

Professional standards and duties of care

Adherence to professional standards, ensuring familiarity with up-to-date guidance on best research practice from professional bodies and groups.

Most professional bodies aligned with particular disciplines have their own sets of standards that define the ethos expected of scholars and scientists working in those disciplines. Such standards include codes of conduct and codes of practice and, in some disciplines, detailed ethical codes regarding research ethics. Researchers should be familiar with any applicable guidance issued by relevant professional bodies in their own disciplines and ensure that they are aware of any specific duties associated with them. Researchers should also bear in mind that in some cases the codes associated with professional bodies might differ, either minimally or substantially, from institutional codes such as Teesside's *Framework and Code of Practice*. Although the latter is written in such a way as to encompass standard principles applicable across disciplines and should not conflict substantially with codes of conduct from professional bodies, it is important to ensure that where substantial differences exist that these differences are noted so that they can be addressed by the University. In most cases, professional standards will be more detailed and rigorous than those set out in a generic institutional code such as Teesside's *Framework*, so researchers should not be placed in position where maintaining the standards expected by a professional body would involve a conflict with those pertaining to their employment or award regulations for a degree.

Duty of care for participants in, and the subjects of, research.

The duty of care owed by researchers to the participants of research consists of two elements.

Firstly, researchers must adhere to the ethical principles of research ethics review, set out in the University's *Policy, Procedures and Guidelines for Research Ethics*.

The applicable to duties of care are:

Harm to research participants must be avoided: the protection of the dignity, rights, safety and well-being of all actual and potential participants, researchers, non-participating members of the public, and the environment takes precedence over scientific, or any other, considerations or interests. Researchers and participants must normally be informed as fully as possible about the purposes, methods and intended possible uses of the research, what their participation in the research entails, and what risks and benefits are involved. This information should be accurate, clear, and easily understood by the potential participant, who should have the capacity to understand what is involved in their participation. Research proposing variation from this principle may be approved but only in very specific contexts in which the lack of proper information must be justified by the value of the research. Research participants must consent to participate in a voluntary way, free from any coercion, undue influence, or manipulation. Use of inducements to encourage participation must be carefully monitored. The confidentiality of information supplied by research participants, and their anonymity, must be respected except in cases where illegal behaviour is discovered. All data and other materials from and about research participants will be collected, processed, retained, stored, and disposed of, in accordance with current legal requirements.

Secondly, researchers' duties of care apply also to the process of research ethics review, which must be applied for and receive a favourable opinion from a Research Ethics Committee prior to any recruitment of participants. At Teesside this is known as **ethics Clearance**. Any specific details of the research proposed with participants raised during the review which are aimed at ensuring that participants are treated according to the ethical standards expected must be upheld during the course of research. Such details could involve specific matters of consent obtained in order to conduct the research or related to the handling and use of participant data.

The standard test of duty of care is that reasonable steps are taken during research by those holding such a duty. The first reasonable step in research involving human participants is to undertake ethical review, allowing for pertinent ethical issues to be disclosed and for scrutiny by objective third parties of what is proposed, as well as relevant legal permissions to be sought; the second reasonable step is that any issues identified during the review are put in place and carried through into the research; the third reasonable step is that basic ethical principles and standards are maintained once research commences. This also includes:

- Ensuring the safety of all those associated with the research;

Full guidance on duties of care to participants, ethical review procedures, and associated standards, is available in the *Policy, Procedures and Guidelines for Research Ethics*.