

National Museums Scotland

Code of Research Ethics

The Museum's fundamental mission is the advancement and dissemination of knowledge and understanding through access to its collections.

This framework for the ethical conduct of research within the National Museums of Scotland is also guided by principles of dignity, respect, selflessness, honesty, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, and leadership.

The principles apply equally to staff and external researchers and this code forms part of NMS policies on staff conduct and research.

Dignity, respect, selflessness and honesty

These principles of conduct inform all the other principles set out below. Further, in a co-operative research environment, researchers are encouraged to develop their skills and to exchange research ideas and information openly.

Integrity

The integrity of research results should always be ensured. In any publication, the author(s) must be able to identify their contribution to the publication, be familiar with the content, and accept personal responsibility for it. The contribution of others, either as formal collaborators or less formally as supporters of the research, must be properly acknowledged.

Both academic fraud and plagiarism must be guarded against. Academic fraud strikes at the whole basis of academic activity and the quest for knowledge. It may involve fabricating or falsifying research results (such as making false claims in relation to experiments, interviews or surveys; the omission of statements relating to data, results or interviews; or claims which cannot be justified). Plagiarism – the unacknowledged use of another person's ideas, words or work – can arise deliberately as a serious form of cheating, or may occur accidentally through poor standards of scholarship.

Objectivity

Peer review is an important part of research activity. Those who agree to act as reviewers should declare any actual or potential conflicts of interest, should treat any information received in their capacity as reviewers as confidential, and should not take advantage of any information received in this way.

Disagreement on questions of interpretation or judgement must be kept within the bounds of civilised academic discourse.

Accountability

Staff should be aware that under the Freedom of Information Acts any information they hold might require to be released on request, unless an appropriate exemption can be applied. Full, clear and secure records of all stages of research work should be kept, so that data can be released if appropriate or a proper exemption sought. Records, whether stored electronically or as hard copy, should include accurate and contemporary details of primary experimental data and results, in order to provide unambiguous answers to any questions which may later arise regarding the validity of the data and to demonstrate good research practice.

Openness

Publication of the results of research is expected where appropriate, but account must be taken of Intellectual Property Rights and the confidentiality of any commissioned research carried out under contract.

Where research involves participation by individuals as the subjects of investigation, its design should take account of any ethical guidelines drawn up by relevant professional bodies. Participants in a study have the right to be informed about the aims and purposes of research (except in specific circumstances which are prejudicial to the outcome of the research project), the likely publication of its findings, the context in which the findings will be reported and the potential consequences for individuals. Informed consent should be sought where necessary, and particular attention should be paid to any code of conduct governing the participation of children, the treatment of animals, or the use of human remains. Researchers should respect the cultural, religious, gender and other significant characteristics of sections of the population in planning, conducting and reporting their research. Subjects of research are entitled to withdraw from participation at any time.

Individuals who are research subjects must have their legal rights explained to them, including their rights under the Data Protection Act. The researcher should secure the individual's explicit written consent to the proposed holding and use of the data.

Leadership

Those responsible for academic leadership should ensure a climate within which research can be conducted in accordance with the ethical considerations set out in this Code. Research should be appropriately supervised, and advice should be available on matters of research integrity and academic conduct. It is the responsibility of experienced staff to inculcate these principles in less experienced staff and external researchers.

Approved by NMS Research Advisory Group
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