FRAMEWORK FOR PREVENTING HARM (SAFEGUARDING)

IN RESEARCH AND INNOVATION ACTIVITIES AT NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY

1. Overview

The UK Collaborative on Development Research (UKCDR) defines safeguarding in research as *'preventing and addressing any sexual exploitation, abuse or harassment of research participants, bullying, psychological abuse and physical violence'*[1]

The purpose of this guidance note is to set out how the University addresses safeguarding issues for both researchers and research participants through a framework of institutional policy, procedure, guidance and training. The document is intended to clarify the expectations of researchers in relation to University policies and signpost them to sources of support.

2. Key principles

- **Prevention of harm:** everyone involved in the research and innovation process has the right to be safe from harm.

- **Risk assessment:** research teams should anticipate potential safeguarding issues as part of the research planning process and take action to mitigate risks.

- **Participant safety:** research involving working with human participants should be carried out to the highest ethical standards, and with due consideration for the safety, dignity and respect of those participants.

- **Researcher safety:** due consideration should also be given to the safety of researchers undertaking research and innovation activities in both the UK and abroad.

- **Reporting concerns:** safeguarding concerns should be reported to the University (via the Head of Academic Unit) in the first instance to ensure that appropriate action is taken on behalf of the University in response to the issues identified. In accordance with the University's Policy and Procedure on Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblowing), concerns can also be reported anonymously.

- **Escalating concerns**: the University may be required to report the incident to an external third party, such as a funder, the police or regulatory body.

- **Supporting victims**: a victim/survivor-centred approach should be taken to ensure that the individuals are fully informed of their options and that their needs and wishes are taken into account as part of the response.

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[1] UKCDR Guidance on Safeguarding in International Research (2020)

2. University Policy Framework

2.1 Bullying, harassment and discrimination

Student policies and procedures managed by the University's Student Progress Casework Team (email: casework@ncl.ac.uk) and People Services (contact local Faculty Business Partner).

- **General principles:** as part of the University's Behaviour Framework and Research Culture Action Plan, we aim to create an inclusive, supportive and safe research environment characterised by respect and collegiality. Newcastle University therefore takes a zero-tolerance approach to bullying, harassment, victimisation or any other act of unreasonable behaviour or unlawful discrimination.

- **Students:** expectations are set out in the University's Student Charter and Behavioural Code of Conduct. This includes behaving responsibly and in a way that fosters mutual respect and understanding between all members of the University community. In accordance with the University's Student Complaints and Resolution Procedure, any complaints about student behaviour (or complaints by students regarding the behaviour of members of staff) should be reported to: casework@ncl.ac.uk. If the complaint is upheld, this may lead to disciplinary action. Support for students experiencing bullying, harassment and discrimination is provided through Student Wellbeing Services.

- **Colleagues:** guidance is provided in the University's Standards of Behaviour and Bullying and Harassment Policy. The formal process for raising an allegation is provided in the University's Grievance Policy. If the allegation is upheld, this may lead to disciplinary action and the research funder being notified. The University also has an obligation to notify funders of any allegations of bullying and harassment which are upheld following an investigation. Support for colleagues experiencing bullying, harassment and discrimination is available via the peer support service, Just Ask. A 24-hour confidential helpline is also available to colleagues as part of the University's comprehensive Employee Assistance Programme.

- **Anonymous reporting:** colleagues and students are encouraged to include their contact details when raising concerns to enable the University to offer direct support. Although concerns may also be reported anonymously using the following online forms:

  - Colleague anonymous reporting form
  - Student anonymous reporting form

  It should be noted that there are limitations to the action that the University can take in these cases, as the alleged perpetrator has a right to respond to any accusations made against them. However, the information will be used to inform harm prevention activities around campus.

- **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion** (EDI) is one of the University's core institutional values, which is reinforced through mandatory training for both colleagues and students during their induction to Newcastle University. Further EDI training is available to colleagues via the University's Learning Management System including: Be an Active Bystander, Equality Analysis Step by Step, Challenging our Biases for Behaviour Change, Race and Racism, and Reasonable Adjustments. An EDI Toolkit for Researchers is also available to promote EDI principles throughout the research lifecycle.

2.2 Conducting Fieldwork

Standards and procedures are managed by the University's Occupational Health and Safety Service (OHSS) (email: ohss-safety@ncl.ac.uk).

- **General principles:** researchers should consider their own and others' health safety when undertaking fieldwork in the UK and abroad. All researchers conducting fieldwork in the UK should refer to the Fieldwork Management Standard and guidance produced by the OHSS and complete a Fieldwork Risk Assessment Form and Fieldwork Health Questionnaire.

- **Lone working:** additional consideration should be given to lone worker strategies both on and off campus. Due to the risk of injuries, high-risk activities such as the use of machinery, tools and equipment or working with hazardous chemicals should be avoided. For more information, researchers should refer to the OHSS Lone Worker Management Standard as part of the planning process. Based on the definitions provided in this document, a Lone Working Generic Risk Assessment Form should be completed for medium / high activities. More information on control measures can be found in the Management Standard, including the use of the University's SafeZone App when working alone outside core hours on campus. Emergency support is also available by telephoning the University's Security Services Office: (0191) 208 3333.

- **Social research**: guidance on best practice is also available via the Social Research Association (SRA)'s Code of Practice for the Safety of Social Researchers, which advocates planning for safety and sets out strategies for handling challenging situations.

- **International travel:** researchers conducting international fieldwork should complete the University's Overseas Travel Risk Assessment Form with support from their local School Safety Officer. More information on this process and the sign-off procedure is available in the OHSS Travel Abroad Management Standard. If the proposed travel is to a high-risk country, researchers should also liaise with the Insurance Office to ensure that an appropriate level of insurance is in place prior to travel (email: insurance@ncl.ac.uk.ac.uk). Researchers should note that permission to travel will be based on the latest UK travel advice produced by the Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office (FCDO), which may be subject to change at short notice.

2.3 Health and Safety standards

Standards and procedures are managed by the University's Occupational Health and Safety Service (OHSS) (email: ohss-safety@ncl.ac.uk).

- **General principles:** researchers should consider their personal safety within the laboratory or workshop environment, follow any local policies and procedures and complete any relevant equipment training. In addition to this, the University Health and Safety Policy and OHSS Health and Safety Management Standards can help support the undertaking of local risk assessments.

- **Reporting incidents:** All health and safety incidents should be reported as soon as possible to ensure that the injured party receives medical attention. In the event of a minor injury, the University has a number of designated First Aiders on campus and their contact details are displayed in each building. More significant injuries may require hospital treatment. Colleagues should report accidents to their Line Manager in the first instance. Undergraduate students should report to the School Office and Postgraduate students should inform their Academic Supervisor. Line Manager / School Offices / Academic Supervisors should report the incident to OHSS to enable the University to investigate and take remedial actions to mitigate the risk of reoccurrence.

2.4 Personal Relationships at Work Policy

Policy and procedure managed by People Services (contact local Faculty Business partner).

- **General principles:** the University's Personal Relationships at Work Policy acknowledges that conflicts of interest may occur as result of personal relationships with students or between colleagues, and that these relationships may be subject to imbalances in power. As a result, researchers may be subject to either unduly favourable or unfavourable treatment.

- **Declarations:** to ensure the fair treatment of all researchers, the University does not accept close personal or intimate relationships between students and their direct supervisors. A confidential Declaration Form (provided as an Appendix to the Policy) should be submitted to the individual's Line Manager to report a close personal or intimate relationship between colleagues. The Line Manager will then consider alternative arrangements.

- **Reporting concerns:** concerns regarding potential conflicts of interest created by personal relationships at work should be reported to the relevant Head of Unit in the first instance. Disciplinary action may be taken against colleagues who fail to declare this information where a conflict of interest arises. If a colleague is suspected of acting inappropriately towards a student or colleague under the age of 18 or a vulnerable adult, a report should be made to the Designated Safeguarding Officer (see Section 2.6).

2.5 Research Ethics Policy

Policy and procedure managed by Research and Innovation (email: res.policy@ncl.ac.uk).

- **General principles:** the University's Research Ethics Policy states that all research and innovation projects involving human participants require ethical approval before work on the study commences. The purpose of the ethical review process is to protect the welfare, dignity and rights of research participants by identifying and mitigating risks and ensuring compliance with professional, legal and regulatory frameworks.

- **Participant safety:** participants should be briefed on what to expect by taking part in the study and provide informed consent. Participation should be voluntary and individuals should be given the right to withdraw from the study at any point. Additional guidance on best practice on working with human participants (including working with children and vulnerable adults) is provided in the University's Policy regarding Participation of Volunteers in Research Projects, Informed Consent Guidelines and online ethics toolkit. The University's Research Integrity e-learning programme also includes a module on research involving human participants.

- **Limitations of confidentiality:** researchers should be aware that they have a legal duty to report any safeguarding concerns to the University in order to notify the relevant authorities. Limitations of confidentiality should be clearly outlined in the Participant Information Sheet.

- **Approval routes:** while the majority of research and innovation projects involving human participants are approved internally by a Faculty Research Ethics Committee, certain types of projects must be approved by an external body. For example, additional considerations apply to projects which involve working with NHS patients and / or vulnerable adults who lack the capacity to consent. These types of projects require external approval by an NHS Research Ethics Committee. Defence and Security research projects involving human participants which are funded by the Ministry of Defence (MoD) or one of its funding arms also require external ethical approval by the MoD Research Ethics Committee to ensure that ethical standards are upheld.

- **International research:** special considerations also apply to international research involving working with human participants. Researchers should ensure that the protocol meets UK ethical standards in order to avoid the exploitation of research participants in low and middle-income countries. An appropriate approach to reporting safeguarding concerns should be agreed in consultation with local partners which takes into account different social and cultural, legal and regulatory frameworks, access to technology and power differentials. Further guidance and support are available from Faculty Research Ethics Committees as part of the University's ethical review process.

- **Reporting concerns:** any concerns regarding the safety and well-being of participants in a research project should be addressed to the Principal Investigator or the Research Integrity and Governance Manager (email: Research.Integrity@ncl.ac.uk). Following the reporting of an adverse event, the research project will be put on pause to enable further investigation and remedial action to be taken. The activity should only restart once all safety concerns have been addressed satisfactorily.

- **Security sensitive research:** Colleagues and students conducting security sensitive research online should follow the University's Prevent Guidance and contact a member of the Prevent Team for specialist advice. Personal or work laptops should not be used to conduct this type of research. The IT Helpdesk can help arrange access to a University PC or laptop to access security sensitive materials online. Security sensitive data should not be stored on personal or work laptops. However, the University's Research Data Service can offer advice on developing an appropriate Research Data Management Plan. Further guidance on good practice is available through the UUK Report on Oversight of Security Sensitive Research Material in UK Universities.

- **Support for researchers:** colleagues and students should also consider their own mental health and wellbeing when conducting research on security sensitive research or other difficult or emotionally challenging topics. Students can access support through the University's dedicated counselling service. University colleagues can access support through the Colleague Health and Wellbeing Hub.

2.6 Safeguarding Policy

Policy and procedure managed by Student Wellbeing Services (Designated Safeguarding Officer email: Sally.Ingram@ncl.ac.uk).

- **General principles:** the University's Safeguarding of young people (under 18) and vulnerable adults' policy sets out the specific legal duty of the University regarding the protection of children and vulnerable adults engaged in Newcastle University activities. This states that appropriate safeguarding action should be taken wherever there is a concern that a child or vulnerable adult has been harmed, or at risk of being harmed.

- **Risk assessment:** all research and innovation activities involving children and vulnerable adults should be considered high risk and appropriate measures put in place to mitigate those risks.

- **Reporting concerns:** the Head of Student Wellbeing Services acts as a Designated Officer and is the first point of contact for reporting concerns. In cases where abuse is disclosed, the University is obliged to share this information in order to address the risk of harm. This may include a referral to the police or local authority social services.

Louise Jones
Research Integrity and Governance Manager
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