and enclosing research and knowledge, treating these as assets to be exploited rather than shared freely. Here, too, CAHSS colleagues are examining these transformations critically and imaginatively, and considering what they mean for research and researchers at University of Edinburgh, with collaborators and in global academic contexts. CAHSS colleagues also work to ensure Open Research is understood and practiced in ways consonant with our disciplines, subject areas and modes of working, as well as equitably considering expectations and opportunities for researchers at different career stages. This means recognising different open research cultures and practices and ensuring that FAIR principles and Open Research practices are contextually appropriate and ethically sound. We understand Open Research as the sharing of diverse research outputs at many different stages of the research process, through open collaboration with all relevant actors and with a strong focus on accountability.

Finally, this strategy is situated within a broader programme of cultural change, led by researchers and research-enabling colleagues across the University. We recognise that achieving positive change requires evolving ways of working, supported by appropriate infrastructure, resources, and community engagement. We present this as a positive opportunity for growth and improvement in research practices. The strategy also recognises the important role of students (both undergraduate and postgraduate) in open research, as both learners and contributors to research culture.

With this strategy, at CAHSS we are aiming to:

- Align with university-wide open research policies, strategies and actions, while respecting the diversity of open research practices in our disciplines and cross-disciplinary work.

- Embrace opportunities and address challenges for CAHSS open research.

- Consider how CAHSS can help lead and shape the open research agenda, both within the University and in the sector.

Our priorities and principles for 2026-29 are organised into four strategic areas: advocacy, training, culture and policy.

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[4] CAHSS Open Research Strategy 2018:
https://edwebcontent.ed.ac.uk/sites/default/files/atoms/files/cahss_open_research_strategy_2018_1.pdf

Strategic Priorities and Principles

Area A: Advocacy - Promote diverse approaches to openness

Context: The "Open Research at Edinburgh" report published in 2024 acknowledges that open research awareness and adoption within the University has been skewed towards the sciences and psychological sciences.[5] Raising awareness among arts, humanities and social science researchers about the benefits of open research practices is crucial and should be supported through systematic education and training opportunities.

Regarding open data, The University's Research Data Management policy supports the broad global consensus that research data should be made openly available as soon as possible with as few restrictions as necessary. Research data takes a wide range of forms in the arts, humanities and social sciences, not always recognised or described as such, like novels, interviews, image files, videos, audio recordings, and use of historical collections. Additionally, different disciplines have different traditions and requirements around openness, from pre-registration in psychology to community-based participatory research to arts practice. FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Reusable) principles provide a valuable framework that can be adapted across these diverse contexts.

Regarding open access, norms and requirements are now well-established across all disciplines within the College for journal articles and conference proceedings, with CAHSS meeting funder and University policy's targets. However, around 70% of our journal articles are published gold open access via "read and publish" deals. This route reinforces the market dominance of large legacy publishers and exacerbates global inequality in scholarly publishing.

Strategic Principles:
- Promote a broad and inclusive understanding of data and open research that resonates with the widest possible range of researchers, encompassing not only traditional scientific data but also creative outputs, cultural materials, and diverse forms of evidence.
- Support and amplify distinctive open research approaches across our disciplines, creating opportunities to share innovations and collaborate across traditional boundaries.
- Champion open research methods and metadata sharing as valuable alternatives when ethical, legal, or practical barriers prevent full data sharing, ensuring transparency and accountability without compromising protection of participants or sensitive information.
- Support efforts to raise awareness of sharing other key types of research outputs, e.g. code, methodologies, hardware and co-created materials.
- Endorse the FAIR principles to support the long-term maintenance of valuable digital assets, while acknowledging legitimate reasons for restricting access to data, such as confidentiality concerns, commercial viability, and culturally-appropriate terms of access.
- Advocate for alternative routes to open access that encourage bibliodiversity, including scholar-led and community-owned publishing initiatives that align with our values of equity and sustainability.

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[5] The "Open Research at Edinburgh" report: https://doi.org/10.2218/eor.2024.10130

- Engage with debates around the environmental sustainability of open research practices, contributing to discussions about balancing openness with carbon footprint considerations in data storage and transmission.

Area B: Training and Education - Build competence and exchange good practice

Context: At CAHSS we operate on the basis that openness is about responsibility, above policy. Training in anonymisation, ethics, formats and copyright and licences can help overcome challenges relating to responsible approaches to open research. The "Open Research at Edinburgh" report highlights that the University training offered is not equal across disciplines, with more training available for scientific research and less for arts and humanities research. Education and training should empower researchers to make contextually appropriate decisions, not impose one-size-fits-all solutions. We recognise that different career stages face different pressures and require different support.

Strategic principles:

- Advocate for discipline and context sensitive training to be developed at University level. The CARE principles (Collective Benefit, Authority to Control, Responsibility, Ethics) should be an essential part of this programme.[6]
- Support greater exchange between researchers, and relevant data experts at Information Services, Colleges and Schools.
- Create learning opportunities around FAIR principles, open methods, metadata standards, and practices like pre-registration, open materials, and preprints where appropriate to disciplines.
- Collaborate on integrating open research principles into student research training at all levels, recognising students as both learners and active contributors to research culture.
- Build researcher capacity in understanding the environmental implications of data storage and management decisions.

Area C: Culture, Ethics and Integrity - Foster a diverse culture of open research and promote cooperation and trust in research

Context: Research is conducted in diverse environments that have their own cultures and contexts. Both physical and digital research assets and materials used and generated through the research cycle differ from discipline to discipline. There are different conventions, standards of methodology, and values as well as distinct approaches to conducting research, generating data outputs, and evaluating research. At the same time, open communication and co-operation can lead to new, and shared, approaches and opportunities. It is essential that researchers have the freedom to implement open research practices as appropriate for their disciplines, methods and topics. These practices can forge and strengthen access to knowledge, research exchange and accountability, while remaining attuned to the uneven conditions of scholarly production globally and across the academic lifespan. Alternative methods of public dissemination are often needed and valuable. An output may be open (accessible) but not understandable to a lay audience. We seek to support meaningful engagement beyond simple access.

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[6] CARE Principles for Indigenous Data Governance: https://www.gida-global.org/care

Furthermore, access itself has become more contested, as the impact of AI is being felt, for example in the journal publishing ecosystem, in how academic outputs are used for LLM training, and in new concerns about responsible research. How access, openness and responsible research evolve in the context of AI is likely to have considerable consequences for the future of open research and scholarly communications.

Strategic principles:

- Support sharing of outputs and research materials in accessible ways that foster trust and mutual understanding.
- Prioritise principles of care, consent, and community control in research data practices, drawing on frameworks such as CARE principles for Indigenous data governance and prioritising research integrity at all stages of the open research lifecycle.
- Support initiatives that recognise all contributions made to the production and publication of research outputs, such as the Contributor Role Taxonomy[7].
- Monitor the dynamic interplay between AI, open research, and academic publishing, including how Open Access publications (as digital assets) are increasingly used in large language model training, raising new questions about consent, attribution, and responsible research.
- Ensure that ethics committees have appropriate guidance and support to understand how open research practices intersect with ethical considerations.

Area D: Strategy and Environment - Develop enabling policy environment

Context: Navigating through the many available open research statements, policies and guidance can be challenging, if we consider the range of funders, publishers and institutional frameworks. Developing an enabling policy environment within CAHSS involves crafting a framework that acknowledges and integrates policies without unnecessary duplication. This strategy stands to benefit the diverse disciplines across CAHSS by promoting transparency, reproducibility, and accessibility in research outputs. The University's CoARA action plan commits to base research assessment primarily on qualitative evaluation.[8] It is a University objective to develop mechanisms to ensure that open research practices are recognised and rewarded appropriately. We therefore endorse the University of Edinburgh's Open Research position statement on developing policy and infrastructure to support the inclusive, equitable and sustainable production of open knowledge, such as novel participatory research methods. We are open to working in collaboration with publishers, funders and other academic institutions to foster an environment that supports open research. Such collaborations could lead to shared resources, and a greater alignment with global research agendas.

Strategic principles:

- Contribute to and align with broader University strategies as well as regularly monitor and react as needed to funders' policies on open access, open data, FAIR practices, sustainability and open research methods.

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[7] CRediT – Contributor Role Taxonomy https://credit.niso.org/
[8] CoARA action plan: https://www.ed.ac.uk/research-cultures/home/responsible-research-assessment

- Collaborate with central teams to monitor the uptake of Open and FAIR research practices, as well as the development of a framework of open research competencies.
- Promote and enable access to publications beyond articles and conference contributions, committed to supporting openness for long form and diverse outputs.
- Advocate for institutional investment in sustainable infrastructure that enables open research practices: equitable access to expertise, technology and security, regulatory and legal resources, and adequate data management support.
- Work in collaboration with publishers, funders and other academic institutions to foster a policy environment that supports open research and bibliodiversity.

Next steps

This document outlines what we mean by advocacy, training, culture and policy in relation to Open Research, and what key principles CAHSS will focus on. The implementation of this strategy is detailed in the Action Plan [to be developed], which will list specific initiatives to achieve these aims.

The involvement of Schools, subject areas and centres within the College is essential to the success of this strategy.

Schools will integrate open research into their Research and Innovation strategies. This approach ensures that open research receives ongoing visibility and priority within the broader context of School research planning. Schools are encouraged to develop Action Plans aligning with the College's.

References

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