

SOAS Research Ethics Policy

1. Aim and scope

SOAS is, and aims to continue to be, a research-led institution. SOAS is committed by its [Research Strategy](#) to achieving international standards and world recognition in research and research-led teaching, in all of the School's disciplines, and to achieving growth in research income.

Alongside this commitment to research is a commitment to ethical standards, as one of the core values in SOAS's [Vision and Strategy for the Centennial](#). SOAS and its members are expected to maintain the highest ethical standards, and to foster the values of openness, honesty, tolerance, fairness and responsibility.

The purpose of this policy is to translate SOAS's ethical commitment into the field of research, and to provide a framework for research ethics at SOAS. This is done by:

- Setting out the general ethical principles which SOAS expects researchers to follow.
- Defining the concept of research misconduct, which will be used to determine whether research has failed to meet the School's ethical standards.
- Defining the obligations of SOAS and SOAS researchers under this Policy, including SOAS's obligation to implement this Policy by developing and maintaining research ethics procedures.

This policy is substantially based on, and intended to be consistent with, relevant standards issued by Research Councils UK, the UK Research Integrity Office and individual research councils. It will be updated as necessary to take account of developments in these standards.

This policy applies equally to SOAS staff and SOAS students conducting research at any level, and to any other person (regardless of their status) engaged in research under the auspices of SOAS or on behalf of or in association with SOAS (for example, independent contractors, consultants, visiting staff, staff from other institutions, emeritus staff, and staff on joint or honorary contracts). Research conducted collaboratively with other institutions or non-SOAS researchers is covered by this Policy, to the extent that it involves a contribution from a researcher acting under the auspices of the School. This Policy does not apply to research conducted by individuals in a private capacity, except for research conducted as part of consultancy or "third stream" activities approved by SOAS.

2. Status

This policy was approved Research Committee on 11 February 2009 (with subsequent amendments approved on 30 April 2009), and by Academic Board on 27 May 2009. It will be reviewed and revised by Research Committee from time to time.

3. Definitions

Research: any form of disciplined inquiry that aims to contribute to a body of knowledge or theory. This includes research carried out as part of consultancy or “third stream” activities approved by SOAS, but not other research carried out by researchers in a private capacity. Research conducted collaboratively with other institutions or non-SOAS researchers is covered by this Policy, to the extent that it involves a contribution from a researcher acting under the auspices of SOAS.

Research ethics: the moral principles guiding research, from its inception through to completion and publication of results and beyond. These principles are set out in [section 5](#).

Research misconduct: conduct or performance by a SOAS researcher which exhibits one or more of the characteristics set out in [section 6](#). The existence of any of these characteristics is indicative of research which has failed to meet SOAS’s principles of ethical research.

Research participants: living individuals who are the focus of research.

Researcher: any member of SOAS conducting research at any level, including staff and students, and any other person (regardless of their status) engaged in research under the auspices of SOAS or on behalf of or in association with SOAS (for example, independent contractors, consultants, visiting staff, staff from other institutions, emeritus staff, and staff on joint or honorary contracts).

4. Relationship with discipline-specific codes and standards

SOAS researchers are expected to follow any ethical standards or codes of practice issued by relevant professional bodies which are specific to their area or discipline: for example, the standards issued by the [Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth](#), the [British Association for Applied Linguistics](#) and the [British Sociological Association](#). In the unlikely event of conflict between such standards and this Policy or SOAS’s ethical procedures, SOAS’s Policy and procedures shall be followed.

5. Principles of ethical research

SOAS believes that ethical research will be guided by the following principles, which SOAS researchers are expected to follow. This list is not exhaustive: it defines a set of core values which should apply in any research, although additional values and principles may be relevant in specific contexts.

i. Integrity: research should be designed, executed and disseminated in a way which ensures its integrity and quality.

Researchers must ensure that their research has integrity and is of the highest quality. Integrity may be achieved by following the principles set out below. Quality requires that research should be planned so that its findings have demonstrable validity by the standards of the researcher's discipline. In order that findings can be verified, primary data and research results should be preserved and accessible for a reasonable period of time after the completion of research.

ii. Honesty: researchers must be honest about their role, contribution and findings, must comply with legal and contractual obligations, and must respect the rights of research participants and other researchers (including non-SOAS researchers). Such rights include (but are not limited to) intellectual property rights, privacy and Data Protection rights, the right to be identified as the author of one's own work, and rights under equality legislation. Plagiarism, misrepresentation of authorship or results, and other forms of academic dishonesty are fundamentally contrary to SOAS's core values, and frequently involve an abuse of the rights of others.

Honesty includes, within the research team, ensuring that data is shared with other team members in accordance with employment obligations, supervisory or line management relationships and contractual requirements. Appropriate acknowledgement and credit should be given for all contributions to a research project, including recognition in publications and further grant applications.

Researchers should ensure that their research fulfils their obligations to research funders and any conditions imposed as part of the approval of research. Legal and regulatory obligations (including obligations specific to the country where the research is conducted) must be met.

iii. Openness: research staff and research participants must be fully informed about the purpose, methods and intended possible uses of the research, what their participation in the research entails, and any risks to them which may be involved.

The overriding principle is that research should be conducted openly and without deception. SOAS will develop procedures for gaining and recording the informed consent of research participants, taking into account the practicalities of field research and the cultural contexts which may affect the understanding of the concept of consent. Covert research involving research participants should only be undertaken in exceptional circumstances after formal ethical approval.

Openness in research also includes the prompt publication and dissemination of research results by the most appropriate means, subject to intellectual property, privacy, confidentiality and contractual considerations. Research by SOAS staff should normally be deposited in SOAS's open-access repository, SOAS Research Online, in accordance with SOAS's commitment to an open-access model for the archiving and dissemination of research, and the requirements of funding bodies.

iv. Confidentiality: the confidentiality of information provided by research participants and their anonymity should be respected, unless they have consented to the disclosure of information.

v. Voluntary participation: research participants should participate in a voluntary way, free from coercion or intimidation. This is closely related to the principle of openness: as part of the process of gaining informed consent, research participants should be informed of their right to refuse to participate in research or to withdraw from research.

vi. Avoidance of harm: research should be conducted in a way which minimizes the harm or risk to groups or individuals, including research participants, research staff and fellow researchers. Harm includes physical or mental harm, and harm to an individual's organisation, business, livelihood, family, kin or community. Researchers should be aware of the impact which their actions could have on fellow researchers, e.g. by jeopardising access by other researchers to a research community or country.

vii. Independence and impartiality: researchers should ensure that there is no undeclared conflict of interest (whether personal, academic or commercial) in their research. Sources of funding, and the roles and requirements of research funders, should be made clear to research participants and disclosed when research is published.

viii. Cultural sensitivity: in the context of SOAS, it is particularly important that researchers should be sensitive to the values and cultures of groups being studied, and how this may affect research participants' understanding of the purpose and nature of research. Ethical and political issues relating to personal and national disparities in wealth, power, the legal status of the researcher, political interest and national political systems must be taken into account in planning research projects. Researchers should be sensitive to the differences between the civil, legal and perhaps financial position of national and foreign researchers and scholars, and the inherent power position that may exist between the researcher and those being studied. The ethical principles outlined above are particularly urgent when dealing with vulnerable populations, such as refugees or war victims.

6. Research misconduct

Conduct or performance by a researcher which exhibits one or more of the following characteristics shall be treated by SOAS as research misconduct. The presence of any of these characteristics in a research project will indicate behaviour which falls significantly short of the principles of ethical research set out in [section 5](#).

Interpretation of these categories will depend on the context of the research project, and will reflect the judgement and experience of those charged with investigating whether research misconduct has occurred:

i. Fabrication: e.g. the creation of fictitious data, evidence, documentation or results.

ii. Falsification: e.g. the inappropriate manipulation or selection of data, evidence, imagery or documentation.

iii. Misrepresentation: this may include:

- **Misrepresentation of data:** e.g. the undisclosed suppression of evidence or findings, or the deliberate or negligent presentation of a flawed interpretation of data.
- **Misrepresentation of interests:** e.g. the failure to disclose the interests of the researcher or of the funder of the research.
- **Misrepresentation** by the researcher of their **qualifications** or **experience**.
- **Misrepresentation of involvement:** e.g. the inappropriate or unjustified claim by a researcher to authorship or attribution, or the denial of others' rights to authorship or attribution.
- **Misrepresentation of publication:** e.g. the undisclosed duplication of publication, or undisclosed duplicate submission of works for publication, where this involves deception or the deliberate circumvention of publishers' or funders' policies.

iv. Plagiarism: the misappropriation or use of the ideas, intellectual property or work (written or otherwise) of others without acknowledgement or permission.

v. Mismanagement of research data or results: the failure to ensure that research data, evidence and research results are preserved and accessible for a reasonable period after the completion of research, in accordance with SOAS's retention and archiving policies and funders' requirements.

vi. Breach of duty of care: this may occur where the researcher deliberately, recklessly or negligently:

- Discloses improperly the identity of research participants, or information provided by research participants, without their consent or in breach of confidence. Particular care must be taken when conducting research involving human participants or privileged or personal data: see [Using Personal Data in](#)

[Research: Code of Practice for SOAS Staff and Students](#) for further guidance in this area.

- Places research participants, research staff or others involved in research at risk of harm, without their prior consent and without appropriate safeguards.
- Fails to take reasonable care to ensure the informed consent of research participants.
- Fails to observe legal, regulatory, contractual or ethical requirements, and obligations to research funders.
- Conducts themselves improperly in the peer review of applications or publications: e.g. through the gross misrepresentation of the content of material, inadequate disclosure of limited competence, or the abuse of material provided in confidence for peer review.

Conduct or performance by a researcher which falls into at least one of the above categories will be research misconduct if it involves deliberate intent, negligence or recklessness. Research misconduct includes acts of omission as well as acts of commission. However, research misconduct does not include:

- Genuine academic disagreements, e.g. over research methodology.
- Honest errors or mistakes, where no negligence, recklessness or deliberate intention is involved.

Researchers who detect errors or mistakes in their research are expected to make all reasonable efforts to rectify them: e.g. by publication of a correction or retraction. Deliberate failure to rectify research errors will be treated as misrepresentation.

SOAS will adopt procedures for investigating allegations of research misconduct, and for referring cases where appropriate to the School's disciplinary procedures.

7. Obligations of researchers and SOAS

The development of a culture of research ethics at SOAS requires a partnership between SOAS and its researchers. This section defines the obligations of both parties under this Policy.

Researchers must:

- Conduct research in accordance with the principles of research ethics outlined in [section 5](#).
- Avoid research misconduct as defined in [section 6](#).
- Following SOAS's procedures, report instances of behaviour by fellow SOAS researchers which they reasonably believe represents research misconduct. Researchers should recognize that research misconduct, if tolerated or ignored, undermines the entire SOAS research community.

SOAS must:

- Develop, and periodically review, procedures for:
 - Ethical review and approval of research projects.
 - Reporting complaints relating to research projects.
 - Investigating and determining allegations of research misconduct.
 - Handling personal data relating to research participants.
 - Retention and archiving of research data and results.
- Provide training and mentoring for researchers, and for those involved in investigating research misconduct, in research ethics and ethics procedures.
- Adequately resource the implementation of this Policy and its associated procedures.