

Royal Northern College of Music
GOOD RESEARCH CONDUCT
Policy & Procedure
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RNCM
ROYAL NORTHERN
COLLEGE of MUSIC

Introduction

The Royal Northern College of Music expects all members of staff and students to observe the highest ethical and professional standards in their research. Research councils and charities require that the research they fund will take a consistent approach to supporting good research practice, and preventing and handling research misconduct, irrespective of funding for individual projects. This means that institutions must have in place procedures for governing good research practice, and for reporting and investigating unacceptable research conduct in line with the Codes of Conduct, Policy and Concordat documents below.

As a member institution of Conservatoires UK (CUK), the RNCM adheres to the principles and guidance set out in:

- The UK Research Integrity Office's Code of Practice for Research and
- The Misconduct Investigation Procedure.

All RNCM researchers must work in line with:

- The Concordat to Support Research Integrity (2025)

These Codes of Practice are aligned with the UKRI Policy on the Governance of Good Research Practice (2022, revised 2025) which all UKRI directly funded projects must adhere to.

The UKRIO Code of Practice for Research defines Research in line with the following established definitions:

- **The 2029 Research Excellence Framework:** "...a process of investigation leading to new insights, effectively shared"
- **The Concordat to Support Research Integrity:** "...part of a process leading to new insights"
- **The Frascati Manual 2015:** "...creative and systematic work undertaken in order to increase the stock of knowledge – including knowledge of humankind, culture and society – and to devise new applications of available knowledge"

The College's expectations of its researchers

Staff at the College who have a role in research, including research-led teaching, are required to know, understand and follow the College's Good Research Conduct Policy. It is the responsibility of all engaged in or supporting research to conduct their research in accordance with the principles of research outlined in this policy and in compliance with relevant College policies. The College expects its researchers to conduct any research activity in line with the policies linked above.

"Researchers" include, but are not limited to, members of staff carrying out research as part of their employment; academic research staff; independent contractors or consultants; research students; postgraduate or undergraduate students conducting research; research assistants; visiting or emeritus members of staff; members of staff on honorary contracts; technicians; members of research-enabling staff (sometimes referred to as research support), professional services staff, or research administrators/managers. External colleagues who are conducting research on RNCM's premises, using RNCM's research facilities, or conducting research involving the participation of staff and/or students at RNCM are expected to abide by the Code of Conduct, although should research misconduct occur,

the case would be referred to the researcher's employing institution. Before commencing a research study, researchers should familiarise themselves with the UKRIO Recommended Checklist for Researchers (extracted from p.4 of the UKRIO Code of Practice for Research linked above) and use this to design their research study.

What researchers can expect of the College

Research Strategy and Policy

The College will ensure that good research practice is integral to the institution's research strategy and any concomitant policies. It will offer clear procedures and ensure that policies and procedures are aligned with wider organizational policies.

Support to help researchers comply with the standards of good research conduct

The College will actively promote academic freedom, and it will provide resources, advice and support to enable researchers to conduct their research in accordance with the standards of good research conduct.

Support to develop excellent researchers

The College is committed to providing suitable learning, training and mentoring opportunities to encourage the development of its researchers. The College will regularly review its research culture and environment and consider feedback from researchers on processes and practices that influence positively and negatively on good practice in research.

A robust and fair approach to dealing with allegations of research misconduct

The College will foster a positive, fair research environment and will encourage all researchers to consider good practice in research as a routine part of their work. The College has a fair, transparent and robust procedure (set out below) for dealing with allegations of research misconduct and mechanisms to protect staff from malicious allegations.

Research and equal opportunities

All individuals involved in research should be able to pursue their work in an atmosphere free from prejudice and harassment. RNCM is committed to ensuring equality of opportunity for all within all of its activities. If individuals feel they may be experiencing discrimination at work, then there are a number of external organisations that can offer them advice and support in addition to RNCM Human Resources staff.

Access to security-sensitive or extremism-related research material

The RNCM recognises its responsibilities under the Prevent Duty while maintaining its commitment to academic freedom and freedom of expression as required by the HE (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023. Research involving extremist, radicalising, violent or otherwise harmful content requires ethical approval. Researchers should identify potential risks to participants, researchers, the institution, and the wider public, and demonstrate that appropriate safeguards are in place for the collection, storage, analysis, and dissemination of research data. The RNCM Ethics committee - in communication with the DR - reserves the right to request a comprehensive risk assessment around access to and storage of material pertaining to terrorism, radicalisation, or extremism is required. Relevant external academic expertise may be solicited on ethics applications including such matters to ensure that legal, ethical, safeguarding, and security considerations are appropriately managed without unnecessarily restricting legitimate scholarly inquiry.

Through the ethical approval process, the institution will advise researchers how to store sensitive material on the RNCM core server (the Safe Store) with password protection for

the named researcher(s). They will also advise on methods of secure disposal when no longer needed.

Ethics applications with requests to access such material will be registered with the Director of Research.

RNCM will be guided by the Universities UK guidance in this area, updated in August 2024 and currently available at: <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Pages/security-sensitive-research-material-UK-universities-guidance.aspx>. It 'concerns the storage and circulation of security-sensitive research material. If circulated carelessly, such material is sometimes open to misinterpretation by the authorities and can put researchers at risk of arrest and prosecution under counter-terrorism legislation.'

PROMOTION OF GOOD RESEARCH CONDUCT

Principles of good research conduct

The UKRIO Code of Practice for Research (2025), Concordat to Support Research Integrity (2025) and the UKRI [policy](#) on the governance of good research practice (2025) set out in detail the principles by which researchers and institutions should conduct research. The core elements of research integrity are:

- **honesty** in all aspects of research, including in the presentation of research ideas and goals, through to authorship and financial contributions, and on to findings. Examples include honesty in reporting research methods and procedures; gathering data and information; referencing work; representing and acknowledging the work of others; conveying interpretations; and making justifiable claims based on research findings
- **rigour**, in line with prevailing disciplinary norms and standards, including the use of appropriate methods. It may be evidenced through adherence to procedures, standards of practice and agreed protocols, as appropriate, and is expected when drawing interpretations and conclusions from research, including when communicating findings. The integrity of the research record should be protected through secure and rigorous approaches
- **transparency and open communication** as the foundation for the actions taken when conducting or communicating about research. Examples may include: declaring potential competing interests; reporting research data collection methods; acknowledging the use of tools such as emerging technologies; analysing and interpreting data; and publishing or otherwise sharing findings. This may include appropriate open research practices. It permits humility in the process, acknowledging errors committed in good faith and ensuring honest mistakes are seen as productive elements of research
- **care and respect** for everyone and everything involved in the research system, and for the protection of the integrity of the research record. They should be extended to everyone involved in the research process, all participants in research, and for the subjects, users and beneficiaries of research, including humans, animals, the environment and cultural objects. Those engaged with research must also show care and respect for the integrity of the research record.
- **accountability** of everyone individually and collectively to create a research environment in which diverse individuals and organisations are empowered and enabled to own the research process and be accountable for their contributions to

the research record. This includes being accountable to participants involved in research, and a responsibility to hold individuals and organisations to account when behaviour falls short of the standards set by the Concordat.

UNACCEPTABLE RESEARCH CONDUCT (MISCONDUCT IN RESEARCH)

According to the UKRI policy on the governance of good research practice (2025) and UKRI guidance for research organisations on the investigation of research misconduct (2025), the spectrum of inappropriate behaviour is wide, ranging from honest mistakes which may happen occasionally and inadvertently to significant acts of misappropriation or fabrication. The Concordat to Support Research Integrity (2025) states that 'honest errors and differences in, for example, research methodology or interpretations, do not constitute research misconduct', and expects organisations to create a research environment that values research integrity and creates the conditions necessary for honest errors to be openly admitted without undue detriment. Poor research practices, such as weak procedures, inadequate documentation of procedures, or inadequate record-keeping, might only require further training or development rather than formal disciplinary action, and are normally a matter solely for the employer. The UKRI policy and guidance concentrate on entirely unacceptable types of research conduct. Individuals involved in research must not commit any of the acts of research misconduct specified here:

- **Fabrication:** This comprises the creation of false data or other aspects of research, including documentation and participant consent
- **Falsification:** This comprises inappropriate manipulation and/or selection of data, imagery and/or consents.
- **Plagiarism:** This comprises the misappropriation or use of others' ideas, intellectual property or work (written or otherwise), without acknowledgement or permission.
- **Failure to meet:** legal, ethical and professional obligations, for example:
 - not observing legal, ethical and other requirements for human research participants
 - animal subjects, or human organs or tissue used in research, or for the protection of the environment
 - breach of duty of care for humans involved in research whether deliberately, recklessly or by gross negligence, including failure to obtain appropriate informed consent
 - misuse of personal data, including inappropriate disclosures of the identity of research participants and other breaches of confidentiality
 - improper conduct in peer review of research proposals, results or manuscripts submitted for publication. This includes failure to disclose conflicts of interest; inadequate disclosure of clearly limited competence; misappropriation of the content of material; and breach of confidentiality or abuse of material provided in confidence for the purposes of peer review

- **Misrepresentation**, including of:
 - data, including suppression of relevant results/data or knowingly, recklessly or by gross negligence presenting a flawed interpretation of data
 - publication history, through undisclosed duplication of publication, including undisclosed duplicate submission of manuscripts for publication
 - interests, including failure to declare competing interests of the researcher or of the funders of the research
 - qualifications, experience and/or credentials
 - involvement, including inappropriate claims to authorship or attribution of work
 - denial of authorship/attribution to persons who have made an appropriate contribution
- **improper dealing with allegations of misconduct:**
 - failing to address possible infringements, such as attempts to cover up misconduct and reprisals against whistle-blowers
 - failing to adhere appropriately to agreed procedures in the investigation of alleged research misconduct accepted as a condition of funding. Improper dealing with allegations of misconduct includes the inappropriate censoring of parties through the use of legal instruments, such as non-disclosure agreements

Procedure for the Investigation of Misconduct in Research

The RNCM has a responsibility to investigate allegations of unacceptable research conduct. The procedure for the investigation of misconduct in research links to the College's Staff Disciplinary Policy and the Student Conduct and Discipline Policy and complements the Public Interest Disclosure Policy (Whistleblowing).

This procedure applies to allegations about RNCM staff and research students from inside and outside the College.

The unacceptable research conduct procedures are guided by the following key principles:

- The procedures are driven by the requirement for the even-handed treatment of both the complainant and the respondent
- The presumption of innocence should be maintained throughout the investigation
- The complainant and respondent should expect a just decision following a fair and speedy process involving an impartial, informed and independent investigation
- The responsibilities of those dealing with the allegation must be clear and understood by all interested parties
- Proper records of the proceedings should be kept while ensuring that the confidential nature of the allegation and investigation safeguard the rights to confidentiality, and to disclosure, of the interested parties.

How to report misconduct in research

The institutional contact person responsible for any investigation into misconduct in research is the Head of Doctoral Programmes, Professor Tom Parkinson (tom.parkinson@rncm.ac.uk).

Individuals with a concern are encouraged, in the first instance, to attempt to address it informally with either the individual concerned or their line manager or research supervisor. They should log that they are intending to do so with the Head of Doctoral Programmes and, if in doubt, check who their appropriate contact person is (i.e. line manager/ research supervisor). The line manager/supervisor may seek to initiate an informal resolution process, in liaison with Human Resources e.g. via a facilitated meeting. This approach may be relevant where the issue appears to be basic or minor or where there appears to be a potential misunderstanding or dispute between individuals.

In the event that the individual is not satisfied with the outcome of an informal approach, then the matter should be addressed formally.

A record of any informal concerns raised and outcomes should be made and retained by the relevant line manager/supervisor (copied to the Head of Doctoral Programmes for monitoring purposes).

A line manager/supervisor should immediately forward all allegations they are made aware of, that they deem to be serious, to the Head of Doctoral Programmes, as informal resolution would not be appropriate in such cases.

Allegations found to be made frivolously, maliciously or vexatiously may result in a recommendation for referral of the complainant to the disciplinary procedure or other appropriate action

Investigation of misconduct in research

Stage 1: Informal enquiries

It is the responsibility of the Head of Doctoral Programmes to make a preliminary investigation into all allegations of unacceptable research conduct made against staff or research students. This also applies to visiting researchers while based at the RNCM and RNCM staff and/or students while based in another institution.

The Head of Doctoral Programmes shall notify the Director of Research and the Head of Human Resources as soon as an allegation of unacceptable research conduct has been received. The Head of Doctoral Programmes would normally complete the investigation within one month.

In the event that the Head of Doctoral Programmes is directly implicated in the research, the Director of Research will initiate an investigation into the allegation in as timely a manner as possible.

The research project may be halted where continuation breaches legal or ethical standards, and as long as it is safe to do so and does not exclude the expression of lawful academic opinion until the allegation has been investigated.

The Head of Doctoral Programmes will determine whether the allegation falls within the scope of this procedure, and whether an investigation is warranted. This should involve informing the respondent of the substance of the allegation and giving them the opportunity to respond.

If the Head of Doctoral Programmes decides that an investigation is not warranted, he/she will request that their justification for that decision be noted in the member of staff's

Research Activity Review form for that year and inform the complainant, respondent and Director of Research of this outcome.

Possible outcomes of the Informal Enquiry are:

- a) Sufficiently serious and of sufficient substance to warrant formal investigation
- b) Has some substance but is relatively minor and/or relates to poor practice rather than intentional misconduct and should be addressed through training/ education or other approach such as mediation
- c) warrants referral to another organisational policy and procedure such as Exam Regulations, Academic Misconduct, Staff Disciplinary or Student Conduct Policies
- d) is unfounded because it is mistaken or without substance
- e) is unfounded because it is vexatious and/or malicious and will be dismissed

The Head of Doctoral Programmes shall take action according to the outcome.

Formal Investigation

If the Head of Doctoral Programmes decides that an investigation is warranted, he/she will notify both the respondent and the complainant in writing, the Director of Research and the Head of Human Resources.

The purpose of the investigation is to examine and evaluate all relevant facts to determine whether unacceptable research conduct has been committed, and if so, the responsible person(s) and the seriousness of the misconduct.

The Head of Doctoral Programmes will appoint a Panel of up to three senior and appropriate individuals to undertake the investigation. The Panel should not have any conflicts of interest with the respondent or the case in question, and they must have the necessary expertise, including research expertise, to examine the evidence and conduct the investigation effectively.

The investigation will not be conducted by the Director of Research or any other person who may have to reach a final decision or consider a review of the case.

The investigation will be conducted as sensitively and speedily as possible, but with due regard to concepts of natural justice and to the need to safeguard individual reputations from unfair damage.

The investigation will include examination of all relevant documentation, including but not limited to: relevant research data; research notes; computer files; proposals; publications; correspondence; memoranda and email correspondence.

Interviews will be conducted with the respondent and the complainant and any other individuals who might have information relating to key aspects of the allegation. All individuals interviewed during the investigation will be expected to respect the confidential nature of the investigation. Interviews will be minuted. Confidentiality does not preclude lawful whistleblowing or protected academic expression.

Where the research is carried out in collaboration with another party or with an external funder, then the other party involved may be notified of the allegation if it is considered appropriate or necessary to do so by the Head of Doctoral Programmes. Where an investigation is about someone funded by or engaged with UKRI (including acting as a supervisor for an UKRI postgraduate student or engaged with peer review activities), even if it is about work not connected with a grant from a UK Research Council, the case must be reported to the relevant Council at this stage. The Councils reserve the right to take

appropriate action, after consultation with the research organisation, about any duties being performed for UKRI.

The panel will be charged with producing an investigation report. The report will include a summary of the procedures under which the investigation was carried out, from whom information was obtained, the evidence considered, a summary of the views of the respondent and complainant and the findings of the investigation, including whether unacceptable research conduct has been committed or not. If unacceptable conduct is identified, the report should make clear the responsible person(s) and the seriousness of the unacceptable conduct (see Possible Outcomes below).

The report shall normally be produced within 30 working days of the commencement of the investigation. A summary of the outcome shall be distributed in strict confidence to, as a minimum the respondent, the complainant, the Head of Doctoral Programmes, Director of Research and Head of Human Resources.

Possible outcomes of the Formal Investigation are that the allegation of misconduct in research:

- a) is upheld in full
- b) is upheld in part
- c) has some substance but is relatively minor and/or relates to poor practice rather than intentional misconduct and should be addressed through training/ education or other approach such as mediation
- d) warrants referral to another organisational policy and procedure such as Exam Regulations, Academic Misconduct, Staff Disciplinary or Student Conduct Policies as the infringement lies outside of misconduct in research
- e) is unfounded because it is mistaken or without substance
- f) is unfounded because it is vexatious and/or malicious and will be dismissed

The Head of Doctoral Programmes will decide on the basis of the investigation report how any recommended actions should be implemented, with outcomes a) and b) normally leading to the invocation of the College's disciplinary procedures, and outcome c) to be actioned by the Head of Doctoral Programmes. Any decision shall normally be made within five days of production of the report.

The Head of Doctoral Programmes shall notify the respondent in writing of this decision, as well as the Head of Human Resources and any collaborating parties where applicable.

The Head of Doctoral Programmes shall give consideration to informing other interested parties of the outcome of the investigation, including but not limited to any journals in which the research was published.

Right of Appeal

The respondent has the right to a review of the decision and/or actions recommended in the investigation report. The complainant has no right to a review.

The respondent may request an appeal within five days of receiving the investigation report. The request must be in writing to the Director of Research and state the basis for the appeal. The Director of Research may appoint an appeal board consisting of three people not associated with the original investigation.

In the event that the Director of Research led the original investigation due the Head of Doctoral Programmes' direct implication in the research, another member of the Executive Team will oversee the appeals process.

The appeal will normally include examination of all evidence called into question in the original investigation. The respondent will be invited to attend to give oral evidence and may submit any relevant supplementary evidence in support of their case.

The appeal shall normally be completed within 30 days of its initiation, unless there are documented reasons for delay.

The appeal report shall state how the review was carried out, from whom further information was obtained, and the findings of the review. A summary of the outcome shall be distributed in strict confidence to, as a minimum, the respondent, the Head of Doctoral Programmes, Director of Research and member of the Executive Team. It may be distributed to any collaborating party or funder involved if appropriate or necessary, at the discretion of the member of the Executive Team.