

# ETHICAL GUIDELINES FOR EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

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Fourth edition (2018)

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## ABOUT BERA

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The British Educational Research Association (BERA) is the home of educational research in the United Kingdom. We are a membership association committed to advancing knowledge of education by sustaining a strong and high quality educational research community.

Together with our members, BERA is working to:

- advance research quality
- build research capacity
- foster research engagement.

Since its inception in 1974, BERA has expanded into an internationally renowned association with both UK and non-UK based members. It strives to be inclusive of the diversity of educational research and scholarship, and welcomes members from a wide range of disciplinary backgrounds, theoretical orientations, methodological approaches, sectoral interests and institutional affiliations. It also encourages the development of productive relationships with other associations within and beyond the UK.

Aspiring to be the home of all educational researchers in the UK, BERA provides opportunities for everyone active in this field to contribute through its portfolio of distinguished publications, its world-class conference and other events, and its active peer community, organised around 30 special interest groups. We also recognise excellence in educational research through our range of awards. In addition to our member-focussed activity, we aim to inform the development of policy and practice by promoting the best quality evidence produced by educational research.

As an organisation we are committed to principles of openness, integrity and transparency, and seek to uphold ethical values in all our activities and processes.

# LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear colleague,

On behalf of the Council of the British Educational Research Association (BERA), I am very pleased to present to you our fourth edition (2018) of the *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research*.

Research related to education is varied and complex, rarely amenable to precise measurement or given to all-encompassing solutions to its many challenges. Nevertheless, the continued pursuit of improved knowledge and understanding of all aspects of education is vital for our democracy and social wellbeing. To this end, these guidelines are designed to support educational researchers in conducting research to the highest ethical standards in any and all contexts.

BERA's guidelines unequivocally recognise and celebrate the diversity of approaches in educational research, and promote respect for all those who engage with it: researchers and participants, academics and professional practitioners, commissioning bodies, and those who read and utilise the research. They are not rules and regulations, but they do represent the tenets of best ethical practice that have served our community of researchers well in the past and will continue to do so in the future.

The new guidelines are greatly extended in length in comparison with their predecessors. This has been found appropriate in order to take account of the many changes that have taken place in the last few years, including the rise of social media and online communities, new legislative requirements, and the growing impact on our research of internationalisation and globalisation. As time goes on,

BERA Council will continue to review the guidelines and will update them as necessary. I hope that you will find them of assistance in your work, and that you will commend them to everyone who carries out, participates in or makes use of educational research.

With best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gary McCulloch', written in a cursive style.

Gary McCulloch  
President, British Educational Research Association  
June 2018

# INTRODUCTION

The intended audience for these guidelines is anyone undertaking educational research – be they people whose job description includes research, or others who, for a variety of reasons (including studying for a qualification or with the intention of improving practice), conduct research within the field. This includes both independent researchers and those based in educational institutions of any kind (including but not limited to early years settings, schools, colleges and universities).

The Association expects its members to conduct themselves in a way that reflects its vision, aims and ethical values (as stipulated in the BERA code of conduct<sup>1</sup>). For this reason, the British Educational Research Association (BERA) recommends that members make use of these guidelines (and/or other ethical guidelines, where relevant or required), and expects that they will adhere to their spirit and underlying principles (described later) and apply them with integrity in their research activities so that their actions can be seen to be ethical, justifiable and sound. It is the hope of the Association that these guidelines will attract widespread consideration and use by those engaged in carrying out, sponsoring or using educational research who are not BERA members.

For a great deal of educational research activity, the application of these guidelines will not be problematic, but in some cases dilemmas may arise. We recognise that since few ethical dilemmas have obvious or singular solutions, researchers will take different and creative approaches to resolving them. Certain dilemmas are flagged up within these guidelines, but others that cannot be covered here will also arise. Guidelines that state what action

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1 British Educational Research Association [BERA] (2017) 'BERA Handbook: Member Code of Conduct', London. <https://www.bera.ac.uk/about/bera-handbook>

'should' be taken may not be appropriate to all circumstances; in particular, different cultural contexts are likely to require situated judgments. Furthermore, some kinds of research may require ethical clearance from other bodies, such as the National Health Service (NHS), which commit researchers to acting in accordance with their guidelines. In sum, and for each research project, researchers will need to devise specific ethical courses of action which may incorporate elements from more than one set of guidelines – those of both the NHS and BERA, for example. To do this, they may draw on ethical approaches that reflect a range of philosophical orientations (virtue ethics, or deontological ethics, for example). It is adherence to the *spirit* of the guidelines that we consider most vital to protect all who are involved in or affected by a piece of research. In addition to these guidelines, support and links to related resources are offered wherever possible.<sup>2</sup>

We recommend that at all stages of a project – from planning through conduct to reporting – educational researchers undertake wide consultation to identify relevant ethical issues, including listening to those in the research context/site(s), stakeholders and sponsors. This means that ethical decision-making becomes an actively deliberative, ongoing and iterative process of assessing and reassessing the situation and issues as they arise.

BERA recommends that researchers bring these guidelines to the attention of those they work with – including, for example, participants, stakeholders, sponsors and commissioners of research, schools and other organisations – and encourage and support those contacts to engage with them. BERA hopes that these guidelines will inform the training of students enrolled on education and research degrees, and recommends that local ethical review

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2 Furthermore, it is BERA's ambition to produce and publish a series of case studies that illustrate how researchers have put ethical guidelines and principles into practice within specific projects and contexts. This document, and its associated webpages, will be updated with details of these case study publications as and when they are published.



procedures make use of them in support of their own work.

It is recommended that, in addition to vetting applications, committees should consider how to foster opportunities for follow-up dialogue to reveal whether and how researchers have acted in consideration of BERA and/or local ethical principles throughout an entire study.

The guidelines are intended to promote *active and concrete responses* following from a deliberation of the issues. Researchers and their students and collaborators should – in their research proposals, reports, funding applications, work with schools and so on – explicitly indicate *how* they are adhering to those points included in these guidelines that are salient to their work.

It is recognised that educational researchers whose work is conducted under the auspices of an educational institution will be required to seek ethical review and clearance from that institution. These guidelines are, therefore, intended to inform and support researchers as they develop their ethical thinking and practice.

### *Aspirations of educational researchers*

Educational researchers aim to extend knowledge and understanding in all areas of educational activity and from all perspectives, including those of learners, educators, policymakers and the public. The Association recognises that the community of educational researchers is multidisciplinary and diverse in its application of research approaches and philosophical positions. Concepts such as 'data', 'reliability', 'validity', 'credibility', 'trustworthiness', 'subjectivity' and 'objectivity' may therefore be understood and legitimately applied in different ways. Ethical review processes thus need to be conducted in an open-minded and inclusive manner.

These guidelines do not pre-empt, judge or constrain, directly or indirectly, anyone's choice of research approach.

### *Principles underpinning the guidelines*

The Association endorses the set of ethical principles agreed in 2015 by the Academy of Social Sciences (AcSS)<sup>3</sup> through in-depth consultation with its member learned societies (including BERA). These principles are as follows.

- a. Social science is fundamental to a democratic society, and should be inclusive of different interests, values, funders, methods and perspectives.
- b. All social science should respect the privacy, autonomy, diversity, values and dignity of individuals, groups and communities.
- c. All social science should be conducted with integrity throughout, employing the most appropriate methods for the research purpose.
- d. All social scientists should act with regard to their social responsibilities in conducting and disseminating their research.
- e. All social science should aim to maximise benefit and minimise harm.<sup>4</sup>

All five of the AcSS's principles above are reflected (explicitly or implicitly) in the various sections of the BERA guidelines that follow, and they are consistent with the ethical principles of respect that have been developed through previous iterations of BERA's guidelines. The Association believes that

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3 Academy of Social Sciences [AcSS] (2015) 'Five Ethics Principles for Social Science Research', London. <https://www.acss.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/5-Ethics-Principles-for-Social-Science-Research-Flyer.pdf>

4 Reproduced from AcSS 2015.

all educational research should be conducted within an *ethic of respect* for: the person; knowledge; democratic values; the quality of educational research; and academic freedom. *Trust* is a further essential element within the relationship between researcher and researched, as is the expectation that researchers will accept responsibility for their actions. These are the collective principles that we ask members and those using the guidelines to commit to and engage with when making decisions in their research.

Applying an ethic of respect may reveal tensions or challenges. For example, there will usually be a need to balance research aspirations, societal concerns, institutional expectations and individual rights. It is recommended that researchers undertake a risk-benefit analysis, beginning at the earliest stage of research planning, to reflect on how different stakeholder groups and the application of this ethic of respect can be considered in the research design.

In guiding researchers on their conduct within this framework, the Association sets out its guidelines under the following five headings:

- responsibilities to participants
- responsibilities to sponsors, clients and stakeholders in research
- responsibilities to the community of educational researchers
- responsibilities for publication and dissemination
- responsibilities for researchers' wellbeing and development.

# GUIDELINES

## Responsibilities to participants

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1. The British Educational Research Association (BERA) believes that educational researchers should operate within an ethic of respect for any persons – including themselves – involved in or touched by the research they are undertaking. Individuals should be treated fairly, sensitively, and with dignity and freedom from prejudice, in recognition of both their rights and of differences arising from age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class, nationality, cultural identity, partnership status, faith, disability, political belief or any other significant characteristic.
2. The Association expects researchers to be mindful of the ways in which structural inequalities – those, for example, associated with ‘race’, gender, LBGT+ issues and socio-economic status – affect all social relationships, including those that are formed in the course of research. Where relevant, attention should be paid to the ways in which such inequalities specifically affect children and young people, and their relationships. Sensitivity and attentiveness towards such structural issues are important aspects of researchers’ responsibilities to participants at all stages of research, including reporting and publication.
3. Participants in research may be actively or passively involved in such processes as observation, experiment, auto/biographical reflection, survey or test. They may be collaborators or colleagues in the research process, or they may simply be implicated in the context in

which a research project takes place. (For example, in a teacher or lecturer's research into their own professional practice, students or colleagues will be part of the context, but will not themselves be the focus of that research.) It is important for researchers to take account of the rights and interests of those indirectly affected by their research, and to consider whether action is appropriate – for example, they should consider whether it is necessary to provide information or obtain informed consent. In rare cases – for instance, in some politically volatile settings, or where researchers are investigating illegal activity, including suspected abuse – covert research may be defensible. In such cases approval must be obtained from an institutional ethics review committee.

4. Where research draws on social media and online communities, it is important to remember that digital information is generated by individuals. Researchers should not assume that the name given and/or identity presented by participants in online fora or media is a 'real' name: it might be an avatar. This avatar could represent a human or a bot, but behind either will be one or more human creators responsible for it, who could therefore be regarded as participants; whether and how these potential participants might be traceable should be considered. Where an organisation shares its data with researchers, those researchers have a responsibility to account for how and with what consent that data was gathered; they must also consider the authorship of that data and, consequently, whether it is necessary to independently approach the relevant individuals for consent concerning its use. Researchers should keep up to date with changes in data use regulations and advice.

5. Researchers have a responsibility to consider what the most relevant and useful ways are of informing participants about the outcomes of the research in which they were or are involved. They could consider whether and how to engage with participants at the conclusion of the research by, for example, debriefing them in an audience-friendly format, or by eliciting feedback on the findings. Should conflicting interpretations arise, researchers should normally reflect participants' views when reporting the research. Researchers may wish to offer them copies of any publications arising from projects in which they have participated, or to produce reports specially tailored for the research context, taking into consideration potential subsequent uses of this material, including by the participants' institutions. Where the scale of the research makes such a consideration impractical, alternative means such as a website could be used to ensure that participants are informed of the outcomes and the ways in which they are able to engage with them.
6. Researchers also have a responsibility to consider how to balance maximising the benefits and minimising any risk or harm to participants, sponsors, the community of educational researchers and educational professionals more widely – while again recognising that irresolvable tensions may need to be addressed. At times, some benefits to participants may be compromised in order to achieve other gains or goals, but these compromises should be justifiable and, where possible, explicitly accounted for.
7. Researchers should not undertake work for which they are not competent.

**Adherence to an ethic of respect implies the following responsibilities on the part of researchers.**

## Consent

8. It is normally expected that participants' voluntary informed consent to be involved in a study will be obtained at the start of the study, and that researchers will remain sensitive and open to the possibility that participants may wish, for any reason and at any time, to withdraw their consent. The Association takes voluntary informed and ongoing consent to be the condition by which participants understand and agree to their participation, and the terms and practicalities of it, without any duress, prior to the research getting underway. It should be made clear to participants that they can withdraw at any point without needing to provide an explanation – this is detailed in sections 31 and 32 below.
  
9. Researchers should do everything they can to ensure that all potential participants understand, as well as they can, what is involved in a study. They should be told why their participation is necessary, what they will be asked to do, what will happen to the information they provide, how that information will be used and how and to whom it will be reported. They also should be informed about the retention, sharing and any possible secondary uses of the research data. Where appropriate, researchers who are BERA members will include a declaration of membership in information sheets and consent forms, to make explicit the fact that members are expected to follow BERA guidance as part of the Association's code of conduct<sup>5</sup> (which contains a complaints procedure that may be helpful<sup>6</sup>).
  
10. Participants may be willing to take part in research even though they are unable to be fully informed about the implications of their participation – perhaps due to their

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5 BERA (2017).

6 BERA (2017): paragraphs 19–29.

unfamiliarity with research, a lack of ability to understand, or their circumstances. In these situations, researchers and participants should negotiate consent within relationships of mutual trust, the credibility of which depends upon the integrity and trustworthiness of the researcher.

11. The institutions and settings within which the research is set also have an interest in the research, and ought to be considered in the process of gaining consent. Researchers should think about whether they should approach gatekeepers before directly approaching participants, and about whether they should adopt an institution's own ethical approval and safeguarding procedures; this is usually a requirement. (Furthermore, in some circumstances researchers may have a statutory duty to disclose confidential information to relevant authorities; see section 52.) Particularly when researching in more than one language or culture, researchers should consider the effects of translation and/or interpretation on participants' understandings of what is involved.
12. In many cases the producers of publicly accessible data may not have considered the fact that it might be used for research purposes, and it should not be assumed that such data is available for researchers to use without consent. Researchers should be attuned to differences between, for example, policy documents, governing body minutes and charitable trust reports that are written with the expectation that they are available for public use or accountability, and data that appear to be in the public domain yet are produced for a range of purposes (in blogs, social media, online discussion forums, face-to-face presentations or meetings, for example). Seeking consent would not normally be expected for data that have been produced expressly for public use. There is no consensus, however, as to whether those in online communities perceive their



data to be either public or private, even when copyrights are waived. Therefore, consent is an issue to be addressed with regard to each and any online data-source, with consideration given to the presumed intent of the creators of online content, the extent to which it identifies individuals or institutions, and the sensitivity of the data. See the sources listed in the below footnote for further guidance.<sup>7</sup>

13. Consideration should be given to whether and how best to approach online communities (through members, gatekeepers or moderators, for example), or those involved in face-to-face public events and spaces, in order to inform them about the intended research.
14. When working with secondary or documentary data, the sensitivity of the data, who created it, the intended audience of its creators, its original purpose and its intended uses in the research are all important considerations. If secondary data concerning participants are to be reused, ownership of the datasets should be determined, and the owners consulted to ascertain whether they can give consent on behalf of the participants. Sometimes it may be deemed

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7 Economic and Social Research Council (no date) 'Internet-mediated research', webpage. <https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/research-ethics/frequently-raised-topics/internet-mediated-research/>

Hewson C, Buchanan T, Brown I, Coulson N, Hagger-Johnson G, Joinson A, Krotoski A and Oates J (2013) *Ethics Guidelines for internet-mediated research*, London: British Psychological Society. <https://www.bps.org.uk/news-and-policy/ethics-guidelines-internet-mediated-research-2017>

Markham A and Buchanan E (2012) 'Ethical decision-making and Internet research 2.0: Recommendations from the AoIR ethics working committee (Version 2.0)', Chicago: Association of Internet Researchers. <http://aoir.org/reports/ethics2.pdf>

Townsend L and Wallace C (2016) *Social Media Research: A Guide to Ethics*, Aberdeen: University of Aberdeen and Economic and Social Research Council. <http://www.dotrural.ac.uk/social-media-research-ethics/>

Zevenbergen B (ed) (2016) 'Networked Systems Ethics', webpage. <http://networkedsystemsethics.net>

appropriate to accept consent from hosts of the data such as a depository on behalf of contributors.

15. It is accepted that, sometimes, gaining consent from all concerned in public spaces (face-to-face or virtual, past or present) will not be feasible; however, attempts to make contact should be documented. In the event of a secondary source being untraceable, researchers should be able to evidence their attempts to gain consent.
16. In circumstances in which some members of a group (such as students in a class or their parents/guardians) have not given consent to participate, researchers should decide whether this was an *active* refusal of consent, in which case they would need to respect this and find a practical solution. For those who it is not possible to contact, a decision should be taken as to how it might be appropriate to proceed, in conjunction with gatekeepers or other stakeholders.
17. In ethnographic and observational studies, the level of analysis in group-focussed research should be taken into account where some members of the group refuse consent. If the research aims to understand the roles of *individuals* within the group then these members must not be included in the research. However, to the extent that the research is concerned with the *group* dynamic as a whole (for example, within a classroom), consenting individuals' interactions with the non-consenting individuals may still be significant to the research.
18. Specific issues also arise with respect to consent within large-scale randomised control trials across research settings. Institutional leaders may agree to take part, acting as gatekeepers on behalf of members (such as

teachers and students in schools). In order to ensure that *all participants* are as fully informed as possible about the costs and benefits of the study, researchers should offer both information and support. This may result in participants exercising their right to opt out within the parameters of the intervention. Where stratified random sampling is used, it may be appropriate to select more participants than necessary so that where institutions or individuals drop out, they can be replaced from the randomised pool. However, the potential explanations for dropout would normally be discussed with the research sponsor and the implications addressed in the report.

19. An important consideration is the extent to which a researcher's reflective research into their own practice impinges upon others – for example, in the case of power relationships arising from the dual roles of teacher/ lecturer/manager and researcher, and their impact on students and colleagues. Dual roles may also introduce explicit tensions in areas such as confidentiality. These may be addressed appropriately by, for example, making the researcher role very explicit; involving an independent third party in the research process; seeking agreement for politically controversial research; and ensuring that researcher identity remains confidential. Researchers who are researching their own practice should also consider how to address any tensions arising between collecting data for different purposes – for example, using for research purposes data collected for evaluation purposes, or vice versa.
20. In some cases, potential participants may not be in a social position vis a vis the researcher that enables them to easily give unrestrained informed consent. This can occur when the researcher and potential participant are

family members, or if the researcher is the participant's teacher/lecturer. Researchers need to carefully consider how to deal with such situations and, if they can, should reassure such potential participants that non-participation is acceptable.

21. Researchers using auto/biographical approaches and autoethnography need to consider how their work implicates other people, and what the consequences may be for individuals who, although not directly involved in a study, may be identifiable through their relationship with the researcher or other participants; consent may need to be sought from these individuals in some cases.
22. BERA expects that the same ethical principles will be applied to research undertaken by UK researchers outside of the UK as to research undertaken by them within the UK. The application of these principles in different social, cultural and political contexts requires careful negotiation, adaptation and sensitivity, and there is ultimately no substitute for the good conscience and ethical code of the individual researcher. In some countries it is advisable to work with a local person as co-researcher/co-investigator in order to establish adequate levels of trust with prospective local participants. Appropriate permission should be sought from relevant authorities (such as community or religious leaders or local government officials) in cultures that adopt a collective approach to consent. However, cultural sensitivity should not extend to excluding the individuals concerned from making their own informed decisions to take part in the research.
23. BERA's principles of consent apply to children and young people as well as to adults. However, researchers may make different decisions as they deem appropriate

for children and young people of different ages and capacities. BERA endorses the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)<sup>8</sup>; the best interests of the child are the primary consideration, and children who are capable of forming their own views should be granted the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting them, commensurate with their age and maturity.

24. Researchers following the UNCRC will take into account the rights and duties of those who have legal responsibility for children, such as those who act in guardianship (parents, for example) or as 'responsible others' (that is, those who have responsibility for the welfare and wellbeing of the participants, such as social workers). This may involve gaining the consent of those responsible for children, such as a parent or guardian.
25. In the case of participants whose capacity, age or other vulnerable circumstance may limit the extent to which they can be expected to understand or agree voluntarily to participate, researchers should fully explore ways in which they can be supported to participate with assent in the research. In such circumstances, researchers should also seek the collaboration and approval of those responsible for such participants.
26. Opt-in or opt-out procedures of gaining consent could be considered, as appropriate for the context; however, researchers have a responsibility to consult local legislation

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8 See Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills [Ofsted] (2012) 'Young People's Guide to The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)', London. <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/publication/guide-to-the-uncrc/>

and laws,<sup>9</sup> particularly with regard to whether gaining opt-out consent is permissible. Participants' trust in the wider value of the research beyond the researcher's personal interests might be gained by including an endorsement from a senior leader within the institution/organisation where research is being carried out. (Researchers may need to weigh up competing ethical and methodological considerations – for example, taking steps to maximise opportunities to opt out where that method is selected, in order to reduce otherwise unavoidable sampling bias.)

## Transparency

27. Researchers should aim to be open and honest with participants and other stakeholders, avoiding non-disclosure unless their research design specifically requires it in order to ensure that the appropriate data are collected, or that the welfare of the researchers is not put in jeopardy.

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9 In the context of the European Union, 'Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016' (General Data Protection Regulation, or GDPR) is enforceable as of 25 May 2018, and is 'designed to harmonize data privacy laws across Europe, to protect and empower all EU citizens data privacy and to reshape the way organizations across the region approach data privacy' (<https://www.eugdpr.org/>). It defines 'consent' and conditions for it, and describes its implications for the lawfulness of processing personal data.

The UK Information Commissioner's Office, which publishes a guide to the GDPR, suggests that the provisions in this legislation directly relevant to the issue of consent are articles 4(11), 6(1)(a), 7, 8 and 9(2)(a), and recitals 32, 38, 40, 42, 43 and 171 (see <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-the-general-data-protection-regulation-gdpr/lawful-basis-for-processing/consent/>).

**For articles:** Council of the European Union and European Parliament (2016) 'Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data, and repealing Directive 95/46/EC (General Data Protection Regulation) (Text with EEA relevance)', Brussels. <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/3e485e15-11bd-11e6-ba9a-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

**For recitals:** Intersoft Consulting (no date) 'Recitals', General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), online database. <https://gdpr-info.eu/recitals/>

See paragraphs 60–62 of these guidelines for further discussion of GDPR.

Decisions to use non-disclosure in research should be the subject of full, principled deliberation and subsequent disclosure in reporting, and institutional ethical clearance should be obtained before using it. BERA recommends that if researchers are not employed or enrolled in settings where they are subject to institutional procedures they should seek to gain approval for any course of action involving non-disclosure by approaching a local or institutional ethics body and asking if their work can be reviewed. In any event, if it is possible to do so, researchers should seek consent on a post-hoc basis in cases in which it was not desirable to seek it before undertaking the research.

28. Principles of consent also apply to possible reuse of data. This covers two different possible future uses: secondary data analysis by the same research team to address new research questions, or the sharing of the dataset for use by other researchers. In both cases, if data are to be reused, this should be made clear as a possibility when gaining initial consent. It is recommended that only anonymised and disaggregated data should be archived for sharing with other researchers beyond the original research team, and that researchers minimise the possibility that traces of identity retained within anonymised digital data can lead to the identification of participants. Researchers should explain to potential participants how long data will be stored for if it is to be reused.
29. Where research has been sponsored or commissioned this should be made explicit to potential participants and other stakeholders, and in reports of the research and other publications, in the interests of both transparency and acknowledgement.

30. Researchers should not undertake work in which they can be perceived to have a conflict of interest, or in which self-interest or commercial gain might compromise the objectivity of the research.

### *Right to withdraw*

31. Researchers should recognise the right of all participants to withdraw from the research for any or no reason, and at any time, and participants should be informed of this right. Researchers should always provide their own contact details to participants. In all such circumstances researchers should examine their own actions to assess whether they have contributed to the decision to withdraw, and whether a change of approach might persuade the participants to re-engage. In most cases the appropriate course of action will be for the researchers to accept the participant's decision to withdraw. Decisions to persuade them to re-engage should be taken with care, and payment, coercion or duress of any form must not be used. However, in cases in which participants are required by a contractual obligation to participate (for example, when mandated as part of their employment to facilitate an evaluation study) researchers may have proper recourse to a third party (the employing authority in this example) to request compliance.
32. In online research contexts, if authors of postings or other material withdraw or delete data then that data should not be used in research. However, since it will not be possible for researchers to identify such withdrawals after data has been harvested, a proviso could be offered that the data were 'as made available to the public at the [stated] date of harvesting'.



## *Incentives*

33. Researchers' use of incentives to encourage participation should be commensurate with good sense, such that the level of incentive does not impinge on the free decision to participate. Payment for participation in educational research is generally discouraged, not least because of the extra burden of cost that the extension of this practice would place on the practice of research.<sup>10</sup> The use of incentives should be acknowledged in any reporting of the research.

## *Harm arising from participation in research*

34. Ethical research design and execution aim to both put participants at their ease and avoid making excessive demands on them. In advance of data collection, researchers have a responsibility to think through their duty of care in order to recognise potential risks, and to prepare for and be in a position to minimise and manage any distress or discomfort that may arise. Researchers should immediately reconsider any actions occurring during the research process that appear to cause emotional or other harm, in order to minimise such harm. The more vulnerable the participants, the greater the responsibilities of the researcher for their protection.
35. Researchers should make known to the participants (or their guardians or responsible others) any predictable disadvantage or harm potentially arising from the process or reporting of the research. Any unexpected harm to participants that arises during the research should be brought immediately to their attention, or to the attention of their guardians or responsible others as appropriate.

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10 The Association notes that incentives to participate in research may be more commonly offered, and may not necessarily be considered bad practice, in disciplines other than educational research.

36. Researchers should take steps to minimise the effects of research designs that advantage or are perceived to advantage one group of participants over others. For example, in an experimental design (including a randomised control study), the intervention made available to one group, while being unavailable to the control or comparison group, may be viewed as desirable. In mitigation, for example, an intervention emerging as effective can typically be offered to control groups after the end of a trial.
37. The rights of individuals should be balanced against any potential social benefits of the research, and the researcher's right to conduct research in the service of public understanding. The researcher's obligations to the wider research community and to public understanding may, in some circumstances, outweigh the researcher's obligations to act in accordance with the wishes of those in positions of economic, legal or political authority over the participants (such as employers, headteachers or government officials in oppressive regimes).
38. Researchers should recognise concerns relating to the time and effort that participation in some research can require – the long-term involvement of participants in ethnographic studies, for example, and the repeated involvement of particular participants in survey research or in testing for research or evaluation purposes. Researchers should consider the impact of their research on the lives and workloads of participants, particularly when researching vulnerable or over-researched populations.
39. During the research process (especially in longitudinal or ethnographic studies), if unforeseen consequences arise – in terms of human relationships or life experiences, for example – it may be appropriate to go back to the participants,

gatekeepers or sponsors in order to renegotiate consent.

### *Privacy and data storage*

40. The confidential and anonymous treatment of participants' data is considered the norm for the conduct of research. Researchers should recognise the entitlement of both institutions and individual participants to privacy, and should accord them their rights to confidentiality and anonymity. This could involve employing 'fictionalising' approaches when reporting, and where using such approaches researchers should fully explain how and why they have done so. However, in some circumstances individual participants, or their guardians or responsible others, may want to specifically and willingly waive their right to confidentiality and anonymity: researchers should recognise participants' rights to be identified in any publication of their original works or other inputs if they so wish.
  
41. It is also acknowledged that anonymity may not be possible in some contexts and cases. For example, if conducting fieldwork within a small, close-knit community, it may be impossible to prevent some members of that community becoming aware – either through observation or because participants discuss it with them – of some details about the research that is being conducted. Similarly, when researching a very well-known institution, it may be possible for some readers to infer the identity of that institution even from a fully anonymised account of that research. Furthermore, approaches to this issue differ according to the type of research being undertaken: for instance, the maintenance of confidentiality and anonymity is not considered the norm for research using historical or archival data, nor is it achievable for autoethnographic work published under the author/researcher's name.

42. Anonymity may also need to be reconsidered in the context of some visual methodologies and participatory methods. For instance, the study of facial expressions and gestures and the increasing prevalence of video and multimodal data raise questions about whether concealing identities is always appropriate. Researchers may need to negotiate an ethical course of action here – one that secures very clear agreement about anonymity and about subsequent use of the data. Researchers need to be aware that visual material could be misused by others (for example, as an example of poor practice), and should take steps to prevent this as far as possible.
43. Any changes to the degree of anonymity afforded to participants should be considered in the light of potential harm that may be caused by doing so and, in particular, the rights to confidentiality of other individual participants or institutions. In some circumstances, potential changes may require renegotiation of consent, or may be decided against if they would impinge on the rights of others. Where this happens, researchers will need to lodge the fact that there has been a change of circumstances with their institutional ethics committee, and seek updated clearance. It is in the researcher's interests to obtain any waiver of anonymity, or request for identification, in writing.
44. While many sponsors require researchers to make anonymised versions of data available for secondary analysis, this situation is rapidly changing. In future, sponsors may expect researchers to share with them un-anonymised, fully identifiable data that can be linked with other data that they hold. It is thus extremely important that in seeking consent from participants, researchers make it very explicit what kinds of data (if any) are later to be shared.

45. Researchers need to be aware of the possible consequences to participants should it prove possible for them to be identified by association or inference. They should take all reasonable precautions to avoid identification – for example, by fictionalising or by changing identifying features that may leave participants in peril when the researcher has departed (from overseas or sensitive settings in particular).
46. Anonymity is much harder to guarantee in digital contexts. The policies of some social media sites which require identification at signup may exacerbate this. Researchers need to be aware that participants' understandings of their level of privacy in a particular online space may be inaccurate. Ambiguity about privacy within some online communities in which sensitive or illegal topics are being discussed, or material shared, raise further ethical concerns. Relatedly, researchers should consider the question of what online content, in what circumstances, they would be obligated to report to relevant authorities and/or online service providers, bearing in mind any agreements entered into regarding confidentiality and anonymity (see paragraphs 52 and 53, on disclosure). Researchers using data gathered in such contexts should inform the community concerned about how the data will be used.
47. Tensions may be raised between a participant's voice and authentic response on the one hand, and anonymity on the other hand where, for instance, participants take photographs or video recordings in the context of visual ethnography. Researchers need to use their judgment about the appropriateness of anonymity in such circumstances.
48. Researchers must comply with the legal requirements in relation to the storage and use of personal data as stipulated in the UK by the Data Protection Act (1998)

and any subsequent similar acts, including, from May 2018, its replacement: the much stricter General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).<sup>11</sup> In essence, citizens are entitled to know how and why their personal data is being stored, to what uses it is being put and to whom it may be made available. Researchers must have participants' explicit permission to disclose personal information to third parties, and are required to ensure that such parties are permitted to have access to that information. They are also required to independently confirm the identity of such persons to their own satisfaction, and must keep a record of any disclosures. The GDPR defines personal data more broadly as 'any information relating to an identified or identifiable person', and requires that sensitive personal data is given additional protection. Record-keeping and reporting of breaches are mandatory and compliance must be proven. Organisations such as schools may require a data protection policy and a named data protection officer.

49. The UK Data Protection Act (1998) and the GDPR that supersedes it also confer the right to private citizens to have access to any personal data that is stored, and which relates to them. Researchers seeking to exploit legal exclusions to these rights must have a clear justification. The Freedom of Information Act (2000) is applicable to requests for access to data held by public authorities, including state schools, but research data in these settings would be exempt from such requests where explicit confidentiality arrangements are in place. The release of such information would be a breach of personal confidence.<sup>12</sup>

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11 Council of the European Union and European Parliament (2016).

12 See the advice on the Freedom of Information Act (2000) published by the Information Commissioner's Office: <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-freedom-of-information/what-is-the-foi-act/>.

50. Researchers should ensure that data are kept securely, and that the form of any publication (including those published online) does not directly or indirectly lead to a breach of agreed confidentiality and anonymity. Measures recommended by the National Foundation for Educational Research (and in some cases required by GDPR) include, for example: the use of secure computer networks; ensuring that data is stored on secure premises; the use of password protection and data encryption; avoiding portable data storage devices such as laptops and USB sticks; using courier or secure electronic transfer when moving data; anonymising records; and ensuring that any third-party users of the data agree to a data-sharing agreement so that the same assurances are given for the protection of data. It is also advisable to avoid sharing data via email and other media that are vulnerable to hacking.
51. In an international context, researchers should be aware that it will not be possible to protect data stored within some political jurisdictions from scrutiny within that jurisdiction – and should take appropriate steps to ensure its security elsewhere.

### *Disclosure*

52. Researchers who judge that the agreements they have made with participants about confidentiality and anonymity will allow the continuation of illegal behaviour which has come to light in the course of the research should carefully consider making disclosure to the appropriate authorities. If behaviour reported by participants is likely to be harmful to the participants or to others, the researchers must also consider disclosure. In some cases, such as revelations of abuse or proposed acts of terror, researchers may be under statutory duty to disclose confidential information

to relevant authorities, and they must be aware of these responsibilities. Researchers should seek advice from a relevant responsible person before proceeding to disclosure if and when appropriate (students should seek advice from supervisors). Insofar as it does not undermine or obviate the disclosure, or jeopardise researcher safety, researchers should inform the participants, or their guardians or responsible others, of their intentions and reasons for disclosure. In some parts of the world low-level corruption is so endemic that it may be encountered very often. In such contexts, researchers will have to make a situated judgement as to what, if anything, to report, what to describe and what to accept.

53. At all times, the decision to override agreements on confidentiality and anonymity should be taken after careful and thorough deliberation. In such circumstances it is in the researcher's interests to make contemporaneous notes on decisions and the reasoning behind them, in case a misconduct complaint or other serious consequence arises. The researcher should also consider very carefully whether overriding confidentiality and anonymity compromises the integrity and/or usefulness of data, and withdraw any compromised data from the study.

## **Responsibilities to sponsors, clients and stakeholders in research**

54. A stakeholder of research is considered to be any person or body who has a direct interest in its framing and success. A sponsor of research is considered to be a stakeholder that funds or commissions research (such as a research charity or philanthropic foundation, a national research council or other government body, or a non-governmental organisation),



or that facilitates it by allowing and enabling access to resources needed to carry out the research, such as data and participants (an examinations body, for example).

55. Written contracts are considered the norm for funded or commissioned research. Such agreements should, wherever possible and especially in the case of publicly funded research, take into account the rights of the public within a democracy to have open access to the results of research. They should minimally cover the purpose of the research, the research methods to be used, any conditions of access to data or participants, ownership of data, the researcher's right to publish, requirements for reporting and dissemination (including the need for transparency), and deadlines for completion of the work and the accounting for the use of funds. In recognition of the dynamics of research, agreements should also include provision for negotiating changes sought by either the researchers or the sponsors.
56. It is in researchers' interests that respective responsibilities and entitlements should be agreed with sponsors at the outset of the research. Where the sponsor acts essentially as a host or facilitator for research, researchers should, out of courtesy, inform them of the work they propose to undertake. For example, a group of teachers engaging in a process of action research as part of curriculum renewal should inform the school management of their intentions.
57. In negotiating sponsorship for their research, researchers should provide honest and complete details of their competence and capacity to undertake the research that is proposed. Researchers are encouraged to think carefully about how they position themselves and their research design, analysis and interpretation in relation to the interests of their sponsors and stakeholders. Any conflicts

of interest or compromises to the integrity of the research must be made clear and open to scrutiny.

58. Researchers should acknowledge sponsors of and participants in their studies in any publications or dissemination activities.

## *Methods*

59. These guidelines should not be interpreted as privileging particular research approaches or methods over others: the Association respects the diverse range of possible approaches. Those researchers who prefer or promote specific methods, theories or philosophies of research should have knowledge of alternative approaches sufficient to assure sponsors that they have considered these, and that the needs of the research are being properly addressed. Sponsors should be offered a full, honest and accessible justification for the final choice of methods.
60. Researchers should, within the context and boundaries of their chosen methods, theories and philosophies of research, communicate the extent to which their data collection and analysis techniques, and the inferences to be drawn from their findings, are robust and can be seen to meet the criteria and markers of quality and integrity applied within different research approaches.

## **Responsibilities to the community of educational researchers**

61. The 'community of educational researchers' is considered to mean all those engaged in educational research – including, for example, students following research-based programmes of study and independent researchers, as well as staff who

conduct educational research in their employment within organisations such as universities, schools, local and national government, charities and commercial bodies.

62. All educational researchers should aim to protect the integrity and reputation of educational research by ensuring that they conduct their research to the highest standards. Researchers should contribute to the community spirit of critical analysis and constructive criticism that generates improvement in practice and enhancement of knowledge.
63. Educational researchers should not criticise their peers in a defamatory or unprofessional manner, in any medium.
64. It is recommended that researchers, in communications or published information about research projects, identify an appropriate contact whom participants or other research stakeholders can contact in order to raise questions or concerns, including those concerning formal complaints procedures.
65. Where researchers, participants or other stakeholders become aware of examples of malpractice or potential malpractice by a researcher, they are advised to contact the appropriate individual, organisation or authority and raise their concern, following an established complaints procedure. If there is no established complaints procedure, the complainant should respect the researcher's right to respond and, with due consideration of the important principle of the public's right to know, they should avoid bringing the community into disrepute through public accusations or allegations. This is relevant, for example, in the case of potential social media trolling as it relates to commenting on research.

66. In any instance in which a stakeholder or member of the public raises a concern or makes a complaint, researchers have a duty to consider how to respond with appropriate action.
67. Plagiarism is the unattributed use of text and/or data, presented as if they were by the plagiarist. The (2008) Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) guidelines<sup>13</sup> (to which all BERA journals subscribe) stipulate that all sources should be disclosed, and if large amounts of other people's (or the researcher's own) written or illustrative material are to be used, permission must be sought and acknowledgement made. In clear cases of plagiarism, the author should be contacted in writing, ideally enclosing documentary evidence. If no response is received, the COPE advice is to 'contact the author's institution requesting your concern is passed to the author's superior and/or person responsible for research governance'.<sup>14</sup>
68. Attribution should include explicitly recognising authors of digital content, in all cases in which an author or creator can be identified. As well as text, this includes images, diagrams, presentations, multimedia content and other forms of content. Researchers need to be aware that a great deal of digital content is subject to copyright, and cannot be freely reused or modified unless it is explicitly licensed as such – for example by means of one of the 'Creative Commons' (CC) licences.<sup>15</sup> Authors retain copyright of CC-licensed material (which may be published in print or digitally), but choose to permit reuse, distribution and sometimes

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13 See <https://publicationethics.org/resources/guidelines>.

14 Committee on Publication Ethics (2008) 'What to do if you suspect plagiarism: (b) Suspected plagiarism in a published article', Eastleigh. [https://publicationethics.org/files/u2/02B\\_Plagiarism\\_Published.pdf](https://publicationethics.org/files/u2/02B_Plagiarism_Published.pdf)

15 See <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/>.

adaptation, depending on the licence terms; any copies or modifications have to be made available under the original licence terms and must link to that license. Researchers have the responsibility of checking the conditions for reuse, and for attributing the author(s) in all cases.<sup>16</sup>

69. Subject to any limitations imposed by agreements to protect confidentiality and anonymity, researchers should endeavour to make their data and methods amenable to reasonable external scrutiny. Ideally, researchers will make shareable anonymised versions of data available for secondary analysis. They should be fully aware (and make participants aware) of when funding bodies require this (as is typically the case with UK government funding).
70. Assessment of the quality of the evidence supporting any inferences is an especially important feature of any research, and should be open to scrutiny. Where sponsors initiate a request for scrutiny, and disclosure of aspects of the data may be injurious to participants, researchers should consider assuring the sponsor of the integrity of the work through the scrutiny of a mutually acceptable third party, who would also be bound by any existing non-disclosure agreements.
71. Negative results of interventions and evaluations should be reported. Evaluations should be registered beforehand with an official body that maintains a platform for this purpose<sup>17</sup>

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16 For helpful guidance for schools on 'open educational resources' (OER) – learning materials published under an open licence that allows anyone to 'use, share and build on' those resources free of charge – see the resources published by Leicester City Council: <https://schools.leicester.gov.uk/services/planning-and-property/building-schools-for-the-future-bsf/open-education-for-schools/>.

17 Examples of such registries include the American Economic Association's registry for randomised controlled trials (see <https://www.socialscienceregistry.org/>), and the World Health Organization's International Clinical Trials Registry Platform (see <http://www.who.int/ictpr/en/>).

(many sponsors require this in the UK). A condition of registration is that researchers report the results of their research – including negative results – in full at the specified end-date of a project. It should therefore allay any concerns that negative results will be withheld.

## Responsibilities for publication and dissemination

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72. Educational researchers should communicate their findings, and the practical significance of their research, in a clear, straightforward fashion, and in language judged appropriate to the intended audience(s). Researchers have a responsibility to make the results of their research public for the benefit of educational professionals, policymakers and the wider public, subject only to the provisos indicated in subsequent paragraphs. They should not accept contractual terms that obstruct their exercise of this responsibility.
73. Where research is conducted in international settings in which English is not the prevalent language, researchers should seek to make the fruits of their research available in a language that makes it locally as well as internationally accessible.
74. To assist researchers in making the results of their research public, consideration should be given to providing open access (without a paywall) to published research findings. In the UK, researchers can use the UK Scholarly Communications Licence<sup>18</sup> to make peer-reviewed manuscripts publicly available using a Creative Commons licence (see section 68 above). Public sponsors of research, such as the UK Research

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18 See <http://ukscl.ac.uk/>.

Councils, may also require research to be published open-access. Mindful of the potential impact of research findings outside of academia or specific educational institutions and organisations, researchers should think carefully about the implications of publishing in outlets that restrict public access to their findings.

75. Researchers acting as consultants should be particularly aware of potential constraints upon publishing findings from projects which their institutions, sponsors, partners or publishers may consider to be commercially sensitive, and whose findings may, in whole or in part, need to remain confidential for that reason.
76. In some circumstances, research findings will be regarded as sensitive information by sponsors, commissioners or other research stakeholders (because they raise politically or culturally controversial issues, for example, or because they may result in negative publicity for an organisation). When researchers become aware that research findings are likely to be controversial, they should aim to inform stakeholders prior to publication, and negotiate with those stakeholders a fair publication strategy that takes into consideration the public interest in the findings, the researcher's need to publish, and the stakeholders' concerns.
77. Researchers must not bring research into disrepute by in any way falsifying, distorting, suppressing, selectively reporting or sensationalising their research evidence or findings, either in publications based on that material, or as part of efforts to disseminate or promote that work.

## Authorship

78. The authorship of publications normally comprises a list of everyone who has made a substantive and identifiable contribution to the research being reported. Examples of this include: contributing generative ideas, conceptual schema or analytic categories; writing first drafts or substantial portions of text; significant rewriting or editing; contributing significantly to relevant literature reviewing; and contributing to data collection and analysis, and to judgements and interpretations made in relation to it. Where research has involved collaboration across different roles or professions – between education researchers who are academics and those who are teachers or other practitioners, for example – then anyone who has made a substantive contribution should be credited as a co-author.
79. Academic status or any other indicator of seniority does not determine first authorship. Rather, the order of authorship should reflect relative leadership and contributions made. Alternatively, co-authors may agree to a simple alphabetic listing of their names. Consensual agreement on authorship should be gained as early as possible in the writing process.
80. Researchers should not use research carried out with co-researchers as the basis of individual outputs without the agreement of the co-researchers concerned.
81. Researchers and sponsors have the right to dissociate themselves publicly from accounts of research in which they were involved, but that are authored by others, where they consider the presentation and/or content of those accounts to be misleading or unduly selective. Arbitration may be useful in order to reach agreement before such dissemination.



## Scope and format

82. For contracted and sponsored research, the contract will normally cover: methodologies, reporting processes and publication and dissemination strategies, including how the researcher's name will appear and whether the researcher may independently publish the findings. Research outcomes are unpredictable, and discussions to resolve sensitive issues are both to be expected and advisable prior to publication of findings.
83. The format(s) in which research is published, and the means by which those publications are disseminated, should take into account the needs and interests of the communities that were involved in the research. Researchers have a responsibility to share their findings with participants and their wider social groups as fully as possible, while maintaining confidentiality.

## Responsibilities for researchers' wellbeing and development

84. Safeguarding the physical and psychological wellbeing of researchers is part of the ethical responsibility of employing institutions and sponsors, as well as of researchers themselves. Safety is a particular concern in qualitative research, as researchers may be conducting fieldwork in situations that are potentially risky. Researchers should be aware of the legal responsibilities as well as the moral duty of institutions towards the safety of staff and students. Institutions, sponsors and independent researchers should consider whether an in-depth risk assessment form and ongoing monitoring of researcher safety is appropriate, especially for those undertaking fieldwork, working abroad and/or

investigating sensitive issues; this may be mandatory for postgraduate students. Researchers, principal investigators, students and their supervisors should ideally be offered training on researcher safety. Specialist training should be made available to researchers entering conflict or post-conflict settings internationally, or areas with high risk of disease.<sup>19</sup>

85. Employers and sponsors need to avoid exploiting differences in the conditions of work and roles of other researchers, including student researchers and those on time-limited contracts. Employers are also responsible for supporting researchers' personal and professional career development. The *BERA Charter for Research Staff in Education* provides helpful guidance on these issues.<sup>20</sup> Researchers employed in higher education institutions in the UK are covered by the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers,<sup>21</sup> which stipulates the standards that research staff can expect from the institution, as well as their responsibilities as researchers.

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19 See the recommendations of the ESRC National Centre for Research Methods qualitative research node (Qualiti's) 2006 inquiry, reported in Fincham B, Bloor M and Sampson H (2007) 'Qualiti (NCRM) Commissioned Inquiry into the risk to well-being of researchers in qualitative research', *Qualitative Researcher* 6: 2–4. [http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/socsi/qualiti/QualitativeResearcher/QR\\_Issue6\\_Sep07.pdf](http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/socsi/qualiti/QualitativeResearcher/QR_Issue6_Sep07.pdf)

20 British Educational Research Association (2013) *The BERA Charter for Research Staff in Education*, London. <https://www.bera.ac.uk/researchers-resources/publications/the-bera-charter-for-research-staff-in-education>

21 Vitae (2008) *The Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers*, London. <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/policy/vitae-concordat-vitae-2011.pdf>

*If you have any feedback or queries about these ethical guidelines, please contact [publications@bera.ac.uk](mailto:publications@bera.ac.uk).*

*While BERA cannot provide ethical guidance further to these guidelines, or comment on individual cases, we value the feedback of the educational research community, and will endeavour to address any and all points and concerns raised in subsequent editions of these guidelines.*

# HISTORICAL NOTE

The provenance of these guidelines can be traced back to a BERA invitational seminar convened by John Elliott and held at Homerton College, Cambridge in March 1988. The seminar led to a report published in *Research Intelligence* 31 (February 1989), which called for a code of practice to be drawn up. In 1991, BERA Council invited Caroline Gipps and Helen Simons to formulate a set of guidelines, drawing with permission from the Elliott report and the ethical guidelines recently published by the American Educational Research Association. They published these for members' comment in *Research Intelligence* 43 (Summer 1992), and later that year they were formally adopted.

As a code of practice the guidelines were universally welcomed; however, they also attracted a degree of criticism in relation to their scope and application. An example of this was the critique presented by Peter Foster at the 1996 BERA conference. Following Peter Foster's death in 1999, his paper was reproduced in *Research Intelligence* 67 as a tribute to his work. Michael Bassey, the then academic secretary of BERA, used the paper to promote debate in the BERA Council and, at the beginning of her presidency in September 2001, Anne Edwards announced her intention to update the 1992 guidelines.

In the spring of 2002, a working group comprising John Gardner (chair), Ann Lewis and Richard Pring began the task of revising the guidelines. The revision built on the 1992 statement to recognise the academic tensions that a multidisciplinary community generates when dealing with the complex research issues that characterise education contexts, and to include the field of action research. Over the next 18 months several consultative exercises were carried out, and in the spring

of 2004 the final draft of the *Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research*<sup>22</sup> was moved by John Furlong (president) and formally adopted by Council. These guidelines stood unchanged until concerns began to be raised about aspects of some contemporary research contracts running contrary to the Association's declared principles and ethical code – for example, those that prevent or inhibit publication.

Therefore, in late 2008 Pamela Munn (president) set up a working group to examine and make recommendations on these issues. The subsequent report, from David Bridges (chair), Sean Hayes, Jeremy Hoad, Saville Kushner, Olwen McNamara, Ian Menter and Nigel Norris, came to Council in November 2009. This report refined and strengthened the Association's position on the rights of researchers in commissioned research contexts. It recommended a number of further changes and updates, including the need for updated guidelines on culturally sensitive issues. Council accepted the majority of the changes, and asked another small group, comprising Uvanney Maylor, Pat Thompson and David Bridges, to develop the final amendments on cultural sensitivity. The new guidelines were then moved by John Gardner (president) and formally adopted by Council in June 2011.<sup>23</sup>

In 2015 BERA Council and the Academic Publications Committee (APC) convened a subcommittee to review the 2011 ethical guidelines and suggest what may need updating, particularly with regards to how the guidelines accommodate and facilitate practitioner research, how they integrate technological development, and any other pertinent issues arising since the last review. The group was chaired by Anna Mountford-Zimdars

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22 Archived at <https://www.bera.ac.uk/researchers-resources/publications/revise-ethical-guidelines-for-educational-research-2004>.

23 The most recent version of the 2011 edition of BERA's *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research* remains archived online at <https://www.bera.ac.uk/researchers-resources/publications/ethical-guidelines-for-educational-research-2011>.

and included Rachel Brooks, Alison Fox and David Lundie. The recommendations of the subcommittee were reported to APC and BERA Council, leading to the establishment of an Ethical Guidelines Review Working Group in 2016, chaired by Sara Hennessy (BERA Council member and vice-chair of APC). This group included Ruth Boyask, Alison Fox, David Lundie, Marilyn Leask and Lesley Saunders, assisted by Jodie Pennacchia.

The working group oversaw the review of the guidelines and engaged in consultation with BERA members and a wide range of experts, learned societies and stakeholders,<sup>24</sup> as well as reviewing key publications. Significant revisions were made in order to update the guidelines to incorporate new concerns such as those raised by online and social media research. The consultation process led the review to consider more explicitly the range of contexts for educational research, in particular: research by organisations outside higher education; school-based and practitioner research; studies carried out in international contexts; online and social media-related research. These revised guidelines are the result of considered deliberation about the ethical issues associated with changes in society and technological advances as they affect educational research. In response to our consultations, the guidelines themselves now take a more deliberative and less prescriptive approach in their language.

The working group reported to Council and APC during the spring of 2017. As part of the discussion on the draft, ways in which the guidelines could be made more accessible were endorsed. This included an interactive digital version with links

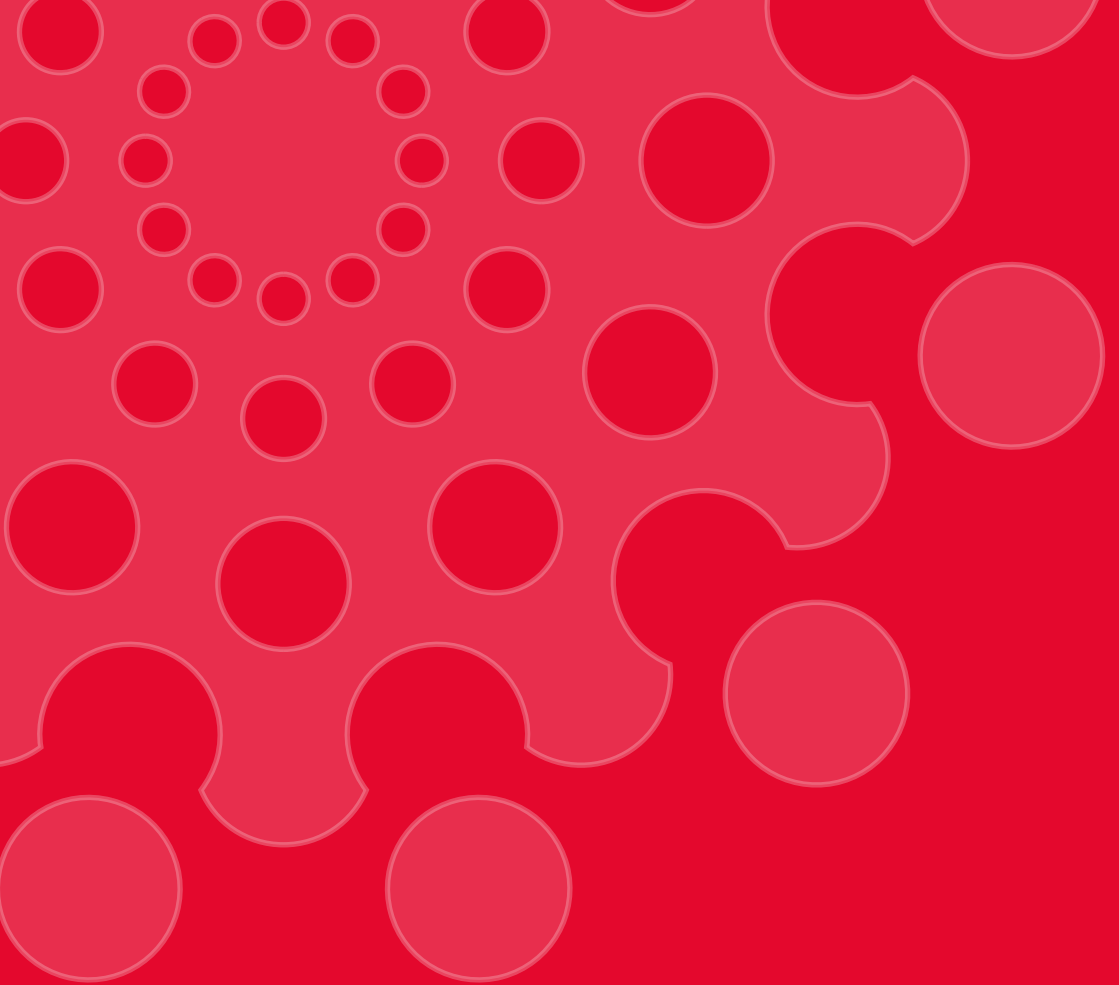
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24 Among the experts who gave substantial responses to our consultation were representatives from the National Education Union, teaching school alliances, Chartered College of Teaching, Higher Education Funding Council for England, National Foundation for Educational Research, Social Policy Association, Social Research Association, Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education, and the Education Achievement Service for South East Wales.

where appropriate, and the curation of a number of illustrative case studies. These will be developed to sit alongside the full downloadable guidelines. After independent peer review, the updated draft was considered by BERA's General Purposes Committee (GPC) in November 2017 and then passed to Pat Sikes who worked with Gary McCulloch in preparing an updated draft for consideration by Council in January 2018. This published version has then been edited further in the light of Council discussion, and was endorsed by GPC prior to publication. As well as developing additional resources to support these guidelines, BERA Council is committed to a regular review and updating of these guidelines. Any changes made to the text of these guidelines will be described and dated in an appendix to any subsequently published versions of this document.

### **Acknowledgments**

*In the putting together of this version of the guidelines, BERA would like to acknowledge the contribution of the original review group of Anna Mountford-Zimdars, Rachel Brooks, Alison Fox and David Lundie. We also acknowledge the efforts of the working group that developed the draft – Sara Hennessy, Ruth Boyask, Alison Fox, David Lundie, Marilyn Leask and Lesley Saunders, assisted by Jodie Pennacchia. Thanks also to those who advised and worked on the development of the final guidelines – Alis Oancea, Pat Sikes, Gary McCulloch and Ross Fulton, as well as all members of BERA Council.*



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