

Research Ethics Policy

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Policy Owner	Department
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Policy Overview and Scope

1. INTRODUCTION

This policy was developed to reflect and engage with policies and codes issued by national and international research bodies and ethical frameworks. All members of Writtle University College (WUC) staff and students are expected to adhere to the highest professional standards of research integrity. The University College adheres to the RCUK Policy and Guidelines on the Governance of Good research Conduct and the Universities UK Concordat to Support Research Integrity.¹

This statement sets out: the responsibilities of researchers, provides guidance on the standards expected, it defines research misconduct and outlines procedures for dealing with allegations, and also outlines WUC research ethical review processes and procedures.

Policy and Procedure

2. RESPONSIBILITIES

All members of the University College, whether staff or students, are individually responsible for ensuring that their work is conducted in accordance with the University College values and with all policies that form part of the terms and conditions of employment and study. Researchers must ensure that they adhere to the highest standards of academic integrity and to the highest level of ethical standards set out by national and international regulatory bodies, professional and regulatory research guidance and research ethics frameworks.

The Research Committee is responsible for supporting the University College's research activities by considering policy and practice. The Head of Research, senior managers and principal investigators leading teams must ensure a research environment of mutual cooperation is in place, in which all researchers are encouraged to develop their skills and create a culture where open discussion of ideas is fostered. They must also ensure that appropriate supervision and training is provided for researchers for whom they have responsibility. WUC endeavours to promote best practice in research and to ensure the maintenance of high ethical standards in the conduct of any research through its Ethical Review Procedures.

3. PRINCIPLES OF GOOD RESEARCH CONDUCT

The main principles of good research conduct are:

Honesty: Staff and students are required to 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,

¹ <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/funding/researchintegrity/>

including experimental design, generating and analysing data, publishing results, and acknowledging the direct and indirect contributions of colleagues, collaborators, students and others. All staff and students must refrain from plagiarism, piracy or the fabrication of results. Committing any of these actions is regarded as a serious disciplinary offence.

Openness: While the need for staff and students to protect their own interests and the interests of the University College in the process of planning and carrying out their research is recognised, the University College encourages them to be as open as possible in discussing their work with other researchers and with the public. The University College supports the widest dissemination of results possible, unless confidentiality agreements have been put in place and/or it has been agreed that sponsors will own a part or all of the intellectual property.

Documenting of results and storage of primary data: In order to respond to the needs of funding bodies, the University College requires researchers to keep clear and accurate records of the research methods used and of the results obtained, including interim results. 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. Research Councils expect data from projects they fund to be securely held for a period of ten years after the completion of the research project. Data generated in the course of research must be kept securely in paper and electronic form. The means of data storage should be appropriate to the task. Primary electronic data should be stored on a central server, in addition to any storage that is maintained at the local level. If individuals responsible for generating the data relocate, a set should be maintained in the University College. This is important for research that is funded by Research Councils but it also applies to research that is funded from other sources.

Questioning one's own findings: Academics should always be prepared to question the outcome of their research. While fully supporting academic freedom and acknowledging the pressures of time and resources under which researchers often have to work, the University College expects research results to be checked before being made public. Staff should not make claims for their research that cannot be substantiated on the basis of the evidence provided.

Acknowledgement of collaborators and other participants: The issue of authorship is an important aspect of good research practice and the University College expects anyone listed as an author of a research output to accept personal responsibility for ensuring that they are familiar with the contents of the output. The contributions of formal collaborators and all others who directly assist or indirectly support the research must be properly acknowledged. This applies to any circumstances in which statements about the research are made, including provision of information about the nature and process of the research and in publishing the outcome. Failure to acknowledge the contributions of others is regarded as unprofessional conduct. Conversely, collaborators and other contributors carry their share of the responsibility for the research and its outcome. Authors are also responsible for ensuring that they agree with the way in which their contribution to any research

output is presented. Where appropriate, the support of funding bodies should be acknowledged in publications.

Confidentiality and duty of care: Staff and students have a duty of care to all those involved in the research, whether as subjects/participants or as part of the research team. They need to ensure that those involved are fully aware of all the risks and dangers in advance of that involvement and ensure that appropriate informed consent is obtained properly, explicitly and transparently. Staff and students handling personal information in research must not pass it on, except following prescribed procedures, and must keep it secure. Staff are required to respect the intellectual property of others and to observe commercial and official secrecy.

4. RESEARCH MISCONDUCT

Scientific misconduct can be recognised to cover two broad categories. The first involves fabrication or falsification of research results; the second involves plagiarism, misquoting or other misappropriation of the work of other researchers. Colluding in, or concealing the misconduct of others is, in itself, misconduct. Honest mistakes do not, of course, constitute scientific misconduct.

Allegations of research misconduct may come from others in the University College, for example, colleagues, research assistants or students, or they may come from outside the institution from, for example, other researchers who may feel that their work has been plagiarized or from research participants/subjects.

If someone has a concern about any aspect of a research project he/she should ask to speak to the researcher(s) and the Head of Research in the first instance who should do their best to address any questions. If concerns remain, formal complaints should be made to the Writtle University College Secretary. Allegations of research misconduct by staff will be dealt with according to the procedures set out in the WUC Disciplinary Procedures. Allegations against students will be considered according to the WUC Academic Offences Procedures.

5. RESEARCH ETHICS GUIDELINES AND PROCEDURES

The Research Ethics and Animal Welfare Committee (a sub-committee of the WUC Research Committee) is responsible for the consideration and approval of all applications on research ethics matters. Individual researchers ultimately have responsibility for ensuring that they consider ethical issues and obtain any appropriate ethical approval prior to commencing the research. Work conducted without ethical approval (where this approval is required) may not be covered by the University College's indemnity arrangements and failure to comply with this policy may lead to the failure of assessed work; or the suspension of study, research projects, and/or of funding from research sponsors or the inability to publish. Failure to secure ethical approval prior to commencing research constitutes research misconduct.

The WUC ethical approval process for staff and students is as follows: Any applications submitted for ethical approval to the Research Ethics and Animal Welfare Committee must be detailed and complete (i.e. all sections of forms filled-in; must have all relevant signatures and include all required accompanying documents). Any project involving research or data gathering must fill in the **Form EC1**. A research proposal

with a detailed experimental protocol is required with all applications to give the committee background information to the project. Any projects carrying out any experimental work on live animals require the **Form AW1**. Any work involving human subjects require the **Form EC2**. Additionally, if the human subjects participate actively (e.g. as riders or in prescribed sports exercise regimes) an appropriate **PARQ** (Physical Activity Readiness Questionnaire) and consent forms are also required. In cases where human subjects are involved as respondents to a survey, final copy of the questionnaire to be used in the survey must also be submitted for approval by the committee. In addition, all questionnaires must include a data protection statement and detailed information for participants to the survey. Researchers (students and staff) must also undertake requisite risk assessments, and complete and submit relevant risk assessment forms and, where appropriate COSHH forms.

Additionally, assignments or other taught module assessment tasks that incorporate elements involving data collection using animals or in surveys will not be formally reviewed and recorded by the Research Ethics and Animal Welfare Committee. In such cases, the module leaders and/or lecturers who set those assessment tasks are ultimately responsible for reviewing the work to ensure that such tasks do not breach ethical guidelines set out in this policy, and should consult the Chair of the Research Ethics and Animal Welfare Committee if they are in doubt about any aspect of such work.

Research Involving Animals

WUC follows the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 in defining ‘**animal**’ as any living vertebrate other than man and any invertebrate of the species *Octopus vulgaris* from the stage of its development when it becomes capable of independent feeding. As a matter of current practice, invasive animal research and research requiring a Home Office Licence is not conducted on University College premises. Members of staff who conduct animal testing which is deemed invasive or requires a Home Office Licence will do so in collaboration with another institution / organisation. The University College acknowledges that members of staff and students observe animals on the premises of the University College, but that this research is non-invasive and does not require a Home Office Licence. When members of WUC undertake animal research in collaboration with another institution / organisation, such experiments will be subject to ethical procedures of that institution / organisation. In the case of research undertaken by staff in collaboration with another institution, the WUC Research Ethics and Animal Welfare Committee will make a judgement as to the appropriateness of that institution’s ethical procedures and give guidance to staff and students. Documents relating to the ethical approval of the research must be submitted to the University College Ethics Committee for ratification prior to commencement of the research. All non-invasive research involving animals and carried out on the University College’s premises should be subject to the usual ethical approval procedures. Staff and students are given the opportunity to opt out of research conducted on animals.

Research Involving People

Respect must be shown for those participating in the research process whether actively or passively. Participants include (i) subjects of observation, inquiry, test or experiment; (ii) collaborators; (iii) those assisting with the research process; (iv) those with responsibility over the space in which the research is conducted or over the participants of the research and (v) those who form part of the immediate context in which the research is being undertaken.

- a) The University College's commitment to Equal Opportunities must be reflected in a non-discriminatory approach to participants in the research process. Respect for the person does not depend on gender, age, race, religion, sexuality or any other distinguishing feature.
- b) Researchers must seriously and comprehensively consider the question of informed consent in the research process. The working principle should be that participants in research should give their informed consent to the research process.
- c) Particular concern and consideration must be taken with the issue of informed consent where the research involves minors. Researchers should consider, with appropriate consultation, to what extent children are able to give their consent in the particular circumstances of the research.
- d) Consent should be obtained from the institution (company/organisation) where the research is to be conducted. As a general principle, the more wide-ranging the research, the higher level of consent required.
- e) The seeking of consent must be genuine. Prospective participants must have the opportunity to decide not to participate, without suffering any consequences for so doing.
- f) Consent must be informed. Researchers have a responsibility to seriously and comprehensively consider the question of informing participants in the research of the content of that research. In particular, participants should be informed of any negative effects which the research may have on them (for example, emotionally, professionally, in terms of stress).
- g) There may be occasions when the researcher considers that the full disclosure of the content and likely impact of the research process will negatively affect the integrity of the research process and its results. Due consideration must nonetheless be given to the impact of this lack of full disclosure on participants in the research process and the priority should lie with the well-being of participants.
- h) Participants must have the right to withdraw their consent any at any point within the research process.
- i) Respect for participants includes respect for privacy. Results should normally be reported in such a way that the identity of individuals cannot be determined. Particular concern must be taken where the data collected might be construed to be of a personal nature. If such data is to be collected, this should be communicated to the participant concerned before the research commences.
- j) Researchers should be clear about the type of data to be collected and the method of collection and this must be a key consideration when obtaining informed consent. This is particularly the case when the method of data collection involves covert observation of human interaction. The researcher should take care to ensure that participants are as far as possible aware of the period during which their actions or words contribute towards the research findings. Particular care should be taken over the use of data obtained from what might normally be construed as private conversations or actions.

- k) Researchers must be aware of any potential conflicts of interest in their work arising from their position within the research context. In particular, for researchers in a position of authority arising from or separate from the research process should be aware of placing other participants in a situation where they feel obliged to participate in the research or to produce particular results.

6. COMPLIANCE OF RESEARCH WITH THE PREVENT DUTY

In compliance with the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015, and Prevent Duty for Higher Education (2015) it is a legal requirement that any research into terrorism, extremism, radicalisation, and similar such areas use secure data storage (digital or hard copy). The University College has developed a separate policy and procedures for managing and storing security-sensitive research material based on the document published by Universities UK, ***Oversight of Security-Sensitive Research Material in UK Universities: Guidance***, which involves the registration of research that involves access to and/or storage of security-sensitive research material. Consult Prevent Duty Guidelines for Higher Education and consult the Head of Research at WUC for more information, and further advice.

REFERENCES

Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (December 1998) *Statement on Safeguarding Good Scientific Practice*

Research Councils UK (February 2013) *Policy and Guidelines on Governance of Good Research Conduct*. (<http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/funding/researchintegrity/>)

Universities UK (2012) *Concordat to Support Research Integrity* (<http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Pages/research-concordat.aspx>)

Universities UK (October 2012). *Oversight of Security-Sensitive Research Material in UK Universities: Guidance*. (<http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2012/oversight-of-security-sensitive-research-material.pdf>)

This policy supersedes any other policy and procedural guidelines, which may be in other existing University College documents. Writtle University College may amend this policy from time to time and any such amendments will be notified via the website, through Writtle Weekly or by email.

If this information is difficult to access, read or understand, it can be provided in another format, for example in Braille, in large print, on audiotape, in another language or by someone talking it through with you.

Version Control

Version Number	Purpose/Amendment	Date
1	New policy – WUC template	Dec 2016