The Code of Practice for Research

Introduction

The University of Sunderland is committed to maintaining the integrity and probity of its academic research. To this end the University regards it as fundamental that the conduct of research must conform to good academic practice that the dissemination of the results of research must be truthful and fair, and has accordingly adopted the following Code of Practice for Research to inform staff and students of the standards of behaviour it expects. All members of the University are under a general obligation to act in a professional and ethical manner, and to preserve and protect the integrity and probity of research.

The University of Sunderland complies with the formal agreement or ‘concordat’ concerning standards and integrity in UK research. The concordat embodies commitments that will assure Government, the wider public and the international community that research in the UK continues to be underpinned by the highest standards of rigour and integrity.

The Code of Practice for Research (hereafter referred to as the Code) is fully aligned to the University’s ‘People Strategy’ and places expectations on those engaged in research to perform to the highest possible standards, take ownership of their work and accept the responsibilities this brings. The strategy also supports the need of researchers to continuously develop their skills and knowledge and requires them to make best use of opportunities to learn and develop. Those with responsibility for leading research are expected to guide and encourage those they support to achieve success, be a positive role model, support staff to reach the highest standards of research endeavour and promote collaboration, teamwork, innovation, flexibility and skills development.

https://services.sunderland.ac.uk/hr/policies/document/people-strategy---excellence-through-our-people.html
1. **Principles:**

The standards of performance and behaviour expected of all those engaged in research at the university are as follows:

Guiding Principles:
- Honesty
- Rigour
- Fairness
- Transparency & Open Communication
- Dignity & Respect
- Accountability
- Ethical behaviour
- Equality & Diversity

It is a requirement of the University that all staff and students involved in academic research access and observe the requirements of the Code. Whilst establishing the general principles of research conduct, the Code cannot cover all situations and eventualities and therefore it is the responsibility of individuals to seek further guidance if in doubt. The Code is applicable to all academic staff, researchers, research students, research support staff and research related administrators (hereafter referred to as “researchers”).

The Code is not intended to limit research interest or endeavour. It does not imply a requirement for academics and students to be risk adverse in their research activity but rather to be risk aware and take responsibility for their actions. It seeks to ensure that all engaged in research are fully aware of the expectations placed upon them, are appropriately skilled to undertake their work to the highest possible standards and establishes appropriate measures and procedures should things go wrong. Fostering good practice in academic research is predominantly about self-regulation, supported by an environment and culture that promotes integrity at the highest level of the University.

The University will undertake to actively communicate the Code to all research active staff and students. This will include highlighting the Code in induction and training programmes, embedding recognition of the Code into research related systems such as the Ethics Review Application system and through ensuring that it is readily accessible through the University website.

Failure of researchers to comply with the Code could be subject to a formal investigation of misconduct and may result in disciplinary procedures. Academic Deans are responsible for promoting and ensuring compliance. Directors of Studies of research students are responsible for ensuring compliance with the Code by their associated research students.

The principles embodied in this Code apply to all research activity, including research activity within taught programmes. Staff involved in teaching or supporting research within taught programmes are encouraged to ensure that students are aware of the principles of good conduct of research in a proportionate and appropriate way. However, separate procedures exist for managing academic and/or other misconduct in connection with students on taught programmes, which will operate in place of those mentioned in this document, which are specific to postgraduate research students.
2. Good Research Practice:

2.1 Professional Standards

The University of Sunderland expects all staff to perform their roles to the highest possible standards. All staff and students engaged in research or supporting research activities are therefore expected to comply with the ethical, legal and professional obligations and standards as required by statutory and regulatory authorities, and by employers, funders and other relevant stakeholders.

2.2 Research Leadership

The University of Sunderland has a clear commitment to maintaining an environment that supports integrity and good practice in research. This commitment is shared throughout the management structure of the institution and is led by the Deputy Vice-chancellor (Academic) and Academic Deans of the faculties. All are responsible for developing a culture of professionalism and good research practice and supporting a research environment that encourages cooperation, the open exchange of ideas and recognises the contribution of all. They are responsible for the direction of research in their area, ensuring that the work is adequately resourced and reviewing progress.

2.3 Research Training, Development and Mentoring

The University expects all researchers to be appropriately knowledgeable and skilled to undertake their research activities. Researchers are expected to understand the requirements of this code and maintain their knowledge through attending University induction and training programmes. Mentoring and peer review are important elements of developing good practice in research and are encouraged across all disciplines of academic endeavour. Finally, it is the responsibility of the individual to ensure they identify their development needs throughout their careers and seek advice if they are unclear of any aspect of good practice, relevant policy or procedure.

The University is fully committed to the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers.

The University is committed to the seven key principles of the Concordat:

- Recognition of the importance of recruiting, selecting and retaining researchers with the highest potential to achieve excellence in research
- Researchers are recognised and valued by their employing organisation as an essential part of their organisation's human resources and a key component of their overall strategy to develop and deliver world-class research
- Researchers are equipped and supported to be adaptable and flexible in an increasingly diverse, mobile, global research environment
- The importance of researchers' personal and career development, and lifelong learning, is clearly recognised and promoted at all stages of their career
• Individual researchers share the responsibility for and need to pro-actively engage in their own personal and career development, and lifelong learning
• Diversity and equality must be promoted in all aspects of the recruitment and career management of researchers
• The sector and all stakeholders will undertake regular and collective review of their progress in strengthening the attractiveness and sustainability of research careers in the UK

The University of Sunderland was awarded the European Commission’s HR Excellence in Research Award in 2013. The award demonstrates the university’s commitment to improving standards of research practice and career development for research staff, which will in turn improve the quantity, quality and impact of our research.

2.4 Research Design

Foremost consideration should be given as to whether proposed research is ethical within the context of the values and practices of the University. This is distinct to the scrutiny of the Research Ethics Group and relies more on an individual’s understanding of what the University would consider appropriate in terms of research interest or acceptable sponsorship. Any research that could be deemed unethical within this context should be referred to the University Executive for guidance.

Good practice in research design should ensure that researchers minimise any potential of harm to participants (physical, social or psychological).

Procedures must be justified against an analysis of alternative approaches. Identified potential benefits must be realistic and proportionate to the impact of undertaking the research. All work is undertaken within the context and recognition of cultural, religious, political and gender differences.

Where appropriate, research should be based on a properly developed protocol that has been approved by the Research Ethics Group (see section 3). It is required to be prepared according to good practice guidance given by government and other research and professional bodies. Researchers must ensure that the safety, dignity and wellbeing of participants take precedence over the development of knowledge and that foreseeable risks are minimised. Researchers must be satisfied that the anticipated benefits to participants outweigh the foreseeable risks, or that the foreseeable risks to participants are minimal if the research only has the potential to benefit others more generally.

The University expects all research to be free from discrimination and to respect participant equality and diversity rights. All reasonable steps should be taken to provide equal access to participation and the opportunity to benefit from the research. Where appropriate, participants should be engaged at all stages of the project to ensure that the research is well designed and conducted.

Appropriate monitoring systems should be in place to satisfy the University and external auditors that the research is being carried out in accordance with the law and good practice.

It is essential that all who engage in research activity have the appropriate skills and knowledge to undertake the work. Research team leaders are responsible for ensuring that all members of the team have the necessary skills, experience, training and support to carry out their research responsibilities as effectively as possible.
Commercial and other interests must not adversely influence or affect the direction or completion of research. Research designs should be available to reviewers and journal editors when submitting research reports for publication.

2.5 Conflicts of Interest

Researchers should actively consider whether their research is subject to potential conflicts of interest. Conflicts of interest are often an unintentional consequence of collaborative working and it is therefore important that full consideration be given to minimising this risk during research design. It is the responsibility of researchers to make a full disclosure of any potential or actual conflict of interest at the earliest opportunity. Early notification is more likely to facilitate the implementation of measures to resolve issues between parties and limit the risk of compromising the integrity of the research. Failure to resolve conflicts of interests should result in a full review of the validity of the proposed research.

2.6 Data Collection and Retention

Researchers must abide by the University’s policies relating to data collection and retention. Data collection is an important consideration of research design, requiring researchers to ensure that all research data are accurately recorded and supported by clear and accessible methodologies of collection. In general terms, researchers are encouraged to fully explore the most appropriate methods of gathering, analysing and recording data in the early stages of the design process and this should be recorded in a data management plan. The data management plan should be available on request for the purposes of verification and audit. Researchers should be aware and comply with any data requirements of external funding organisations. These requirements should be acknowledged in detail in the data management plan.

2.7 Peer Review

Peer review is considered an important aspect of good research practice. All researchers are encouraged to seek the advice of appropriately skilled peers throughout the research process, including the submission of proposals. The University recommends and encourages the practice of internal and/or external peer review of project proposals and research before it is published or disseminated in the public domain.

The University seeks to encourage appropriately skilled researchers and supervisors to act as peer reviewers. The Code places an obligation on staff to be as accurate and honest in their reviewing, and to maintain confidentiality. The reviewer should not retain, copy or disseminate any material without the permission of the individual, organisation or publisher requesting the review. Peer review should be carried out to the highest professional standards. Staff involved in the review process should always adhere to the specific guidance, criteria and processes of the relevant review body. Reviewers should undertake their critique in an objective and balanced way, ensuring that their feedback is constructive and informs future activity. Any potential conflicts of interest should be disclosed in advance of the review. It is important that all review activity is carried out within a specified time period and reported in an appropriate format. All peer review activity should be carried out in compliance with University policies relating to data protection, intellectual property and ethical approval.
Researchers submitting work for peer review should always adhere to the highest level of research ethics and standards and the University Research Ethics Policy and Procedures. Any attempt to identify or approach peer reviewers or directly or indirectly attempt to influence the critique of their work will be construed as potential misconduct and would be subject to an investigation as laid out in the rules for investigating and resolving allegations of misconduct by members of staff in academic research.

2.8 Authorship, Publication and Dissemination

The University supports dissemination of knowledge and encourages its staff and students to disseminate their research findings through appropriate and timely publication. Dissemination of research outputs should be in-line with the University’s, Open Access commitment and the University Research Ethics Policy and Procedures.

The University has joined a growing number of UK institutions in adopting an open access mandate for research publications.

The University of Sunderland fully endorses the principle of open access to research publications and requires all authors to deposit bibliographic information for all research outputs into the university research repository SURE to provide an accurate institutional record of research activity. The University requires that all authors ensure that they deposit their final peer-reviewed manuscripts, where this is permitted by the publisher, onto SURE within 3 months of acceptance for publication.

Researchers have a duty to disseminate their research findings to all appropriate parties as soon as they have had an opportunity to establish priority and ownership claims. Researchers should consider any confidentiality agreements with funders and other stakeholders, or the need to protect data ahead of any patent applications when deciding on the timescales for dissemination of research findings.

Publications and reports for external dissemination should be clear and understandable, accurately reflecting the significance of the study. These conditions apply to all research findings disseminated in any recognised format; refereed journal articles, books or book chapters, conference proceedings, exhibitions or artefacts, digital media or performances. Where possible and in an appropriate time all research outputs should be submitted to the University research repository SURE for public dissemination. It is the responsibility of all researchers to clearly identify whether their research output is supported by peer review when submitted to the University repository. http://library.sunderland.ac.uk/find-resources/sure/

An author is defined as an individual who has made a considerable contribution towards a published study. This includes the individuals who designed and completed the study and the people involved in drafting, reviewing, revising and approving the publication. If an individual is listed as an author on any publication then this means they accept personal responsibility for the content of the publication and are recognised for their contribution to it.

The author must honestly acknowledge the contribution of others in all publications and recognise any external sponsor who has contributed or provided funding for the research. Any persons not making a significant contribution to the development, implementation and findings of the research should not seek to be identified in any publication. Notice should be given to all appropriate parties of your intention to publish. Approval should be confirmed by all authors before publication.
2.9 Submitting Funding Applications

The University encourages and supports researchers to apply for appropriate external funding to support their work. All research funding proposals should adhere to the good practice set out within this document. The University expects the Principal Investigator to take full responsibility for ensuring that all reasonable measures are taken to guarantee the accuracy and completeness of all information given in the funding application.

Good practice in identifying an appropriate external funding opportunity requires a Principal Investigator to ensure that:

- The funding implications and requirements are sensible;
- The research area is appropriate;
- There is sufficient time to prepare and submit the proposal to the highest standard.

The University encourages honesty, openness and good communication in all aspects of research and this is a priority when preparing a funding application. All relevant parties should be aware of the impending application. Staff should inform research leaders and the Research Support team in Enterprise and Innovation as early as possible in the application process of their intention to submit a proposal. This ensures that the correct procedures are followed and enables the applicant to take full advantage of the support available to them.

All researchers are encouraged to notify their Team Leader and their Academic Dean about the intended submission and identify any potential impact on existing work commitments arising from the submission. This should be done at the earliest opportunity.

All funding applications are required to be submitted for approval through the University's financial analysis and costing tool, pFACT. The system is an online programme used by the University to enable academics to assess the financial viability of the proposed work and secure institutional commitment to the project. [https://www.sunderland.ac.uk/more/research/services/pfact/](https://www.sunderland.ac.uk/more/research/services/pfact/)

In developing collaborative bids, consent must be secured from project partners to ensure they are aware of the intended submission and are fully committed to the proposed research.

When submitting a proposal on behalf of the University, it is necessary to ensure any legal issues have been discussed in advance with the Research Support and Legal teams. This would include agreeing to specific terms and conditions of funding organisations or the partnership arrangements with collaborators. Any proposal requiring institutional sign off by the University Executive is subject to similar checks in advance of submission. It is important that all requests for legal support and institutional endorsement are made well in advance of the submission deadline.

Peer review is vital when preparing a funding proposal and appropriate arrangements should be made for this before submission. The University acknowledges the responsibilities of peer reviewers to be thorough and objective in their work and requests that all reviewers respect the confidential nature of the activity. Researchers should take all reasonable measures to ensure compliance with sponsor, institutional, legal, ethical and moral obligations when preparing a funding application for submission.
2.10 Monitoring and Audit

Research projects should be monitored and audited to ensure that they are being carried out in accordance with good practice, legal and ethical requirements and any other guidelines.

Any specific requirements for monitoring and audit should be considered and identified at an early stage of proposal development and discussed with the Research Support team. Research projects should be based on a work plan that lists objectives and milestones to be achieved. When funding is awarded, the Principal Investigator is responsible for ensuring that all agreed objectives / milestones are met. Significant amendments to the plan should be discussed with the Academic Dean before submission to the sponsor for approval.

Research should be carried out as described in the original funding application and the project budget should be used solely for the purposes for which it was intended unless other arrangements have been made in writing. Financial guidelines must be adhered to. Finance should be approached in order to put in place the necessary audit arrangements.

Principal Investigators must ensure that the research they undertake is consistent with the terms and conditions as defined by the sponsor and/or covered by agreements between the University and the sponsor. Project evidence should be retained throughout the research project; this includes financial receipts, research data and details of outputs.

Researchers must co-operate with any monitoring and audit undertaken by, or on behalf of, an applicable body. The relevant Academic Dean must be kept up to date with project activity and progress and any major project issues should be highlighted immediately.

3. Ethical Review

The University of Sunderland is committed to the pursuit of knowledge, ideas and innovation and to the promulgation of that knowledge and understanding. It is committed to high ethical standards and, therefore, it is the policy of the University of Sunderland that all its work, including research is conducted in accordance with internationally accepted ethical principles and standards. The University has many systems, checks and professional codes that address ethical issues that arise in the normal course of university work such as teaching, administration, business, finance, employment, marketing etc.

However, there are often particular and complicated ethical issues arising in research and as such the University has established a Research Ethics Group (REG) to give specific attention to research matters and aims to ensure that all research undertaken on behalf of the institution is ethical. Through the REG, the University has defined its own ethical policies and procedures for research.

https://www.sunderland.ac.uk/more/research/governance-integrity/ethics/
All research active staff and students of the University are responsible for understanding and complying with these policies and procedures. It is the policy of the University of Sunderland that all research is considered through these policies and procedures to mitigate risk of unethical practice.

To support these aims, all research active staff must complete the Research Ethics Training Course provided by the University. Members of the Research Ethics Group must additionally complete external ethics training for their professional development such as courses provided by AREC and NRES. All University research, particularly that involving human participants, must be reviewed by the REG via the Online Ethics Review System. Applications that can be ‘Self Certified’ by the Principal Investigator must also be entered onto the Online Ethics Review System.

Any Research that is of “low ethical risk” and, therefore, is not likely to raise any significant ethical issue beyond the minimum standards set by the University Research Ethics Group can be “Self-Certified”. Self-Certification is only allowed provided the Principal Investigator has received University Staff Research Ethics Training AND provided the research does not require any research worker to have an enhanced DBS disclosure. Following self-certification, the research does not have to go to the Ethics Group for review. Research that is likely to be of low risk and eligible for Self Certification includes work that does not involve sensitive data or controversial subjects.

Staff requiring ethical review and approval for their research by the REG must do so through the Online Ethics Review System. It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure the completeness and accuracy of the information provided to the REG and to notify the group of any significant changes to the proposal that may affect their decision to grant approval. This condition similarly applies to any significant changes in the implementation of the project and which could necessitate a further review by the REG. Applications that can be ‘Self Certified’ must still be entered onto the Online Ethics Review System.

Student research requiring ethical approval by the REG will be determined by University policies and procedures pertaining to research in undergraduate and postgraduate research degree programmes. It is the responsibility of module leaders and Directors of Studies to ensure all proposed research activity undertaken by students is considered against ethical risk, although it is the student’s responsibility to construct an application for ethical approval.

The Research Ethics Group has the authority to monitor and audit all research approved through its policies and procedures. This is to:

- assure the committee of the quality and standards of Research Ethics procedures and principles employed by the university against internal and external points of reference,
- enhance provision by offering advice or identifying and disseminating good practice,
- identify any areas for improvement.

Audits cover:

- Sample research projects that were submitted to the Research Ethics Group for review in the previous year.
- Activity for which the University acts as a research sponsor, particularly activity which falls within the National Health Service and Health & Social Care frameworks.
- Activity falling within the protocols of any other funding bodies or research sponsors or partners which have similar sponsorship and/or audit requirements.

Failure of researchers to comply with these policies and procedures could be subject to a formal investigation of misconduct and may result in disciplinary procedures.

4. Allegations or Complaints of Misconduct in Research

The University of Sunderland is committed to maintaining the integrity and probity of academic research to the highest standards. To this end the University takes seriously any allegation of misconduct and has adopted rules for the investigation and resolution of any allegations of misconduct in research. Research misconduct includes but is not limited to:

(a) **Fraud**: defined as deliberate deception (which may include the invention or fabrication of data)

(b) **Misrepresentation**: defined as deliberate attempt to represent falsely or unfairly the ideas or work of others, whether or not for personal gain or enhancement;

(c) **Piracy**: defined as the deliberate exploitation of ideas or Intellectual Property Rights from others without proper acknowledgement or recognition;

(d) **Plagiarism**: defined as the deliberate and unacknowledged use of material taken from the work, published or unpublished, of another, including copying or misappropriation of ideas (or their expression), text, software or data (or some combination thereof);

(e) **Failure to comply with good academic practice**, e.g. not following a relevant Research Council Code of Practice.

The Code places an obligation on all members of the University to act in a professional and ethical manner and to preserve and protect the integrity of research at the institution. If any member of staff has good reason to suspect any misconduct in research, they are similarly obligated to report their suspicions. Nonetheless, members of the University (and the public) should consider that any allegation of academic impropriety is serious and potentially defamatory, and could lead to the threat (or even the instigation) of legal proceedings.

It is in that context that the Rules contain provision for the preliminary screening of allegations, based on the principles of confidentiality, natural justice, and no- detriment. The Rules also seek to ensure that no one making an allegation in good faith of misconduct in research is penalised for having made the allegation.


Rules for investigating and resolving allegations of misconduct in academic research by members of staff
https://my.sunderland.ac.uk/download/attachments/105484848/Misconduct%20by%20Members%20of%20Staff.pdf?version=1&modificationDate=1511961392000&api=v2

These rules are supplementary to the rules for investigating and resolving all allegations of misconduct by members of staff
https://services.sunderland.ac.uk/hr/policies/document/disciplinary-procedure.html
Rules for investigating and resolving allegations of misconduct in academic research by research degree students

Rules for investigating and resolving allegations of misconduct in academic research by taught degree students
https://my.sunderland.ac.uk/download/attachments/105484813/Academic%20Misconduct%20Regulations%20v13.pdf?version=1&modificationDate=1507024374000&api=v2

5. External Codes

In addition to its own Code, the University of Sunderland requires those engaged in research in any area to be fully aware of and in compliance with the appropriate external protocols and statements governing research activity as they exist from time to time. The following list is indicative, but is not intended to be exhaustive:

- Nolan Committee on Standards in Public Life
- Relevant documents and codes of the following Research Councils
- Medical Research Council
- Biotechnology & Biological Sciences Research Council
- Engineering & Physical Sciences Research Council
- Economic & Social Research Council
- Arts and Humanities Research Council
- Research Councils UK
- Governance arrangements for NHS Research Ethics Committees (GafREC)
- Department of Health
- Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers
- UK Research Integrity Office
- National Research Ethics Services