

Guidance note on preventing harm in research and innovation activities

Preventing harm is also known as safeguarding. The University has a [safeguarding policy](#) and all researchers who work with vulnerable groups should be aware of this policy and their responsibilities in relation to this.

This guidance note on preventing harm in research and innovation activities must be read in conjunction with other relevant policies and codes of practice (including those of funders). These include:

- [Safeguarding policy](#)
- [The Prevent Duty](#)
- [Code of Good Practice in Research](#)
- [University Ethics Policies](#) and guidance
- [Support for researchers undertaking international projects](#)
- [Guide to Health and Safety Risk Assessment \(COP 04\)](#)
- [Fieldwork safety code of practice \(COP 32\)](#)
- [Overseas travel safety code of practice \(COP 38\)](#)
- [Outside of normal hours working \(COP 07\)](#)
- [Anti-Bribery and corruption](#)
- [Whistleblowing](#)

The University recognises its need to comply with the [Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office's Enhanced Due Diligence –Safeguarding for External Partners 2018](#) as well as [the UK Research and Innovation's Policy on Preventing Harm \(Safeguarding\) in Research and Innovation](#) and guidance from the [National Institute for Health Research](#).

Definition for research and innovation activities

The University is using the UK Collaborative on Development Research (UKCDR) definition of safeguarding for research and innovation activities, which is also used by some of our major research funders including UKRI. This defines safeguarding as preventing and addressing “*any sexual exploitation, abuse or harassment of research participants, communities and research staff, plus any broader forms of violence, exploitation and abuse... such as bullying, psychological abuse and physical violence.*”

Scope

This guidance note is relevant to all postgraduate researchers or staff (from any group, including professional services, technical or academic) who are undertaking research activities, in the UK or abroad.

This includes all volunteers engaged on these projects under the direction of the University and associated personnel engaged on work or visits related to the research projects, including but not limited to consultants, contractors and visitors.

Context

Whilst the University's Safeguarding policy and ethics procedures highlight responsibilities for conducting research in relation to participants and vulnerable groups in particular, this guidance note focuses on our staff, students and associated personnel, as one of the groups that is vulnerable to harm during research activities.

The University is committed to doing everything possible to ensure a positive environment for research activities, acknowledging that risks may be due to the physical environment but also the emotionally demanding nature of the research. It is also noted that some research environments (especially in LMICs) may have power imbalances or poor working cultures, which may also lead to harm to researchers, including abuse, bullying, harassment and sexual misconduct.

Expectations of staff, students and associated personnel involved in research and innovation activities

Behaviour

We expect staff, students and any associated personnel directly involved in any research and innovation activity to:

- treat each other, research and innovation participants and members of the general public with dignity and respect, to act with the highest standards of integrity, honesty and professionalism and to embed good practice in every aspect of their work
- adhere to the highest level of research ethics, in line with requirements set out by the University, national and international regulatory bodies, profession and regulatory research guidance and research ethics frameworks
- abide by all relevant legislation, statutory and regulatory requirements within the countries that they work
- undertake any training associated with this policy relevant to their role
- recognise the inherent power imbalances that exist in research and innovation activities and take all reasonable steps to mitigate them within the activities that they are involved in
- engage in equitable partnerships throughout the development, delivery and dissemination of a research and innovation activity to avoid exploitative approaches
- be aware of relevant policies and procedures, including safeguarding and health and safety, within the University and know how to respond to and report concerns about exploitation, abuse and harm
- raise concerns that they have, or those that are reported to them, through the appropriate channels within the University and/or the appropriate authorities
- co-operate fully with internal or external investigations carried out into reported concerns

Staff, students and any associated personnel should take to take a leadership role in developing a positive culture within their research and innovation teams where exploitation, abuse and harm is not tolerated, and to anticipate, mitigate and address the risks of exploitation, abuse and harm.

Risk management

As a University, we have a duty of care to students and to staff to ensure that they are fully aware of risks in the research process and have an appropriate risk assessment in place. We expect Heads of School and staff leading research projects to have carefully considered all risks, including safeguarding risks, for every project before an activity begins.

- Risk management for research projects is the responsibility of the relevant Head of School with the day to day responsibilities delegated to the PI of the project
- Risk assessments **must** be created for all projects activities and they should fully consider the safeguarding needs for the individual and any vulnerable communities being visited for the purposes of study / research to prevent exploitation, abuse and harm from occurring. An agreed route to report any safeguarding issues must be in place.
- For international travel, the PI and individual travellers should have sufficiently researched, risk assessed and planned for the environment they are travelling to and the conditions that they might reasonably be expected to encounter. HoS are responsible for checking that any risk mitigation in place is suitable and sufficient and must not agree to any travel where they do not reasonably believe this to be the case. Please refer to [CoP 38 Overseas Travel](#) for further details.
- The PI of the research project should consider creating a risk register for the project to identify the main risks (preventing harm and wider project delivery risks) and mitigating actions. Any significant risks would need to be fed up to Head of School for information and possible inclusion in the School risk

register. The Schools involved in this work should have generic risk(s) within their school risk registers that refers to international travel or research projects.

- For larger, multi-partner or multi-country projects risk registers are strongly encouraged and many funders may stipulate the need for these are part of their funding terms and conditions. The risk register should be kept regularly updated and should be discussed at the project advisory board or other regular formal project governance/management meeting.
- The PI must support staff or students involved in the project to identify and access training and support required to deliver the project and assist in all aspects of project planning
- Third party organisations (subcontractor or consultants) may be involved and roles and responsibilities or expectations should be clearly set out and agreed with them at the inception of the project (and incorporated into any agreements with them) and reviewed regularly at project governance/management meetings
- Research Services will complete due diligence on all external organisations funds by the research project and this will include ensuring that these organisations have appropriate policies and procedures in place to ensure the safety and ethical conduct of their staff. Research Services will draw up formal collaboration and other agreements with these partners to set out terms and conditions, responsibilities, and expectations.

Ethical requirements

Ethical approval is required for all primary data collection involving human participants, including children and young people, and certain types of research involving pre-existing human data/tissues. Please see [here](#) for further guidance on the ethics process.

All research involving vulnerable groups, including those in low or middle-income countries, must be approved by the Ethics Committee and must comply with the University's Research Ethics Guidelines, the requirements of the Concordat to support Research Integrity as outlined in the University's statement and all relevant research governance requirements.

The PI of any project falling in the scope of the ethics committee must ensure that approval is obtained before work commences.

Route for reporting safeguarding concerns

Staff are required to report any safeguarding-related concern that they have about any individual connected with the University to the appropriate person as quickly as possible.

Staff should contact one of the following to report a concern:

- Any of the Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSL) as set out in the University [safeguarding policy](#)
- Line Manager/Head of School or Function

It's possible that reports could also be received via the [Whistleblowing](#) or [Research Integrity](#) concerns processes but these should be directed to a DSL immediately.

If the concern has been reported to someone other than the official safeguarding officer, that person that has received the report should contact a DSL immediately.

The allegation will be managed and investigated as per the protocol set out in the [safeguarding policy](#)

Should a member of staff have safeguarding concerns about an individual from another institution, they should report it to a senior person within that institution or raise it with their line manager at Reading.

Responsibilities at key stages of research project lifecycle

Stage	Professional services	PI	School	Research organisation
Research application	Provide template and guidance for completing research risk register Signposting to H&SS safety and risk assessment pages (COP04)	To consider risks arising from the research application related to the potential for harm to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff and students • Associated personnel (e.g 3rd parties, volunteers) • Research participants • General public Document on risk register and think about mitigating actions		Ensuring institutional policies and procedures are established and up to date
	Conduct due diligence on partners receiving funding from the University via the research project to ensure they have appropriate policies in place. (Research Services)	Discussing risks of the research project (including safeguarding and international travel) with partners/co-applicants and jointly deciding on mitigation actions (this is especially important where the research is to be conducted in an overseas country with a culture different to the UK)		
	Support and advice for costing relevant mitigation measures (Research Services)	Ensure application includes relevant costs for mitigation measures		
Project set up	On award, send relevant PIs details of ethics process (Research Services)	Ensure application to ethics committee is submitted if the research involves participants		Have appropriate Ethics review structures in place
	Providing training materials (online courses and web documentation)	Undertake training as required – Ethics, Safeguarding and Personal safety/travel training	Ensure dissemination of training opportunities and support staff attendance	
	On award, send risk register template and this guidance to PI (Research Services)	Finalise risk register and mitigating actions with input from all project collaborators at project initiation meeting. Feed unusual or high risks to School for inclusion in their risk register. Ensure risk assessments (including for international travel) are carried out for project activities prior to commencement. These should consider the safeguarding needs for the individual and any vulnerable communities being	For international travel, HoS are responsible for checking that any risk mitigation in place is suitable and sufficient and must not agree to any travel where they do not reasonably believe this to be the case. School should make all staff aware of the School risk register	

		visited for the purposes of research to prevent exploitation, abuse and harm from occurring	and how to feed items into it	
	Conduct DBS checks on new staff appointments who will have contact with children and vulnerable adults (HR)	Ensuring the Job Descriptions and Staffing request forms (SRFs) highlight where staff will be in contact with children and vulnerable adults	Ensuring School staff with responsibility for creating job descriptions, raising SRFs and interviewing are aware of the need to highlight when staff will be in contact with children and vulnerable adults	Have appropriate HR policies and procedures in place to check all staff who will be in contact with children or vulnerable adults
		Ensure staff working on the project know where to report safeguarding concerns and respond to requests for information relating to safeguarding concerns in a timely manner		
Project operation		Ensure risk register is regularly reviewed and discussed at advisory board or other relevant project management meetings		
		Ensure that all participants involved in the project are aware of what standards of behaviour they should expect from the staff and other personnel involved in the project and that they understand how to report incidents and concerns (i.e. they are aware of this document)		
	Provide advice and guidance to students, staff and supervisors on matters of safety and wellbeing in relation to research fieldwork COP 32 and 38 (Governance)	Conduct briefings with members of staff before commencing work off site to highlight main risks and mitigation measures including regular check ins etc	To ensure that there is a record of who is undertaking fieldwork at any one time and to ensure they have followed University procedures for travelling overseas	To provide emergency assistance when required
		To report safeguarding concerns to reporting contacts		