

University of Northminster Research Good Practice Policy

After review and evaluation the University has decided to adopt the Wellcome Trust Guidelines on Good Research Practice in its entirety. These guidelines form the standard of practice to which the University of Northminster expects its researchers to adhere.

This research best practice policy statement is supported by a procedure to address allegations of research misconduct. The University of Northminster's Research Misconduct Procedure links to the University's staff disciplinary procedures and the regulations governing student conduct.

Research Conduct Policy Statement

These regulations apply to all members of the institution involved in research. This will include staff and undergraduate and postgraduate students. It also applies to those who are not members of the institution, but who are conducting research on the institution's premises or using the institution's research facilities.

For the purpose of these regulations, the Vice-Chancellor and other officers may act through their properly appointed nominees.

Principles of good conduct in the conduct of research

All those to whom the regulations apply are expected to be familiar with and conform to the Wellcome Trust guidance on best research practice and at all times:

- maintain professional standards
- observe legal and ethical requirements laid down by the institution or other properly appointed bodies involved in the research field
- recognise the importance of good leadership and co-operation in research groups
- take special account of the needs of young researchers
- document results and keep secure primary data
- question findings
- attribute honestly the contribution of others
- take steps to ensure the safety of all those associated with the research
- report any conflict of interest, actual or prospective, to the appropriate person

Definition of research misconduct

Research misconduct includes for example the following, whether deliberate, reckless or negligent:

- failure to obtain appropriate permission to conduct research
- deception in relation to research proposals
- unethical behaviour in the conduct of research, for example in relation to research subjects
- unauthorised use of information which was acquired confidentially
- deviation from good research practice, where this results in unreasonable risk of harm to humans, other animals or the environment
- fabrication, falsification or corruption of research data
- distortion of research outcomes, by distortion or omission of data that do not fit expected results
- dishonest misinterpretation of results
- publication of data known or believed to be false or misleading
- plagiarism, or dishonest use of unacknowledged sources
- misquotation or misrepresentation of other authors
- inappropriate attribution of authorship
- fraud or other misuse of research funds or research equipment
- attempting, planning or conspiring to be involved in research misconduct
- inciting others to be involved in research misconduct
- collusion in or concealment of research misconduct by others

Fraud or other misuse of research funds or research equipment may also constitute contravention of the university's financial regulations and as such will fall within the remit of the University's disciplinary procedures for staff or students (as appropriate).

Research Misconduct Procedure

The institution has a responsibility to investigate allegations of research misconduct fully and expeditiously. It also has a responsibility to protect researchers from malicious, mischievous or frivolous allegations.

All those to whom these regulations apply should report any incident of misconduct, whether witnessed or suspected. Members of staff and students are encouraged to raise concerns about suspected research misconduct in confidence with their Head of School or the University Secretary. Those who raise concerns in good faith will not be penalised in any way for doing so. Allegations should normally be made in writing, accompanied by any available supporting evidence, and will be considered in accordance with the University's Disciplinary Procedures for staff or the Regulations Governing Student Conduct (as appropriate).

The University has a Staff Complaints and Public Interest Disclosure procedure which sets out how members of staff should raise concerns they may have about malpractice or impropriety.

In the event that serious allegations are made they will be brought to the attention of the Vice Chancellor through the University Secretary under the Disciplinary Procedures for staff or the Regulations Governing Student Conduct. In the case of an allegation against a researcher who is neither an employee nor a student a report shall be prepared for consideration by the most appropriate disciplinary body within or outwith the University, as determined by the University Secretary. If it is deemed appropriate the Vice Chancellor may bring the information to the attention of any external professional, regulatory or other body.

Where the research is funded in whole or part by an outside grant, the institution shall have regard to the guidance issued by the relevant funding body. The institution shall ensure that any such body is given appropriate and timely information as to the instigation and progress of an investigation and any referral under disciplinary regulations.

In the event of a finding of misconduct, where the person responsible is subject to the regulation of a professional body such as the General Medical Council, the institution shall consider whether it is appropriate to inform the professional body of any finding.

Where the person responsible has published research, especially research to which the misconduct relates, the institution shall consider whether it is appropriate to inform journal editors or others of any finding.

Guidelines on good research practice

The University of Northminster expects the highest standards of integrity to be adhered to by its researchers. To facilitate this it has drawn up these 'Guidelines on Good Research Practice'.

The University of Northminster ('the University') cannot be prescriptive about individual approaches taken by researchers to solving particular research problems. However, the University expects institutions to ensure that an adequate structure exists to promote and promulgate good research practice, emphasizing integrity and rigour in research, and to create a culture in which the following general principles can be understood and observed.

Integrity

Researchers should be honest in respect of their own actions in research and in their responses to the actions of other researchers. This applies to the whole range of research work, including experimental design, generating and analysing data, applying for funding, publishing results, and acknowledging the direct and indirect contribution of colleagues, collaborators and others.

Plagiarism, deception or the fabrication or falsification of results should be regarded as a serious disciplinary offence.

Researchers are encouraged to report cases of suspected misconduct and to do so in a responsible and appropriate manner.

Researchers should declare and manage any real or potential conflicts of interest.

Openness

While recognizing the need for scientists to protect their own research interests, the University encourages its researchers to be as open as possible in discussing their work with other scientists and with the public.

Once results have been published, the University expects researchers to make available relevant data and materials to other researchers, on request, provided that this is consistent with any ethics approvals and consents which cover the data and materials and any intellectual property rights in them.

The University recognizes that publication of the results of research may need to be delayed for a reasonable period pending protection of intellectual property arising from the research. However, any such periods of delay in publication should be kept to a minimum.

Guidance from professional bodies

Where available, the University expects its researchers to observe the standards of research practice set out in guidelines published by scientific and learned societies, and other relevant professional bodies.

All researchers should be aware of the legal requirements which regulates their work.

Leadership and cooperation

Heads of school and their senior colleagues should ensure that a research climate of mutual cooperation is created in which all members of a research team are encouraged to develop their skills and in which the open exchange of ideas is fostered.

Supervision

Schools should ensure that appropriate direction of research and supervision of researchers is provided. Training in supervisory skills should be provided where appropriate.

A code of responsibilities should be available for supervisors indicating, for example, the frequency of contact, responsibilities regarding scrutiny of primary data, and the broader development needs of research trainees.

The need should be stressed for supervisors to supervise all stages of the research process, including outlining or drawing up a hypothesis, preparing applications for funding, protocol design, data recording and data analysis.

Training

Schools should have in place systems which allow students and new researchers to understand and adopt best practice as quickly as possible.

All researchers should undertake appropriate training, for example in research design, regulatory and ethics approvals and consents, equipment use, confidentiality, data management, record keeping, and data protection.

Primary data/samples

There should be clarity at the outset of the research programme as to the ownership of, where relevant:

- data and samples used or created in the course of the research; and
- the results of the research.

Researchers should keep clear and accurate records of the procedures followed and the approvals granted during the research process, including records of the interim results obtained as well as of the final research outcomes. This is necessary not only as a means of demonstrating proper research practice, but also in case questions are subsequently asked about either the conduct of the research or the results obtained.

Data generated in the course of research should be kept securely in paper or electronic format, as appropriate. The University considers a minimum of ten years to be an appropriate period, however, research based on clinical samples or relating to public health might require longer storage to allow for long-term follow-up to occur.

Back-up records should always be kept for data stored on a computer.

Institutions should have guidelines setting out responsibilities and procedures for the storage and disposal of data and samples (including compliance with the requirements of any ethics committee).

Ethical practice

Research involving human participants: Approval from the appropriate research ethics committees is required for all Trust-funded research involving human participants or biological samples. Approval from other regulatory bodies such as the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority or the Gene Therapy Advisory Committee in the UK should also be sought where necessary.

Researchers should ensure the confidentiality of personal information relating to the participants in research, and that the research fulfils any legal requirements such as those of the Data Protection Act 1998.

Research involving animals: Research involving animals should have approval through the appropriate Ethical Review Process, and may require Home Office licences for the institution, the investigator and the project.

Researchers should consider, at an early stage in the design of any research involving animals, the opportunities for reduction, replacement and refinement of animal involvement (the three Rs).

Publication practice

Results should be published in an appropriate form, usually as papers in refereed journals.

Anyone listed as an author on a paper should accept responsibility for ensuring that he/she is familiar with the contents of the paper and can identify his/her contribution to it. The practice of honorary authorship is unacceptable.

The contributions of formal collaborators and all others who directly assist or indirectly support the research should be properly acknowledged.

An example of good publication practice can be found in the Committee on Publication Ethics guidelines 'Good Publication Practice'.