

The British Museum Code of Good Research Practice

October 2007

Introduction

The British Museum Research Board is responsible for ensuring good research practice within the British Museum, and is responsible for ensuring that appropriate mechanisms are in place for dealing with allegations of research misconduct.

The British Museum promotes a culture of honesty and integrity in research and expects and requires its researchers to adhere to the highest standards of research integrity. To facilitate this, a code of good research practice has been produced. This document sets out the principles of good research practice and defines the standards of research conduct of the Museum which researchers are required to be aware of and adhere to. The Code of Good Research Practice will be made publicly available through the British Museum website.

The guidance contained within this document is based on the standard good practice as outlined by the Joint Statement by the Director General of the Research Councils and the Chief Executives of the UK Research Councils in December 1998, AMRC, BBSRC, MRC, legal requirements and professional practice issued periodically from funders such as the UK Research Councils and professional bodies. Similar Codes of Good Research Practice have been adopted by all UK Universities and it is a requirement that the British Museum has a Code of Good Research Practice in place to be eligible to apply for funding from UK Research Councils and other bodies. This document is based on those already published by UK Universities, including Keele University and the University of Cambridge.

This guidance should be considered along side the Museum's Ethics Policy.

Principles of good research practice

The British Museum recognises that good research practice includes:-

- fundamentals of research work such as maintaining professional standards; documenting results; questioning one's own findings; attributing honestly the contribution of others;
- leadership and co-operation in research groups;
- taking special account of the needs of young researchers;
- securing and storing primary data.

Standards

All staff at the British Museum will conduct their research according to the following Standards of Good Research Practice.

1. Integrity

Researchers should 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 work, including designing experiments, generating and analysing data, applying for funding, publishing results, and when peer reviewing the work of other researchers. The direct and indirect contributions of colleagues, collaborators and others should be acknowledged.

Researchers are accountable to society, their professions, the Museum, the staff and students involved and, in particular, to the sponsor that is funding the research.

Researchers are expected to understand and apply the following principles:

- Plagiarism, deception, or the fabrication or falsification of results is regarded as serious disciplinary offences
- Researchers are encouraged to report cases of suspected misconduct, and to do so in a responsible and appropriate manner.

The Museum expects all researchers to identify and declare potential or real conflicts of interest in accordance with the Museum Ethics Policy. Conflicts of interest may include legal, ethical, moral, financial, personal, academic or of another nature. Any perceived conflict of interest must be disclosed to your Head of Department or line Manager who will determine what further action should be taken. Please note, in certain circumstances, the above policy may also require disclosure to be made to other Museum Managers and/or completion of the register or interests.

Areas of potential conflict might include:

- Where researchers have an existing or potential financial interest in the outcome of the research
- Where there is a private or private practice benefit significantly dependent upon the outcome of the research
- Where the researcher's professional or personal gain arising from the research may be more than might be usual for research.

Researchers shall 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 activity including, but not limited to, applying for funding, experimental and protocol design, generating, recording, analysing and interpreting data, publishing and exploiting results and acknowledging direct and indirect contributions of colleagues, collaborators and others.

Researchers must not commit any act of research misconduct.

Research misconduct includes:-

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

The Museum encourages all researchers to report cases of suspected misconduct, and recommends that they do so in a responsible and appropriate manner.

General guidance (for researchers at all levels) on avoidance of plagiarism and academic dishonesty is available from the Museum's Research Manager.

The Museum's approach to managing allegations of research misconduct is determined by the Museums Ethics Policy and Code of Conduct for Staff and disciplinary procedure.

2. Openness

While recognising the need for researchers to protect their own and the Museum's research interests, and where appropriate their and the Museum's intellectual property rights, the Museum expects researchers to be as open as possible in discussing their work with other researchers and the public. Research that is sponsored must observe confidentiality of information and in particular respect commercially sensitive information and its dissemination. Guidance can be sought through the Museum's Research Manager.

Researchers should be careful when discussing work that is not complete or has not been published. Furthermore, exchange of confidential information via e-mail is not recommended particularly if patent applications are anticipated.

Researchers have a duty to disseminate their research as widely as possible, especially to those who will benefit directly from it, and to publish in places where their research will have the greatest impact, but if sponsored, must observe confidentiality of information and in particular commercially sensitive information.

Once results have been published, researchers should make available relevant data and materials to other researchers on request, provided that this is consistent with any ethics approvals and consents that cover data and materials and any intellectual property rights pertaining to them.

The Museum recognises that publication of the results may need to be delayed for a reasonable period pending protection of intellectual property arising from the research. However, this delay should be kept to a minimum.

3. Guidance from professional bodies and legislation

Where available, the Museum expects researchers to observe standards of research practice set out in guidelines, (including ethical guidelines) published by scientific and learned societies and other relevant professional bodies. The Museum expects researchers to conduct research in accordance to the relevant code of conduct that may exist for any professional bodies that staff are members of.

All researchers should be aware of the legal requirements, which regulate their work, noting particularly health and safety legislation and data protection requirements. Other legislation researchers should also be aware of, but is not limited to, include The Data Protection Act 1998, Freedom of Information Act 2000, The Human Tissue Act 2004 and The Medicines for Human Use (Clinical Trials) Regulations 2004.

4. Leadership

The Chair of the Museum's Research Board and Research Manager are responsible for ensuring direction and leadership for research activities, and through doing so will ensure that a climate exists which encourages research to be conducted in accordance with good research practice.

5. Documenting results and storing primary data and materials (eg samples, tissues)

There should be clarity at the outset of the research programme as to the ownership and use of, where relevant:

- Data and samples used or created in the course of the research
- The results of the research
- Questionnaires, interviews and transcripts, recordings and images
- Equipment paid for by sponsors.

The responsibilities and procedures for the storage and disposal of data and samples (including compliance with the requirements of any ethics committee) should be made clear at the commencement of any project. Any research collaboration agreement relating to the research should contain clauses describing any necessary arrangements.

Researchers should keep clear and accurate records of the procedures followed and the approvals granted during the research process, including records of the interim results obtained as well as of the final research outcomes. 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. Properly maintained notebooks may be used in evidence when establishing ownership of inventions in the US under their "first to invent" patenting system.

Researchers must maintain clear and accurate records of the consent process and evidence of consent should be securely stored.

Data generated in the course of research should be kept securely in paper or electronic format, as appropriate. Back-up records should always be kept for data stored on a computer. Data stored electronically should be backed up regularly; duplicate copies should be held on disc in a secure but readily accessible archive. The Museum considers a minimum of ten years to be an appropriate period.

Researchers should report any changes in the direction of sponsored research to the sponsor or any other relevant body. Best practice would be to discuss any change in direction of the research with the sponsor prior to its implementation.

6. Dissemination and publication of results

The Museum encourages publication and dissemination of the results of high quality research. However, researchers must do this responsibly and with an awareness of the consequences of such dissemination in the wider media. Researchers should take into account the following guidance when publishing or disseminating their research or research findings including any plans they may have to publish or publicise research at conferences or on web sites.

- The sponsor should be notified in advance when the research might be published, publicised or disseminated.
- Researchers should ensure that papers presented for publication are the authors' own work, reflecting their own research and analysis in an honest and complete manner, placing it appropriately within the context of prior and existing knowledge.
- Researchers should make every effort to make sure research is peer reviewed prior to it being published, publicised or disseminated. If research is placed in the public domain before peer review has been undertaken, the researcher must make this clear in the resulting publication and in any publicity.
- All funding sources must be acknowledged in any publication or publicity.
- Results of research should be published in an appropriate form, usually as papers in refereed journals or refereed edited volumes, or as refereed monographs.
- Anyone listed as an author on a paper should accept responsibility for ensuring that he or she is familiar with the contents of the paper and can identify his or her contribution to it. The practice of honorary authorship is unacceptable.
- The contributions of formal collaborators and all others who directly assist or indirectly support the research should be both specified and properly acknowledged.

As research carried at the British Museum always has a public dimension, the Museum expects the dissemination of research and its results carried out by Museum staff to different audiences outside of academia through a variety of media.

7. Ethical Practice of Good Research

The Museum's Research Board will act as the Museum's Research Ethics Committee. All research that raises ethical concerns must seek approval from the Research Board before embarking on the research. Questions about any ethical implications of proposed research will be included in the documentation required by the Board for approving new projects, and in the annual reporting system to monitor research projects.

7.1 Research involving human participants

Researchers should be aware of the appropriate Museum approval that is required for research involving human participants, through the Museum's Research Board. Approval should also be sought from other regulatory bodies as necessary.

Researchers should ensure confidentiality of personal information relating to participants in research and that the research fulfils appropriate legal requirements e.g. Data Protection Act 1998 and the Human Tissue Act 2004.

7.2 Research involving animals

Researchers should obtain approval through appropriate ethical review processes (applying to the Research Board) and be aware that they may require home office licences for the institution, the investigator and the project.

Researchers should consider at an early stage in the design of the research involving animals, the opportunities for reduction, replacement and refinement of animal involvement.

7.3 Research involving Human Remains and objects of containing Human Remains

Researchers should be aware of, and work within, the Museum's policies and guidance on the research and display of Human Remains, and The Human Tissue Act 2004.

7.4 Consumer/Visitor Involvement

Researchers should be aware of, and work within, the Museum's guidance on visitor research.

Researchers should consider and be aware of the active involvement of consumer/visitor groups in research and the dissemination of research findings. It is important for researchers to consider the impact any publication of research findings may have on those involved in the research and consumer groups.

8. Supervision of Students

Museum staff acting as sole or joint supervisors of students undertaking research shall ensure that they use appropriately challenging means to reflect upon their practice.

The Museum's Research Manager will provide information, advice and training on the codes of practice, expectations, managing and monitoring student performance. All Museum staff involved with the supervision of students should consult the relevant University's codes of practice on student supervision. The Museum recommends that where Museum staff are involved the supervision of students is usually conducted in close partnership with staff from appropriate HEI, and that the appropriate member of staff of the HEI is responsible for ensuring the student fulfils the requirements under the University's regulations for the degree the Student is registered for (see arrangements for running collaborative PhD studentships as a model for this arrangement).

Relevant British Museum Policies and Guidance

Ethics Policy
Code of Conduct for Staff
Human Remains Policy
Acquisitions Policy
Policy on De-accession

References

Association of Medical Research Charities (AMRC). 2002. AMRC Guidelines on Good Research Practice.

<http://www.amrc.org.uk/temp/AMRCspGuidelinesponspGoodspResearchspPracticehs1hs.doc>

Biotechnology and biological sciences research council (BBSRC). Statement on Safeguarding Good Scientific Practice. http://www.bbsrc.ac.uk/funding/overview/good_practice.pdf

Engineering and Physical Sciences and Engineering in Research (EPSRC). Guide to Good Practice in Science and Engineering Research.

<http://www.epsrc.ac.uk/CMSWeb/Downloads/Other/GoodPracticeGuideSciEngRes.doc>

Home Office. Animals in Scientific Procedures

<http://scienceandresearch.homeoffice.gov.uk/animal-research/legislation/>

Manchester Museum. Code of Good Research Conduct

Medical Research Council. Good Research Practice.

<http://www.mrc.ac.uk/Utilities/Documentrecord/index.htm?d=MRC002415>

Natural Environment Research Council. Ethics Policy.

<http://www.nerc.ac.uk/publications/corporate/ethics.asp>

Museum of Cambridge. Good Research Practice.

<http://www.rsd.cam.ac.uk/about/policies/practice/>

Museum of Keele. Policy and Guidelines for the Management of Conflicts of Interest

Wellcome Trust. Guidelines on Good Research Practice.

http://www.wellcome.ac.uk/doc_WTD002753.html