

# RESEARCH COUNCIL CODE OF CONDUCT

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## RESEARCH COUNCIL CODE OF CONDUCT

### Policy statement

The Research Council is a publicly-funded organisation which is dedicated to nurturing the highest quality research by focusing on excellence with impact. Each year the Research Councils collectively invest in research covering the full spectrum of academic disciplines from the medical and biological sciences to astronomy, physics, chemistry and engineering, social sciences, economics, environmental sciences and the arts and humanities.

Given this large investment of public funds, there is a need to ensure that the best interests of the public are served in the way Councils and their employees pursue their business objectives. Employees are therefore expected to conduct themselves in a way that ensures that the organisation's business is carried out efficiently and effectively, and also to adhere to the highest standards of professional and ethical practice, as outlined in the seven principles of public life (see Annex). To these ends, this policy sets out rules governing employees' conduct and provides guidance on the expected standards of conduct, both at work and in some outside activities.

The Research Council's Code of Conduct is agreed with the Trade Union Side and complies with legislation.

For the purposes of this policy, the use of the word "employee" covers Research Council employees on permanent or temporary contracts as well as persons who are on secondment to the Research Councils and non-employees such as students, contractors and other persons carrying out work on Research Council premises and/or on behalf of the Research Councils.

The UK Shared Business Services Ltd (SBS) provides HR services across the Research Councils. However some employees are deployed at establishments/facilities/vessels that do not access services from SBS. In these cases references to the SBS or System (Employee Self Service) will not apply and employees should refer to their Research Council HR team for assistance.

Whether a worker is deemed to be a worker or employee is not always clear under employment legislation. In cases where managers or employees have any doubt as to whether the code of conduct policy should apply, advice should be sought from the Research Council HR team.

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## 1. Principles

The key principles of this policy, which applies to all employees, are:

- Employees are required to familiarise themselves with this policy, (this will be covered during the Induction process) and to adhere to the required standards of conduct.
- Employees are expected to act in accordance with the Research Council's policies and procedures
- Employees are expected to conduct themselves at work with integrity, objectivity and honesty.
- Employees have a duty to act in a way that promotes the good name of the Research Council; and, conversely, have a duty not to bring the Research Council into disrepute by their actions (or inactions), statements or neglect of their responsibilities.
- All employees must actively seek to create a working atmosphere that is based on trust, co-operation and mutual respect for others.
- Disruptive, unethical or illegal conduct will not be tolerated. Allegations of such conduct will be investigated thoroughly and addressed appropriately under the relevant policy.

## 2. Breach of the Code of Conduct

- 2.1 A breach of this policy may result in disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal.
- 2.2 Breaches of behaviour or conduct in others working for the organisation should be reported to the appropriate level of management or external body if appropriate.
- 2.3 Legal action may be considered if a criminal offence is suspected and, if appropriate, the matter may be reported to the Police or other relevant authorities.

## 3. Conduct at Work

- 3.1 Employees are expected to conduct themselves in line with the Seven Principles in Public Life as set out by the Committee on Standards in Public Life, available at the Annex.

### 3.2 Behaviour towards others

- 3.2.1 Employees are expected at all times to demonstrate respect, courtesy and co-operation towards everyone they interact with at work internally and externally.

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### 3.3 Equality and Diversity

- 3.3.1 Employees and everyone they interact with at work have a right to be treated with fairness and equity. Employees are therefore required to comply with the Research Council's Equality & Diversity policy and, in particular, have a personal responsibility to prevent their behaviour having an unfair discriminatory effect, irrespective of the intention behind their behaviour.
- 3.3.2 Employees are also expected to comply with the Research Council's policy on Harassment ([link](#)). Any form of harassment is a disciplinary offence.

### 4. Health & Safety

- 4.1 Employees have a duty to take reasonable care of their own health and safety and a responsibility for the health and safety of others who may be affected by their activities.

### 5. Contact with the Media

- 5.1 Except where employees are authorised to handle enquiries from the media, these should always be forwarded to the Research Council's Press Office/Communications team.
- 5.2 RCUK employees may express and debate views freely and publicly on ideas, theories and developments relevant to their professional science, expertise and competence. However employees are advised not to comment publicly on Research Council activities or policies without previously consulting with their Director and/or the Press Office/Communications team.
- 5.3 All employees should be aware of their obligations under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOI) which grants a public right of access to information. Employees can be held criminally liable if it is found that they have frustrated a request for information under the act.
- 5.4 The unauthorised passing of privileged or confidential information to the media or other third parties is a disciplinary offence.

### 6. Use of Resources

- 6.1 The Research Council's resources should be used solely in respect of its business and employees should ensure the proper, economical, efficient use and safe keeping of organisational resources.
- 6.2 Before an employee takes property off site they should ensure they have authorisation from their Line Manager. The Research Council reserves the right of search of an employee (and their vehicle) on its premises when there is good and sufficient reason, in accordance with local guidance.

### 6.3 Use of Research Council IT and Communication Systems

- 6.3.1 The Research Council's IT and communication systems are provided to enable employees to do their jobs effectively. Improper use of the Research Council's computers, computer networks and internet connections will be regarded as a disciplinary offence. The Research Council will monitor network traffic and computer use and unacceptable use which is found

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will be investigated. Further details, including the extent of permitted personal use of IT and communication systems, are provided in the Research Council's Acceptable Use policy ([link](#)).

- 6.3.2 Employees must comply with the terms of any licences granted to the Research Council. Unlawful use or copying of computer software is a disciplinary offence.
- 6.3.3. Flexi-time systems for recording/monitoring attendance (where applicable) must be used with integrity. Misuse is a disciplinary offence.

### 7. Financial Propriety

- 7.1 The Research Council has a 'zero-tolerance' approach to fraud and aims to foster an environment in which opportunities for fraud are minimised and in which suspicions of fraud are reported. The Research Council is committed to rigorously investigating cases of alleged fraud, to the recovery of any assets lost (through legal action if necessary) and to taking action against perpetrators of fraud.
- 7.2 Employees have a contractual obligation:
  - to use Research Council funds and other resources under their control only for the purposes for which they are provided;
  - to manage these resources with probity;
  - not to benefit from personal gifts or hospitality attributable to their employment that may compromise or be thought to compromise their integrity;
  - not to make a profit secretly from their employment activity;
  - to avoid waste or extravagance;
  - to report any suspected instances of irregularity, impropriety or fraud.
- 7.3 Employees whose responsibilities include the management of Research Council resources must follow relevant instructions and guidance issued by the Research Council.

### 8. Confidentiality

- 8.1 All employees have a duty to protect official information held in confidence and not to divulge it to unauthorised persons, inside or outside the Research Council. Information about people or the Research Council's business operations should only be removed from the office with the necessary authorisation and with appropriate data protection safeguards (e.g. encryption) in place.
- 8.2 Employees should continue to observe their duty of confidentiality when no longer working for the Research Council.
- 8.3 Information obtained in the course of work must not be used for personal gain or benefit.
- 8.4 Employees should make themselves aware of their obligations under the Data Protection Act; and any disclosure of information must be in line with the Research Council's data protection and other relevant policies and procedures. If in doubt, clarification should be sought from line managers or the Data Protection Officer.

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### 9. Gifts & Hospitality

- 9.1 Employees should be aware that the giving or receiving of gifts, money, hospitality or other favours may constitute a bribe if it is found to be an inducement for an action that would provide an advantage to the employee or other parties. Such a breach is a disciplinary offence and may constitute a criminal offence under the Bribery Act. (link to disciplinary policy).
- 9.2 Approaches from an outside organisation about the offer of an award or prize must be discussed with line managers.

### 10. Handling Contracts

- 10.1 Only designated employees may enter into contracts or place orders on behalf of the Research Council. Designated employees will be informed of their delegated authority to do so.
- 10.2 Any employee whose work involves negotiation or contact with contractors, suppliers, customers etc, should be scrupulous in avoiding any situation which might give rise to criticism or suspicion or which might compromise the Council. An employee will be required to prove that the receipt of a payment or other consideration from someone seeking to obtain a contract or other advantage is not corrupt.

### 11. External Activities

- 11.1 As a general rule, the Research Council will not concern itself with the conduct of employees outside work. However, activities and/or misconduct outside work which impact adversely on an employee's work performance or the organisation's reputation may result in further action (e.g. disciplinary).
- 11.2 Any employee who is the subject of any criminal proceedings or who becomes bankrupt or insolvent must disclose this to their line manager.

#### 11.3 Conflicts of Interest

- 11.3.1 Employees must declare to their manager any financial or non-financial interests that a reasonable person might conclude were in conflict with the interests of the Council. Any such declaration shall be kept on a Register of Interests held locally

#### 11.4 Consultancy Work

- 11.4.1 Employees are required to seek written approval before accepting paid consultancy work which uses a) official time or resources and/or b) professional knowledge and skills gained in the course of employment with the Council.
- 11.4.2 Employees will not normally receive either paid or unpaid special leave in order to undertake consultancy work.

#### 11.5 Political Activity

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11.5.1 In general, employees are free to take part in political activities. Participation in any political activity must only be undertaken in a personal capacity and employees should avoid becoming involved in political controversy on matters affecting the Research Council.

As a courtesy, employees taking part in local political activities should inform their line manager.

11.5.2 Some employees, in politically restricted posts, may be restricted in their ability to take part in European or national political activities.

### 11.6 Parliamentary or European Assembly Candidates

11.6.1 Employees seeking adoption as a Parliamentary or European Assembly candidate should inform their line manager and HR.

### 11.7 Publications, Broadcasts and lectures

11.7.1 Approval to participate in a lecture or broadcast as a representative of the Research Council should be sought from line managers. Any fees would normally be payable to the Research Council.

11.7.2 If an employee is invited to participate in a lecture/broadcast in a personal capacity on a non-work related matter then permission will not normally be required.

As a courtesy, employees taking part in local political activities should inform their line manager.

## 12. Review of Policy

12.1 This policy will be regularly reviewed to incorporate any legislation changes. The TU may request that a policy is reviewed,

## 13. Amendment history

Version	Date	Comments/Changes

## RESEARCH COUNCIL CODE OF CONDUCT

### Annex– The Seven Principles of Public Life

#### **Selflessness**

Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends.

#### **Integrity**

Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might seek to influence them in the performance of their official duties.

#### **Objectivity**

In carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, holders of public office should make choices on merit.

#### **Accountability**

Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.

#### **Openness**

Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands.

#### **Honesty**

Holders of public office have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest.

#### **Leadership**

Holders of public office should promote and support these principles by leadership and example.

These principles apply to all aspects of public life. They were established by the First Report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, chaired by Lord Nolan, in 1996.