

## Statement on Safeguarding in Research

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This statement has been prepared to advise researchers on the steps to take when considering safeguarding in their research, and should be considered by researchers as part of the research design process. Whilst specific guidance is available elsewhere concerning the [safeguarding of children, young people and vulnerable adults](#), the University recognises that research activities have the potential to raise specific issues and areas of concern. This statement pulls together best practice and key guidance to assist in the development of a strong safeguarding approach. Following reading the guidance, researchers should take time to consider the content and discuss with a wider group of researchers and colleagues as relevant.

Human research, and research involving volunteers or fieldworkers, is particularly likely to raise safeguarding concerns, especially when taking place overseas and in lower- or middle-income countries (LMICs), and special attention should be paid to the guidance in such cases.

A robust safeguarding approach involves identifying and mitigating risk as far as possible (2.1), ensuring an awareness of appropriate reporting procedures and embedding these within the research project (2.2), and fully considering the underlying principles of safeguarding, including the balancing of power dynamics and protection of the vulnerable (3). Further practical advice is given in (3), including information on training. Individuals with concerns should contact the [Lead Safeguarding Officer](#) (LSO), or [Zoe Clarke](#) (Research Strategy & Policy Officer for Integrity) where queries relate to policy compliance.

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### 1. Introduction & Scope

This statement specifically addresses safeguarding in relation to research. The University recognizes its safeguarding responsibilities and is committed to taking all reasonable steps to prevent harm to those involved in research. This Statement, which will be updated as appropriate to reflect best practice within the sector, covers:

- a) All research under the University's auspices, as defined in the [Code of Practice on Research Integrity](#).
- b) All those involved in research, which in practice means the groups specified in the Code of Practice on Research Integrity plus research participants, communities, volunteers, workers and all those that study in the research sector. This includes local fieldworkers and interpreters.
- c) Incidental findings which arise during the course of a project, as well as 'bystander' concerns where researchers have concerns not directly associated with their work.

When considering safeguarding in the context of research, you should aim to:

- Promote a healthy research culture;
- Establish robust reporting routes; and
- Take swift action when cases do emerge.

The University endorses and is subject to the UKCDR [International Development Research Funders Statement on Safeguarding](#).

## **2. Summary of the University's Approach to Safeguarding**

### **1: Anticipating and Mitigating Risk**

This Statement complements and builds upon the [Code of Practice on Research Integrity](#), and notes the responsibility of the PI to identify and mitigate issues as far as possible. Safeguarding should be considered throughout a project. This means:

- i. Identifying and mitigating the risk of harm for all involved, with particular emphasis on the welfare of vulnerable groups.
- ii. Developing a procedure for the handling of incidental findings relating to the welfare of participants or third parties. The [Code of Practice and Principles for Good Ethical Governance](#) notes that a plan for how such findings can be handled within the boundaries of the law should be incorporated into the consent process.
- iii. Considering local contexts, especially when [conducting overseas research](#). In particular, this means identifying and considering relevant legislation (such as the [Children Act](#) and the [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)). All research – including that conducted off campus or overseas – should abide by the highest possible ethical standards. Conducting research abroad in a manner that would not pass ethical review in the UK is not permitted by the University.
- iv. Recognising that issues of bullying and harassment are part of safeguarding. This means accommodating the fact that bullying and harassment are not necessarily predictable, and as such may arise in a project which did not require or undergo ethical review. This could be countered either by naming a project contact (where relevant) or making researchers, participants and volunteers aware of appropriate individuals or organisations who might be contacted if appropriate. See [here](#) for guidance on bullying and harassment issues.

Another mechanism for safeguarding is the [due diligence process](#) – this is the checking of potential funders and partners to ensure their suitability. The [Research Grants and Contracts Office](#) checks this work has been done; however the PI must ensure the appropriateness of funders/partnerships when developing a research project and applying for ethical approval (where applicable). Advice can be sought from subject-level ethics committees and the [Research Strategy and Policy Office](#) (RSPO) where queries relate to governance or policy. The Office for Philanthropic Partnerships and Alumni (OPPA) and the Global Engagement team provide further support for due diligence in relation to international partners and working overseas.

The University [Slavery and Human Trafficking Statement](#) sets out the steps York has taken to ensure slavery and human trafficking are not taking place in our supply chains or as part of our core activities, including research.

## 2: Identifying Reporting Procedures

The University's first duty of care is to the individuals involved. The University Safeguarding approach is currently under review, and this section will be updated to reflect new requirements and expectations as they are identified.

### *Within Research Projects*

When designing a research project, appropriate reporting routes should be identified and agreed by the research team, researcher and relevant colleagues, and approved by the relevant ethics committee prior to beginning the research. Depending on the size and scope of the project, especially in relation to collaborative projects, this may involve identifying a named individual as a liaison between the participants and the research team, making details of an independent reporting route available, or working in partnership with the research community to understand their preferred reporting process. All those involved in a project should be made aware of relevant procedures. See section 3 for more on how this might be achieved in an operational sense.

Where these reporting routes have failed, this should trigger a case or policy review, conducted by the RSPO in co-operation with the relevant project team. To counter this risk, however, researchers should seek appropriate guidance (such as from the Global Engagement Team where relevant) to identify potential risks and reporting routes. All projects should have opportunities for reporting and feedback which are designed and identified with the project in mind.

Where incidents take place within a partner setting, the partner's Safeguarding policy and reporting procedure should be followed. However, the due diligence process mentioned above must ensure that the partner's policies are sufficiently robust.

### *Bullying & Harassment*

Safeguarding covers [bullying and harassment](#), which is handled via separate procedures for staff and students at York (more information [here](#)). Currently, the Bullying & Harassment policy concerns situations involving University employees – work in this area is ongoing to identify a process for use when an accusation involves someone not employed at the University, including research participants and/or in the community.

Where an individual attached to the University of York makes an accusation against someone from a partner institution, the University Safeguarding policy indicates that the policy of the partner institution should be followed. It is good practice to identify a contact within the project team, and within the partner institution where possible, who has responsibility for communicating with the York-based research team in the first instance about ongoing cases.

### *Misconduct Procedures*

The policy and procedure through which a safeguarding breach is handled will depend on the specifics of the breach. It is possible that a Safeguarding breach will be classed as a breach of [Duty of Care](#), and as such will be handled through the Code of Practice on

Research Integrity, with referral to the [research misconduct policy](#). Alleged breaches which fall outside the definition of research misconduct set out in the Research Misconduct Policy and Procedure will, in the case of staff, be handled under the University's [Disciplinary Procedure and Guidelines](#) and/or its [Capability Procedure](#).

### 3: Involving Relevant Individuals

The reporting process for a project should include reporting a breach to the appropriate individuals, and the team member(s) responsible for reporting should be identified. The University has a responsibility to report breaches to funders where relevant, and to ensure an accurate procedure is followed and records maintained. The RSPO should be informed so that these responsibilities can be met and will inform the Pro Vice Chancellor for Research as appropriate. The RSPO should also undertake case review on a regular basis, feeding this into policy review.

The Lead Safeguarding Officer (LSO) for York is [Heidi Fraser-Krauss](#), and the Deputy Safeguarding Officer for York is [Paula Tunbridge](#). The Lead Liaison Officer (LLO) is [Jill Ellis](#), who can be contacted by members of staff who need advice or have concerns about the reporting process. Concerns can also be reported directly to [safeguarding@york.ac.uk](mailto:safeguarding@york.ac.uk), where they relate to children or vulnerable adults.

#### *Protection for whistle-blowers*

Safeguarding is within the scope of the University's Speak Up policy, which protects individuals disclosing a belief that one or more of the following actions has or will occur:

- A criminal offence;
- Failure to comply with a legal obligation;
- A miscarriage of justice;
- An act creating risk to health and safety;
- An act causing deliberate damage to the environment;
- Deliberate concealment of any of the above.

The University is committed to fostering a safe environment in which safeguarding breaches can be reported without fear of detriment. Guidance on the policy can be sought from [HR](#).

### **3. Guidance on addressing safeguarding when planning a research project**

Projects involving human participants, volunteers or fieldworkers have the potential for safeguarding issues to arise. Particular thought should be given to projects taking place overseas, and in such cases there will often be specific policies arising from funders, national governments or NGOs to which a project must adhere.

#### Guiding Principles

The following principles should be considered when developing a safeguarding approach:

- Identify and address the risks associated with power imbalances between individuals, especially when related to issues of consent. Remember that variations in size, scope and content of research projects means that each project can raise its own issues when it comes to safeguarding, and the implications of power dynamics within a project should be continually considered and reassessed. When accessing a community through an authority figure or gatekeeper, consider who might be accepted as a representative of the community and how this might affect the research.
- Pay attention to gender, class, race, sexuality, age, disability, faith, and other dynamics of vulnerability to harm. Be aware of potential risks for all members of the research team, for example the different levels of threat faced by female and male individuals in particular settings – the Social Research Association (SRA) has prepared a [Code of Practice for the Safety of Social Researchers](#), which indicates how best to prepare and conduct a research project.
- Ensure that the approach is based on victims and survivors, with a commitment to rights and needs. It is good practice to continually review safeguarding mechanisms and approaches throughout the lifetime of a project, particularly following a breach of safeguarding, to identify issues and ensure they remain fit for purpose.
- Actively consider how cultural sensitivity can be maintained, including how best to handle overseas contexts. Take time to fully consider the context in which the work is being conducted prior to applying for ethical approval. This relates also to the need for compliance with relevant in-country legal requirements – this is likely to refer specifically to DBS checks or local equivalents.
- Take steps to ensure the work is being conducted in a true partnership – this means committing time and resources to establish, nurture and sustain fair, trustworthy and equitable research partnerships. To ensure an environment of robust safeguarding, all involved must feel secure in raising issues.
- Abiding by the highest relevant set of standards – in practice, no health and safety tourism. **Research that would not be ethical or compliant in the UK is also not ethical or compliant abroad.**

### Practical Measures

There are a number of steps that can be taken to ensure the above principles are considered and incorporated:

- It is important to ensure the team includes people with adequate knowledge and experience – including the PI. Ensure members of the research team are qualified to take on the project.
- Take time to agree a risk management plan, involving representatives of any communities being researched as appropriate. This may lead to the development of agreed codes of conduct and protocols with clear roles and responsibilities.
- Ensure a robust recruitment process for research assistants and other vetting procedures, in compliance with University of York procedures, UK law and relevant international standards. In line with the University [Statement on Slavery and Human](#)

[Trafficking](#), researchers have a responsibility to ensure those involved with your research (including volunteers, participants, and fieldworkers) have not been coerced.

- Develop a whistle-blowing procedure to aid in identifying and responding to concerns, with a focus on supportive, confidential and accountable mechanisms.
  - It is good practice to ask communities and participants how they wish to report concerns. There should be clear mechanisms with multiple routes where possible, with at least one clearly independent of the research team. For international research, there should also be a 'safeguarding focal point' individual as a clear line of accountability in-country.
  - Acknowledge risks associated with mandatory reporting to authorities to ensure contextually appropriate and safe reporting.
  - Those reporting should be advised of the response and what to expect, and should be kept informed of actions being taken. Opportunity should be provided for them to feed back on the process. Reporting duties should be mapped and enforced.
- Mechanisms for continual review should be identified, particularly in response to incidents/needs. Consider when such a review will take place, who will be involved, and who will be responsible for record-keeping within the project team. A key individual should be identified as being responsible for reporting any breaches and their outcomes to the RSPO for central record-keeping. This will include consideration of the reporting procedures described above (section 2).
- Safeguarding should be budgeted for in proposals. This may include specialist training, production and/or translation of project-specific materials, and consultations with LMIC partners and community members.
- Ensure all involved are aware of the above and trained where relevant – protocols should be disseminated to researchers and participants. The training should include support for fieldworkers in emotionally-challenging situations.

The University provides guidance on various topics, including [health and safety](#) and [international emergencies](#).

### Training

From February 2020, the [Research Integrity and Ethics](#) training offered at York will cover the basics of research-related safeguarding. All those involved in a research project should be adequately trained on safeguarding. This should cover basic awareness, common risks and vulnerabilities, expectations on responding, and where to find further guidance.

For research relating to international development and overseas contexts, more specific guidance is recommended. This should cover differing norms and frameworks, challenges associated with international partnerships and effective whistleblowing mechanisms. Such training may be best delivered within research teams in consultation with safeguarding leads and linked to project needs. Please contact [Zoe Clarke](#) for further guidance if you believe a project you are involved with would benefit from such a session.