

LANCASTER UNIVERSITY

Research Ethics and Research Governance at Lancaster: a code of practice

Research at Lancaster shall be conducted in line with the principles set out below, and shall at all times be legal and transparent, and place the responsibility and accountability on the principal investigator or research supervisor. All researchers, but especially principal investigators and research supervisors, have that responsibility.

1. Principles of the code

- 1.1 For the purposes of this code, 'research' covers all forms of research investigation and experimentation by any member of the university, including consultancy, applied and blue skies research, that contributes to a body of knowledge or theory.
- 1.2 Ethical research means research that in its design, execution and dissemination upholds moral principles, is protective of the rights of fellow workers, of participants and of society at large, seeks objective evidence, and where possible contributes to the society in which it is situated.
- 1.3 The University acknowledges its duty to uphold and maintain the highest standards of conduct and discovery and use of evidence by all those who work in its name. It has procedures in place to ensure that the appropriate standards are maintained, particularly in relation to sources of funding, dissemination of results, care of human participants and animal subjects, the correct attribution of intellectual property, and the proper management of finances, of research workers, and of students. The University expects that all researchers, whether staff of all types, students, or research partners, working in its name will conduct their work to the highest standards of ethical principles and practices. In particular principal investigators are expected both to work to such standards themselves and to make all reasonable endeavours to ensure they are implemented by others within their research groups or supervisory relationships, whether at Lancaster or elsewhere in the world.
- 1.4
 - (a) No person shall be subject to unreasonable persuasion to become involved in research they find unethical in relation to their own values or beliefs.
 - (b) Subject to (a), no person shall be excluded from following a particular line of research because of the personal beliefs of others.

2. Collaborative research partnerships

2.1 Research partnerships and collaborations are welcomed between researchers locally, nationally and internationally, provided that:

- (a) all members of the research partnership or collaboration and all others involved, including students, adhere to codes of ethical practice as laid down by member institutions or other organisations, including Lancaster;
- (b) members and other workers shall receive no undeclared benefits from the research other than those stated or implied in the agreed research documentation;
- (c) funding from any source that is likely to be controversial shall be carefully considered by the members of staff leading the proposed initiative, and by the appropriate officers and bodies within their institution, in the light of 1.1 to 1.4 above, prior to entering into any contract or other agreement. The alternatives arising from such consideration are that: the funding may be approved; or not approved; or approved with conditions;
- (d) potential conflicts of interest for any participant in the research shall wherever possible be identified in advance and resolved. If further or other conflicts arise during the course of the research, they shall be brought to the immediate attention of the named institution(s) for resolution;
- (e) the rights and well-being of participants and the interests of animal subjects shall be safeguarded by conditions that are stipulated in advance, and allied to the promotion of the wellbeing of such participants and animals.

2.2 Researchers who are considering entry into a research partnership or collaboration, or those authorising such entry, shall judge the following:

- (a) the potential impact of the source of funding on the University's reputation for academic autonomy and impartiality;
- (b) the match between the ethical code of the potential partner or collaborator with that of the University;
- (c) the potential impact of working with a research partner or collaborator who carries significant responsibility, with known connections, whether direct or indirect, to human rights abuses;
- (d) the potential for conflicts of interest, including of policy, finance or reputation.

If the above evaluation raises significant issues for resolution by the researcher, he/she should consult the appropriate University officer(s) prior to making a commitment to a partnership or collaboration, including to any informal undertakings, in order that an institutional decision may be reached that is binding on all parties.

3. **Ethical behaviour: general guidance**

- 3.1 Ethical behaviour includes openness as the norm, including information about methodology and findings, except on occasions when the funder or sponsor of the research lays down conditions about dissemination to which the researcher and his/her institution give their assent in advance.
- 3.2 The principal investigators have a key stake in maintaining ethical conduct in their own research and in that of staff and students in their charge, including discipline-specific expertise and judgement of what is ethically appropriate in the field concerned.
- 3.3 The research undertaken must be lawful, must comply with national legislation, and should seek to comply with all relevant national and international codes of ethical practice, and with the Human Rights Act.
- 3.4 The dissemination of research findings (subject to 3.1) must be transparent and open to peer review and public comment where applicable. The findings must be presented honestly and accurately, should avoid the withholding of any material information, and should wherever possible be made accessible to non-specialists.
- 3.5 Agreement by staff to enter into confidentiality clauses in whole or in part (subject to 3.1 above) should be given only where strictly necessary; for example when commercial, security or personal data are involved, should wherever possible be time-limited, and should not lead to damage to the careers or lives of research workers or research participants.

4. **Responsibility for other persons**

- 4.1 The university has a responsibility to safeguard the health, safety and well-being of all its members, including students and non-academic staff, who are involved in research. Research shall not be undertaken that involves an undue risk to the health, safety or well-being of any person involved. Risks shall where possible be identified in advance, evaluated, and monitored, and accepted if found to be reasonable and manageable.
- 4.2 The importance of training appropriate to the research undertaken is paramount, especially where independent or individual fieldwork is involved, and irrespective of the status of the person involved.
- 4.3 Where a principal investigator or other senior researcher delegates responsibility for aspects of the research, the competence of the person(s) to whom the delegation is made should be assured.
- 4.4 The University shall maintain and uphold a culture in which difficulties and errors in research methods, procedures or findings can be discussed promptly and openly, without inappropriate recrimination and with an anticipation of active support for the researcher(s) involved.

- 4.5 Respect for participants and animal subjects, having regard to the vulnerability of any individual or group, is a fundamental principle, and procedures shall be drawn up in advance about these matters (see Procedures and Implementation, Appendix 3). Alternatives to their involvement, especially of animals, should in all cases be considered.
- 4.6 Significant changes in methodology or mode of dissemination after the research has commenced, having implications that the principal investigator judges to have a direct impact on the ethical status of the project, shall be notified and where appropriate approved, via the same process as for the original project approval, and prior to implementation.
- 4.7 As part of the research grant approval process, all principal investigators shall complete a checklist that commits them to the appropriate actions in respect of their own conduct and that of other persons.

5. **Conduct towards external bodies**

- 5.1 The University has no limitation on the range of legal external bodies with whom research might be conducted. Nevertheless, it pays particular attention to the ethical duties laid on it by the UK research councils, the UK National Health Service, the relevant UK and EU legislation in force from time to time, and by the tenets of the present document.
- 5.2 Researchers shall behave ethically towards external bodies with which they are involved, whether as funders or the recipients of research output, in the expectation that such bodies will themselves have codes of ethics to which they will adhere in their dealings with members of the university.
- 5.3 Strict adherence to the terms of any written contract or memorandum of agreement, including any agreed side letters, shall be maintained, unless changes between the parties are agreed and documented.
- 5.4 Researchers shall act appropriately in respect of access to premises, personnel, information or expertise of any external body or its members.

6. **Research misconduct**

- 6.1 The University, while anticipating that all its members will act ethically, nevertheless has safeguards in place for use in the event of alleged or actual research misconduct or malpractice, and to prevent corrupt practices and professional misconduct.
- 6.2 Misconduct and malpractice may include but is not limited to the following:

- (a) *Fabrication*

This may include the creation of (fictitious) data or other aspects of research, including documentation and participant consent.

(b) *Falsification*

This may include inappropriate manipulation and/or selection of data, imagery and/or consent.

(c) *Misrepresentation*

This may include:

- misrepresentation of data, including undisclosed suppression of findings or data, or knowingly or negligently presenting flawed interpretation of data;
- undisclosed duplication of publication, including undisclosed duplicate submission of publications;
- misrepresentation of interests, including failure to declare interests of either the researcher or the funders of the research;
- misrepresentation of qualifications or experience which is not held;
- misrepresentation of involvement, such as inappropriate claims to authorship and/or attribution of work, or the denial of the same to others.

(d) *Plagiarism*

This is the unacknowledged and deceitful use of someone else's work. The offense is not confined to literary work but extends to artistic, musical, mechanical and other forms of publication. The definition includes:

- collusion, where a piece of work is prepared by a group (e.g. a research group) with the intention or expectation that it will be represented as if it were the exclusive work of only some members of the group (e.g. a principal investigator, a junior researcher);
- commissioning of work by a member of staff that is not his or her own but representing it as if it were, e.g. written by another person, whether a colleague, or a student whose work is submitted to the member of staff, or a person who is not a member of the university;
- misappropriation of work, including copying or paraphrasing, by a member of staff from another source (literary, artistic, musical, mechanical, etc.), whether in unpublished or published form (including electronic sources) of another person, without appropriate acknowledgement or, where appropriate, approval;
- duplication of existing or almost identical work by the staff member that is already in the public domain and claiming it to have a measure of originality that justifies further publication. The offence of plagiarism does not occur under this category where due acknowledgement of previous publication is made when the work is first submitted to be considered for publication, and in the subsequent publication.

(e) *Failure to manage and/or preserve data and primary materials*

This may include failing to ensure that relevant primary data and research evidence are preserved and accessible to others for reasonable periods after the completion of the research. Such conditions should also be applied where ownership of the data rests with third parties, for instance where there is commercial sponsorship of research.

(f) *Breach of duty of care in carrying out responsibilities for:*

- humans;
- animals used in research; and
- the environment.

This may involve deliberately, recklessly or by gross negligence:

- disclosing improperly the identity of individuals or groups involved in research without their consent or other breach of confidentiality;
- placing those involved in research in danger, whether as researchers, subjects, participants or associated individuals, including reputational danger where that can be anticipated, without their consent and without appropriate safeguards even with their consent;
- not taking all reasonable care to ensure that the risks and dangers, the broad objective and the sponsors of research are known to participants, or their legal representatives, to ensure appropriate informed consent and that this is obtained explicitly and transparently;
- failing to observe legal and reasonable requirements or obligations of care for animal subjects of research;
- failing to observe legal and reasonable requirements or obligations of care for the protection of the environment;
- improper conduct in peer review of applications or publications, including gross misrepresentation of the content of material, inadequate disclosure of clearly limited competence, or abuse of the material provided in confidence for peer review.

For the avoidance of doubt misconduct in research includes acts of omission as well as acts of commission.

6.3 Statute 22, Complaints and Disclosures, in conjunction with the procedures set out in Ordinance 8, give safeguards to employees of the University who make a complaint or disclosure, including in matters relating to research.

6.4 There is a University Research Ethics Committee (UREC), reporting to the Research Committee. Its remit includes a responsibility to consider issues of privacy, confidentiality and ethical behaviour between researchers and human subjects, the inadvertent disclosure of information about illegal activities, and the ethical responsibilities of the University's researchers, including flaws in procedures or practice. The University is committed to bringing active

external members onto the committee, to ensure that there is external verification of the university's procedures and practices.

- 6.5 Faculty ethics committees and/or department ethics committees, where they exist, report to the University Research Ethics Committee. Where faculty ethics committees do not exist it is the responsibility of the faculty research committee to report to the University Research Ethics Committee. The faculty committees, through the associate deans for research, have access to the University Research Ethics Committee for guidance on matters that are causing significant concern, and give guidance on specific items referred to them.

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