BIRMINGHAM CITY TRUST ACADEMIES TRUST

GUIDELINES AND PROCEDURES FOR GOOD RESEARCH PRACTICE

1. Introduction

Birmingham City Trust has a responsibility to ensure that members of staff and students who carry out research do so according to best practice in science, the arts and humanities. The Trust expects the highest standards of scientific integrity to be adhered to. The Trust's Research Ethical Framework (See Annex 1) sets out the ethical principles underpinning the conduct of research. This guide on good research practice sets out the other issues that should be taken into account when planning, conducting and reporting research. It addresses the principles involved in the proper conduct of research, provides guidance on the standards expected, identifies the Trust's key procedures for ensuring the highest achievable standards in the conduct of research, and sets out the procedures to be followed should allegations of research misconduct be made. The statement is intended for:

- Researchers and support staff employed by the Trust;
- Research students and their supervisors;
- Researchers and consultants who may be subcontracted on BCUAT Birmingham research contracts;
- Joint projects involving any combination of Birmingham City University staff, students and BCUAT staff.

Research Councils have adapted the general principles of good scientific practice to meet the particular characteristics of the disciplines that they serve – all researchers should take these statements into account if they wish to supplement this document with any discipline-specific additions.

2 Principles of Good Scientific Practice

The following general principles derive from the statement of the OST Research Councils on Good Scientific Practice. The main principles refer to:

- The fundamentals of scientific work such as maintaining professional standards of honesty, openness, recognising the standards of professional bodies, documenting results, questioning one's own findings, and attributing honestly the contributions of others.

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- Leadership and cooperation in research groups
- The needs of young researchers
- Securing and storing primary data

In the conduct of all research, the Trust expects the following principles to be understood and observed.

2.1 Professional Standards

Honesty

At the heart of all research endeavour, regardless of discipline or institution, is the need for researchers to be honest in respect of their own actions in research and in their responses to the actions of other researchers. This applies to the whole range of research, including experimental design, generating and analysing data, publishing results, and acknowledging the direct and indirect contributions of colleagues, collaborators and others. All staff and students must refrain from plagiarism, piracy or the fabrication of results. Committing any of these actions is regarded as a serious disciplinary offence. The Trust's procedures for investigating and dealing with allegations of research misconduct by staff can be seen in Annex 2.

Openness

While recognising the need for researchers to protect their own interests and the interests of the Trust in the process of planning and carrying out their research, the Trust encourages them to be as open as possible in discussing their work with other researchers and with the public. The Trust supports the widest dissemination of results possible, unless confidentiality agreements have been put in place and/or it has been agreed that sponsors will own the intellectual property. Issues of child protection and relevant permissions from parents of school pupils must also be taken into account.

Guidance from professional bodies

The Trust also expects staff to observe the standards of research practice set out in any guidelines published by scientific societies and other relevant professional bodies.

Documenting results

In order to respond to the needs of funding bodies, the Trust requires researchers to keep clear and accurate records of the research methods used and of the results obtained, including interim results. This is necessary not only as a means of demonstrating proper research practice, but also in case questions are subsequently asked about either the conduct of the research or the results obtained. Such records should be stored in accordance with the Data Protection principles.

A critical approach to research results

Academics should always be prepared to question the outcome of their research. While fully supporting academic freedom and acknowledging the pressures of time and resources under which researchers often have to work, the Trust expects research results to be checked before being made public.

Acknowledging the role of collaborators and other participants

The issue of authorship is an important aspect of good research practice and, in the context of the growth of multiple authorship in recent years, the Trust expects anyone listed as an author of a research output to accept personal responsibility for ensuring that they are familiar with the contents of the output. The contributions of formal collaborators and all others who directly assist or indirectly support the research must be properly acknowledged. This applies to any circumstances in which statements about the research are made, including provision of information about the nature and process of the research and in publishing the outcome. Failure to acknowledge the contributions of others is regarded as unprofessional conduct. Conversely, collaborators and other contributors carry their share of the responsibility for the research and its outcome. Authors are also responsible for ensuring that they agree with the way in which their contribution to any research output is presented. Where appropriate, the support of funding bodies should be acknowledged in publications.

2.2 Leadership and cooperation in research groups

It is the responsibility of senior staff in the Trust to ensure that a climate is created which allows research to be conducted in accordance with good research practice. In BCUAT, the Faculty of Health, Education and Life Sciences will work with Academies to ensure colleagues work together to promote such a climate. Leaders of research units are expected to create a research environment of mutual cooperation, in which all members of a research team are encouraged to develop their skills and in which the open discussion of scientific ideas is fostered. They must also ensure that appropriate direction of research and supervision of researchers are provided. Unit leaders are responsible for the creation of a constructive atmosphere and for ensuring that research staff have the appropriate training and experience to carry out their duties as effectively as possible. This is especially important for new staff.

2.3 The needs of early researchers

Researchers who are new to research may face particular difficulties. Responsibility for ensuring that new researchers and students understand good research practice lies with all members of academic staff, but particularly with the Faculty of Health, Education and Life Sciences working in a supportive capacity. Birmingham City University's Academies Trust's approach to training and mentoring for young or new researchers and research students are set out in Annex 3.

2.4 Securing and storing primary data

Research Councils expect data to be securely held for a period of ten years after the completion of a research project. Data generated in the course of research must therefore be kept securely in paper or electronic form. The means of data storage should be appropriate to the task. Primary electronic data should be stored on a central server, in addition to any storage that is maintained at the local level. If individuals responsible for generating the data relocate, a set should be maintained in the Trust. This is important for research that is funded by research councils but it also applies to research that is funded from other sources.

3   Allegations of Research Misconduct

The Trust takes seriously any allegation of research misconduct, and expects such allegations to be thoroughly investigated. Piracy, plagiarism and fraud are considered to be examples of misconduct and are defined as follows:

- Piracy is the deliberate exploitation of ideas from others without acknowledgement;
- Plagiarism is the copying of ideas, data or text without permission or acknowledgement;
- Fraud involves deliberate deception, including the invention of data, and the omission from analysis and publication of inconvenient data.

Allegations of research misconduct may come from others in the Trust, such as research students, research assistants or colleagues; or they may come from outside the institution from, for example, other researchers who may feel that their work has been plagiarised. To be followed up, allegations must be in writing. When an allegation is made, the Trust will respond to it. Allegations of research misconduct by staff will be dealt with according to the procedures set out in Annex 2. These procedures seek to be fair to both the complainant (the person(s) responsible for making an allegation of misconduct) and the respondent (against who the complaint is being made). If, after an initial investigation to ascertain whether or not there is a case to answer, a decision is made to proceed, managers will ensure that the investigation and interviews are conducted with scientific advice that is both relevant and neutral. A presumption of innocence is maintained until the investigation process is complete and complainants who have made allegations in good faith, whether substantiated or not, will be protected. If allegations are unfounded, the Trust will take whatever actions are necessary to maintain or restore the reputation of respondents. In cases where an allegation of research misconduct is upheld, appeals will be considered in accordance with the procedures and mechanisms laid down in the disciplinary procedures, the results of which are final.

References

BBSRC, Statement on Safeguarding Good Scientific Practice, www.bbsrc.ac.uk

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Royal College of Physicians, Fraud and misconduct in research: causes, investigation and prevention (RCP, 1991).

The Wellcome Trust, Guidelines on Good Research Practice, Wellcome Trust, 2002.

Annex 1

Annex 2

Annex 3