

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 must adhere to the highest standards of integrity and that institutions have in place formal written procedures for the investigation of allegations of research misconduct. All member institutions of Conservatoires UK (CUK), including RNCM, have adopted the Research Councils UK Policy and Code of Conduct on the Governance of Good Research Conduct (2015) and the UK [Research Concordat](#) to Support Research Integrity (2012). These form the standard of practice to which CUK institutions expect their researchers to adhere.

The College's expectations of its researchers

The College expects the highest standards of research integrity from its researchers. This includes, but is not limited to, staff who conduct research, research students and visiting researchers irrespective of the sources of their funding, their area of research and their experience as researchers. It also applies to those who are not members of RNCM 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.

It is the responsibility of all engaged in or supporting research to conduct their research in accordance with the principles of research conduct detailed below and in compliance with relevant College policies.

What researchers can expect of the College

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

The College will provide advice and administrative 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.

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

The College has a clear procedure 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

In accordance with the 'Prevent' responsibilities of higher education bodies, intended to 'prevent' radicalisation/extremism, research students and staff will need to declare their intention to undertake research into security-sensitive areas including extremism (using the Security-Sensitive Research Declaration Form) and seek approval from the Director of Research before starting research and before gaining access to electronic or other material

related to subjects concerning radicalisation and extremism. Colleagues will be required to keep their declaration of research-sensitive research up to date and will report on an annual basis as part of the Research Activity Review process and whenever they are planning to undertake security-sensitive research. Such approval/access will not be withheld where the student or member of staff has good academic reasons to pursue such research and access such material, in accordance with the principles of academic freedom.

Where access is provided, 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.

The institutional contact for requests to access such material will be the Director of Research.

RNCM will be guided by the Universities UK guidance in this area, currently available at: <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/highereducation/Pages/OversightOfSecuritySensitiveResearchMaterial.aspx>. As this guidance says: 'Universities play a vital role in carrying out research on issues where security-sensitive material is relevant. This guidance document 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 authors in danger of arrest and prosecution under, for example, counter-terrorism legislation. Certain procedures for independently registering and storing this material – through research ethics processes – are recommended in this guidance.'

PROMOTION OF GOOD RESEARCH CONDUCT

Principles of good research conduct

The RCUK Code of Conduct on the Governance of Good Research Conduct ([RCUK Policy and Guidelines](#)) and the Concordat to Support Research Integrity published by Universities (UK [Research Concordat](#)) lay down in detail the principles by which researchers and institutions should conduct research.

All individuals engaged in research are expected to observe the highest standards of integrity, honesty and professionalism and to embed good practice in every aspect of their work. The RNCM's core elements of research integrity are:

Excellence

Researchers are expected to strive for excellence when conducting their research; aiming to design, conduct and disseminate work of the highest quality and ethical standards.

Honesty

Researchers must be honest in all aspects of their research including the aims of their research, reporting on research methods and procedures, reporting research findings and acknowledging the work of others.

Rigour

Researchers must be thorough and meticulous in conducting their research, using the appropriate methods, drawing interpretations and conclusions from the research and in communicating the results.

Transparency

Researchers should be transparent and open in declaring conflicts of interest, in the reporting of research data (where appropriate), in making research findings widely available and in presenting work to others

Care and respect / ethical responsibility

Researchers should have respect for all participants in, and subjects of research including the environment and cultural objects.

Professional standards

Researchers should observe the standards of practice set out by professional bodies/organisations where appropriate and available. They must ensure they have the necessary skills and training to conduct the research.

Regulatory compliance

Researchers are expected to make themselves aware of, and comply with any legislation or regulations that govern their research including data protection.

Research management / environment

It is the responsibility of institutions and all those undertaking, supporting or otherwise engaged in research to maintain a culture that promotes good practice. Established researchers are responsible for developing and nurturing young researchers; fostering a supportive environment, which provides appropriate supervision, mentoring and training.

Report research misconduct

Researchers should be aware of the seriousness of research misconduct. Staff and students of the College have an obligation to report suspected research misconduct in accordance with College procedures.

UNACCEPTABLE RESEARCH CONDUCT

The types of behaviour that can be defined as inappropriate range from minor misdemeanours which may happen occasionally and inadvertently to serious acts of misappropriation or fabrication. Poor research practices might require only further training or development rather than disciplinary action.

Individuals involved in research must not commit any types of research misconduct whether deliberate, reckless or negligent: Unacceptable conduct includes each of the following:

Fabrication

- Creation of false data or other aspects of research, including documentation and participant consent

Falsification

- Corruption of research data
- Inappropriate manipulation of research data and/or selection of data

Misrepresentation

- Distortion of research outcomes, by distortion or omission of data that do not fit expected results/are false or misleading
- Dishonest misinterpretation of results
- Misrepresentation of qualifications and/or experience
- Misrepresentation of involvement, such as inappropriate claims to authorship and/or attribution of work
- Plagiarism, or dishonest use of unacknowledged sources
- Misquotation or misrepresentation of other authors

Breach of duty of care

- Failure to obtain appropriate permission to conduct research
- Unethical behaviour in the conduct of research, for example in relation to research subjects
- Unauthorised use of information which was acquired confidentially
- Disclosing improperly the identity of individuals or groups involved the research without their consent
- Placing any of those involved in research in danger without their prior consent and without appropriate safeguards
- Improper conduct in peer review of research proposals or results.

Improper dealing with allegations of misconduct

- Not addressing infringements including attempts to cover up misconduct or reprisals against whistle blowers.
- Failing to deal appropriately with malicious allegations.

It does not include:

- honest error or honest differences in the design, execution, interpretation or judgment in evaluating research methods
- misconduct unrelated to the research process
- poor research unless this encompasses the intention to deceive.

Reporting and investigating unacceptable research conduct

The RNCM has a responsibility to investigate allegations of unacceptable research conduct. The Unacceptable Research Conduct procedure links to the College's staff Disciplinary Policy and the Student Conduct and Discipline Policy and complements the Public Interest Disclosure Policy.

This procedure applies to allegations about RNCM staff and research students from 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 unacceptable research conduct: Informal Action

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. 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, or where allegations are considered too serious to be classed as minor, formal action will be initiated.

The line manager/supervisor will make a record of any informal discussions (copied to the Director of Research for monitoring purposes) and these will be held on the individual's file for a period of up to a maximum of twelve months. The individual should also be given a copy for information. These records may be used in subsequent formal procedures if necessary.

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

How to report unacceptable research conduct: Formal Action

If an individual is not satisfied with the outcome of an informal approach to resolve matters or where an informal approach is not suitable due to the serious nature of the allegations, the line manager will report the need for formal action to the Director of Research, and to HR.

Before taking action the Director of Research will determine whether there is a case to answer and will then decide to:

Take no further action; or arrange counselling or some other form of support mechanism; or arrange for a full investigation to be carried out as soon as is practicable to determine whether there is a need for a disciplinary hearing.

The extent of the investigation will be determined by the nature and complexity of the allegations and the information already available. In relatively straightforward cases the information already available may be sufficient in itself to enable the Director of Research (in liaison with Human Resources) to decide whether there is a case to answer. Alternatively the Director of Research may appoint someone else as Investigating Officer to undertake an investigation.

Stage 1: Informal enquiries

It is the responsibility of the Director of Research to make a preliminary investigation into all allegations of unacceptable research conduct made against staff or research students. It also applies to those who are not members of RNCM 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.

The Director of Research shall notify the Vice-Principal (Academic) and the Head of Human Resources as soon as an allegation of unacceptable research conduct has been received. The Director of Research would normally complete the investigation within one month.

In the event that the Director of Research is directly involved with the research, the Vice-Principal (Academic) will initiate an investigation into the allegation in as timely a manner as possible.

The research project may be halted when appropriate, and as long as it is safe to do so, until the allegation has been investigated.

The Director of Research 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 Director of Research decides that an investigation is not warranted, he/she will record their justification for that decision in the member of staff's Research Activity Review form for that year and inform the complainant, respondent and Vice-Principal (Academic) of this outcome.

Formal Investigation

If the Director of Research decides that an investigation is warranted, he/she will notify both the respondent and the complainant in writing, the Vice-Principal (Academic) 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 Director of Research will appoint an independent Investigating Officer to undertake the investigation, who will report to the Director of Research. The Investigating Officer must 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 Vice-Principal (Academic) 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.

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 Director of Research. Where an investigation is about someone funded by or engaged with RCUK (including acting as a supervisor for an RCUK 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 RCUK.

The Investigating Officer 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, most importantly, if he/she believes there is a case to answer. The report shall normally be produced within 30 working days of the commencement of the investigation. The report should be sent to the Director of Research.

The report will form the basis on which the Director of Research makes a decision on the need for a disciplinary hearing in accordance with College's disciplinary procedure for staff and students. If it is decided that a disciplinary hearing is required, this will take place as soon as is reasonably practicable and will follow the procedure outlined in the College's staff disciplinary policy or student conduct and discipline policy.

RELATED POLICIES

- Staff Disciplinary Policy and Procedure
- Student Conduct and Discipline Policy
- Public Interest Disclosure Policy