

nfer code of practice

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National Foundation for Educational Research

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The NFER is Britain's leading independent educational research institution, and its mission is to improve education and training nationally and internationally by undertaking research, development and dissemination activities and providing information services.
- 1.2 The Foundation wishes to ensure that its work is of the highest quality and is carried out to the best professional standards. It seeks to do this through its staff recruitment, induction and training programmes, day-to-day practices and written procedures, of which the Code of Practice is one.
- 1.3 This Code of Practice sets out the ethical principles by which the NFER conducts its research, and these apply to all staff engaged in the work of the Foundation, including temporary workers and consultants. Sponsors and other bodies with which the NFER collaborates are asked to respect the principles given in the Code.

It is a condition of service and contractual obligation that all NFER staff and associates should adhere to the Code of Practice. Overall responsibility for ensuring that staff and associates adhere to the Code rests with the Director, Assistant Directors and Heads of Department or Service, with Project Directors being responsible for ensuring that research teams adhere to its provisions. If NFER staff are asked by sponsors or other persons to behave in a way so as to contravene the Code, they should report the matter to their Head of Department or Service, who will seek to resolve the issue, if necessary, in consultation with the Director of NFER.

2 Overall guiding principles

- 2.1 In line with its articles of association and independent and charitable status, the Foundation only undertakes research, development and information activities that are apolitical, non-partisan, free of bias and of an ethical nature. It is the responsibility of Heads of Department or Service to ensure that all work adheres to these principles, and that they consult with the Director if any potential work (that their staff wish to undertake) is likely to be in contravention of these principles or, once it has started, raises ethical issues.
- 2.2 The NFER has established an Ethics Committee for the monitoring and resolution of matters requiring ethical scrutiny. This Committee is composed of an Assistant Director (chair) and two other senior or principal researchers. Each department will nominate staff who can serve on the committee and any hearing of an ethical issue will be undertaken by staff from outside the Department or Service where the matter has arisen. The chair will feed back the Committee's views to the Director on the matter under scrutiny for his/her final decision.

It is good practice that research proposals contain a section that raises any ethical issues that the project may need to tackle and to provide possible solutions. Any specific protocols and safeguards for the particular project that are to be put in place should be stated and the NFER Code of Practice appended to the proposal or the sponsor referred to the copy on the NFER website.

2.3 The Foundation's staff will conduct themselves, at all times, in a professional and ethical manner. This involves:

- respecting the privacy of individuals and institutions
- being sensitive, polite and helpful in their dealings with others
- keeping a professional distance from, and not placing oneself under personal obligation to, sponsors and those from whom data is being collected
- being mindful of cultural, religious, gender and other relevant differences within the research population in the planning, conducting and reporting of their work
- protecting the confidentiality of the data collected
- producing findings and judgements based on sound research evidence
- disseminating research findings openly, honestly and in accessible forms to audiences who can use the outcomes to help improve education and training.

3 Negotiating access

3.1 NFER staff will advise the LEA that they are inviting LEA-maintained schools to participate in their research and development activities, and it is the responsibility of the Project Leader to ensure that this has happened.

NFER has an agreement with LEAs regarding carrying out research or test development activities in LEA-maintained schools. The agreement requires staff to contact the NFER Liaison Officer, and/or such other personnel as have been designated by the Chief Education Officer, to notify them that an approach is being made to schools.

- For research and development activities, the LEA should, wherever possible, be given reasonable notice in writing of selected schools before the schools' participation is sought. This requirement may be waived for informal trialling or discussions, prior to surveys or test development activities taking place.
 - The names of all schools to be included in NFER research (whether surveys administered by projects or Research Data Services or field visits) must be notified to Research Data Services, in advance of any formal contacts being made, in order to monitor and advise on usage. Again, this requirement may be waived for informal trialling or discussions, prior to surveys or test development activities taking place.
- 3.2 NFER staff will conduct data-gathering activities in schools, colleges and other institutions only with the consent of the head of the institution or an authorised representative, and only after adequate notice has been given.
- 3.3 NFER staff will seek the express consent of the headteacher, principal or an authorised representative before interviews, group discussions or other face-to-face data-gathering activities are conducted in schools and colleges with students below the age of 18, or with vulnerable adults. Further permissions will be necessary where cameras, video recorders and other visual recording devices are to be used (see paragraph 4.8 below).

- 3.4 NFER staff will provide the head of institution (or an authorised representative), and those staff to be centrally involved in research activities, with information on the nature, purpose and outcomes of the research and, where relevant, how it is to be disseminated.

The information that should be normally supplied to heads of institutions, (or their authorised representatives), and those staff to be centrally involved, comprises:

- the aims and objectives of the research and the name of the sponsor
 - the types of data to be collected, and over what period(s)
 - how they were selected for the study
 - which staff and students or other individuals are to participate, and how much of their time is likely to be involved
 - whether dissemination, verification of findings or feedback is to be offered and, if so, what the nature of this will be, and when it is likely to take place
 - whether or not data are to be shared with other organisations
 - the purposes for which the data will be processed.
- 3.5 NFER staff will not place undue pressure on research contacts to participate in their activities. The decision of the head of institution or his/her representative in these matters shall be final.

4 Conducting research and development activities

- 4.1 Only NFER staff who have been cleared through the Criminal Records Bureau will be allowed to visit schools or have direct contact with children and vulnerable adults.
- 4.2 NFER staff will negotiate with the school, college or other institution a mutually convenient time and location for interviews and meetings to take place that will minimise the disruption to the institution's work schedules.
- 4.3 NFER staff will seek to negotiate with the institution or individual adult, a suitable and preferably quiet place for interviews to take place, where confidentiality of the interview can be maintained and the safety and standing of both the interviewee and the researcher should not be compromised.

It is important for researchers to be aware of child protection and safety issues. It is often better not to interview individuals in a closed, private room. Semi-public spaces, such as a library, room with windows onto public spaces, community centres or quiet reception areas are preferable. For more guidelines on good practice in interviewing children, see [Section 1 of the Implementation Guidelines](#).

- 4.4 Where children and students are concerned, NFER staff should seek their informed consent to participate at or before the start of the interview, by informing them of the purposes of the research and why they have been selected and giving them the right to withdraw.

- 4.5 Data-gathering activities will be conducted in an open and honest way. NFER staff will respect respondents' views and not divulge any data, except in circumstances described in Section 4.6 below.
- 4.6 If, in the course of an interview or other research contact with a child or vulnerable adult, it becomes apparent to an NFER staff member that the person may have been the subject of physical, sexual or emotional abuse, the head of institution or another appropriate authority and the Project Director must be informed and a record kept of the incident and the actions taken. **(See Section 1 of the Implementation Guidelines.)**
- 4.7 NFER staff will normally make written notes and/or use a recorder during the course of an interview, meeting or observation activity, as a means of recording information (unless the purpose of the meeting is for briefing or background purposes only). Where recorders are to be used, consent will be obtained from participants, advising the teacher or similar person in charge where children or vulnerable adults are concerned.
- 4.8 Where cameras, video recorders and other visual recording devices are to be used, consent will additionally be obtained in writing from the head of institution or his/her representative and from parents or carers for children under the age of 16 and for vulnerable adults. **(See Section 2 of the Implementation Guidelines.)**
- 4.9 The potential uses to which photographs or video recordings may be put will be specified at the time of seeking permission. Specific consent in writing must be received from institutions and individuals (if over age 18) or institutions and parents (if under age 18) for the use of photographs and other visual images of individuals that are to be used for publication and dissemination purposes.
- 4.10 When conducting telephone interviews, NFER staff will abide by the statutory requirements of the Telecommunications Act (1987), with regard to the use of electronic recording devices. A synopsis of its main provisions is given in **Section 3 of the Implementation Guidelines.**
- 4.11 NFER staff will ensure that the research instruments (questionnaires, tests, etc.) they develop are as reliable and valid as possible. A detailed Code of Practice for the development of Assessment Instruments, Methods and Systems is described in **Section 4 of the Implementation Guidelines.**

5 Holding, analysing and reporting information

- 5.1 NFER staff will not deliberately fabricate, falsify or misrepresent evidence, findings or conclusions.
- 5.2 NFER staff will adhere to the provisions in the Data Protection Act (1998) regarding the use of data that identifies individuals. The Foundation is registered under the Data Protection Act and its registration has been drawn up to include all current and likely future data held by the NFER. A summary of the main provisions of the Act as they affect the NFER's work is given in **Section 5 of the Implementation Guidelines.** In line with these provisions, the NFER will not release the names of individuals participating in its

research to sponsors or other third parties, except where prior notification has been given to the individuals, or where subsequent permission has been given by them.

- 5.3 The NFER will not release the names of institutions participating in its research to sponsors or other third parties, except where prior notification has been given to the institution, or where subsequent permission has been given by the head of institution or his/her representative. Neither will it release the names of institutions who respond or do not respond to NFER surveys or requests to engage in other research activities, except where prior or subsequent permission has been given by the head of institution or his/her representative. The NFER may, however, share the names of participating institutions, in confidence, with colleagues who are part of a research consortium or partnership in which the NFER is a legal partner.
- 5.4 Data gathered by NFER staff that identifies institutions or individuals is held in confidence by NFER and will not be released to people outside the Foundation (including sponsors) without the written consent of the individual(s) and/or the institution(s) concerned. If the NFER has entered into a contractual arrangement with partners or consortia, respondents must be informed that data may be shared within these other organisations. This will only be done for research and analytical purposes, however, and where sharing of the names is vital to the analysis of the data by the consortium or partnership.
- 5.5 Similarly, data that identifies individuals or institutions, supplied to the NFER for research purposes by a legitimate third party (e.g. by a sponsor, or an LEA on its schools or students), will not be released to anyone other than to that third party, or to colleagues who are part of a research consortium or partnership with which the NFER is a legal partner.
- 5.6 All research instruments, aggregated/anonymised data collected during projects, and pre-publication papers and reports should be treated as being confidential to the NFER project team/consortium and the sponsor. This material should not be released to other personnel, unless the permission of the sponsor is given. In the case of Local Government Association (LGA) and Research Development Programme projects, permission to release information or instruments should be sought from the Project Director and Head of Department or Service.
- 5.7 The release of primary or secondary data, named or otherwise, by Foundation staff to non-NFER colleagues within a research consortium or partnership will only take place when a formal data-sharing agreement is in place that governs how the data will be held and used.
- 5.8 The NFER will ensure that information storage is subject to appropriate levels of security and confidentiality.

It is the responsibility of each Head of Department or Service in the NFER to ensure that information storage in his/her area is subject to appropriate levels of security. Confidential information should not be removed from NFER premises without permission of the Project Director or Head of Department or Service.

- 5.9 NFER staff will not plagiarise, misrepresent, misquote or otherwise misappropriate the work of other authors or researchers.

5.10 NFER staff will abide by the regulations regarding copyright, authorship and the acknowledgement of published and unpublished materials, as laid down by current legislation.

5.11 Copyright of research instruments devised by, and reports and materials published by, NFER staff remains the copyright of NFER, unless a specific clause in the contract for a sponsored project states otherwise.

NFER staff should ensure that the '© NFER' symbol is routinely placed on instruments, reports and materials generated by them, unless a contract clause prevents this. Clarification of the situation regarding externally sponsored projects should be sought from the Project Director or Head of Finance and Administration.

5.12 Published and unpublished material prepared by third parties will not be used by NFER staff in reports or published documents without proper attribution or authorisation.

NFER staff should adhere to accepted practice, as given in 1958 by the Society of Authors and Publishers Association. This states that one single extract of not more than 400 words or a series of extracts, of which none exceeds 300 words, and within a total of 800 words, may be used without charge but with appropriate attribution (i.e. using the NFER's or some other accepted citation style) and without seeking permission from the copyright holders or author(s). The type of acknowledgement to be given for longer extracts or materials should be negotiated with the copyright holder(s) or author(s), and it is the responsibility of the Project Director to see that this has been done where such materials are used in NFER reports or documents to be published or submitted to sponsors.

Where a longer extract or whole text is used for examinations purposes only, this should be clearly referenced on the test instrument to the relevant legislation. The wording used should be to the following effect: 'This text has been incorporated into this test paper solely for the purposes of the examination in accordance with Section 32(3) of the Copyright Designs and Patents Act 1998 (defence only). No copyright clearance for any other use has been obtained or sought.' Where possible, and with the agreement of sponsors where relevant, as a courtesy, the author of the material should be informed that it has been used.

5.13 Most NFER publications are the result of a team effort and it is the right of authors to be credited for their work and not to have their work altered without their permission. The authorship of publications will be a list of those who have made a substantive and identifiable contribution to the publication. First authorship will reflect the relative leadership and contribution to the publication. The remaining ordering should be agreed by team members and be either in alphabetic order or in order of the level of contribution. Other contributions should be recognised by means of an Acknowledgements statement.

5.14 It is the responsibility of the Project Director to establish authorship if this is not immediately clear or a dispute arises. If this cannot be resolved, then the matter will be referred to the NFER Authorship Committee.

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