

Annual statement on research integrity 2022

Section 1: Key contact information

Question	Response
1A. Name of organisation	National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER)
1B. Type of organisation: higher education institution/industry/independent research performing organisation/other (please state)	Independent Research Organisation
1C. Date statement approved by governing body (DD/MM/YY)	30/05/2023
1D. Web address of organisation's research integrity page (if applicable)	http://www.nfer.ac.uk/about-nfer/governance-structure/annual-reports/
1E. Named senior member of staff to oversee research integrity	Name: Dr Lesley Duff
	Email address: l.duff@nfer.ac.uk
1F. Named member of staff who will act as a first point of contact for anyone wanting more information on matters of research integrity	Name: Dr Lesley Duff
	Email address: l.duff@nfer.ac.uk

Section 2: Promoting high standards of research integrity and positive research culture.

Description of actions and activities undertaken

2A. Description of current systems and culture

Policies and Systems

NFER recognises the importance of undertaking its activities responsibly with the highest ethical standards. Our [Code of Practice](#) is supported by implementation guidelines for both our UK and International researchers and sets out how we must act to adhere to ethical and professional standards, in addition to safeguarding and data protection requirements.

The Director of Research (DoR) has overall responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the Concordat and our associated Code of Practice, including the oversight of research policies, research governance and ethics, and training and development opportunities provided by NFER to its staff.

Our Chief Social Scientist chaired the Code of Practice Committee, but this is now being led by the Director of Research. At the initiation of any project a 'Project Director' is required to fill in a Code of Practice Impact Assessment (COPIA) form which is kept with project documents, and which sets out whether the team needs to get ethical approval for its research from the Code of Practice Committee.

The Code of Practice Committee also ensures that training in ethics and research integrity is available to all staff and is up to date. All staff involved in data collection, analysis, and reporting are required to undertake this training on joining NFER, and at regular intervals thereafter. This training provides the following information:

- an introduction to the Concordat to Support Research Integrity and how it relates to NFER's policies and procedures
- examples of how these policies should be applied, and the potential ramifications of research misconduct
- links to further guidance and who to contact for further support
- completion of a self-assessment exercise to assess learning and create an audit trail of who has undertaken the research integrity training.

The Chief Social Scientist was also responsible for ensuring that the Code of Practice Committee members are themselves up to date with the latest best

practice in research integrity and ethics.

Currently, many of NFER's large-scale evaluations are for the Education Endowment Foundation, which has a world-leading pre-specification and publication policy. A protocol is published, in which outcomes are pre-specified and the trial is registered on the ISRCTN database. All trials reports funded by the EEF are published. NFER researchers supported EEF's decision to publish statistical analysis plans, which are peer reviewed and published within three months of randomisation.

Communications and engagement

NFER produces research and assessments. We inform funders that our research needs to be for the public benefit and that our findings need to be free from political or commercial interference. Our approach to assessment development is to ensure no harm and to provide quality assessment materials to maximise public benefit. Our charitable aim to improve educational outcomes for children underpins this. We also foster close links with policy officials, decision makers and schools in the education arena to ensure that our research has impact.

Culture, development and leadership

The Chief Social Scientist previously chaired the Innovation and Improvement Group (IIG), which is responsible for the continual improvement of research methods and rigour. The IIG is supported by a network of professional groupings which are headed up by professional leads who are responsible for ensuring that staff are kept up to date with new methodological developments in their specialism and that we foster a culture of creativity and intellectual curiosity. NFER has professional groupings for: statisticians; economists; survey design specialists; trial specialists; psychometricians; qualitative researchers and assessment specialists. We take the development of staff seriously. Line managers review the development needs of staff according to the competencies needed for their role and grade, and for promotion where suitable.

In addition to these formal routes of training, NFER operates a buddy system for new staff to ensure that staff have a mentor who can help them get up to speed with NFER processes.

NFER is an inclusive and open research organisation. We take our reputation seriously and staff are encouraged to seek continual improvement and to be open and honest regarding mistakes. It is a key organisational aim to ensure that those who contract with us or who read our work have the highest level of trust in our

outputs.

Monitoring and reporting

The NFER Quality Assurance group, chaired by the Director of Research, leads on assuring and continually improving our research efficiency and management, conducting deep dives into our systems to ensure that they are fit for purpose. In addition to this formal group, we conduct an end of project review and information from these reviews is used to improve our processes where needed. For large projects we require that each has a specific project board which helps to mitigate against risks and ensure delivery to time, quality and budget.

The Code of Practice Committee, IIG and Quality Assurance Group report to the Senior Management Team, along with monitoring updates from our Data Security group and Human Resources team.

2B. Changes and developments during the period under review

The NFER Research Quality Assurance Group has reviewed our procedures relating to aligning our actions and outputs with client needs. This involved reviewing several completed and ongoing projects to look at the systems and processes that were used to ensure requirements were met. A report was circulated to Senior Management and NFER's wider research community. We provided guidance for Research Directors and Leaders in capturing, monitoring achievement, and reporting alignment with client requirements. In addition, a deep dive is currently being conducted on the processes to maintain the quality of data collected for research purposes. A report will be presented to Senior Management and lessons learned embedded in practice in due course.

We have also looked at ways to enhance our rigour and ability to respond to changes in market requirements and standards expected through skills and methods development. This year we devolved training and development plans to our Professional Leads (PLs) who instigated a range of learning events and projects designed to strengthen our methods. These were showcased in our annual Research Conference with follow-up learning events. The PLs submitted an annual statement to the Chief Social Scientist that sets out training and development requirements and how they have been addressed.

Underpinning these developments is our 5-year strategy to digitise and improve our research operations and field work, with benefits for research participants and the ease with which they can work with us, as well as enhancing the analysis we are

able to undertake and the value of that for education.

Research integrity awareness and training was rolled out to all staff involved in data collection, analyses or reporting in December 2022 unless they had joined within the last year and completed this training in their induction.

In November 2022 the Chief Social Scientist attended the Westminster Education Forum event 'The next steps for research integrity and reproducibility'. This event provided an opportunity to examine current practice, key developments and the implications for funders, researchers and institutions. Learning from this event will be incorporated into NFER's activities moving forward.

2C. Reflections on progress and plans for future developments

This is the first year that NFER has been an Independent Research Organisation. We are content that we have a culture of research integrity and that our systems support this. Next year we will be looking at how we minimise the research burden on schools. Our new school engagement lead will be working closely with schools to improve the service we offer to them and their engagement with research studies. The school engagement work also aims to increase response rates which will have a direct impact of the rigour of our work. Alongside this we will be investigating the current data landscape and looking for opportunities to minimise primary data collection and utilise existing secondary data sets to answer research questions as part of a new data strategy.

Section 3: Addressing research misconduct.

3A. Statement on processes that the organisation has in place for dealing with allegations of misconduct

NFER has a range of policies intended to promote a positive culture for staff, and to supply guidance to staff on several issues that may pose a threat to a culture of rigour, transparency and respect. These include our Dignity at Work policy that encompasses our anti-bullying and harassment policy (last updated 2019). In addition, our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy promotes diversity in our workforce which we believe supports research quality (last updated 2019).

To protect researchers from undue influence we have a Conflict-of-Interest Policy, (last updated 2022), and an Anti-Bribery and Corruption Policy, last updated (2019).

We also have a Whistle Blowing policy, (last updated 2015), a Grievance Policy (last updated 2019) and a Disciplinary Policy, (last updated 2020).

In line with the Code of Practice, NFER requires all researchers to conduct themselves, at all times, in a professional and ethical manner. NFER takes any allegation of research misconduct seriously. In the first instance, anyone wishing to make an allegation of research misconduct against an employee of NFER should follow the [complaints procedure on NFER's website](#). This holds contact details for the Complaints Officer, who will coordinate the complaints process. Should any allegations of research misconduct arise, NFER has a formal Disciplinary Policy, with associated procedures and guidance, which would be applied. NFER will maintain a register of any disciplinary actions taken regarding researchers not acting with research integrity.

3B. Information on investigations of research misconduct that have been undertaken

In 2022 there were no formal complaints of research misconduct.

Type of allegation	Number of allegations			
	Number of allegations reported to the organisation	Number of formal investigations	Number upheld in part after formal investigation	Number upheld in full after formal investigation
Fabrication				
Falsification				
Plagiarism				
Failure to meet legal, ethical and professional obligations				
Misrepresentation (e.g., data; involvement; interests; qualification; and/or publication history)				
Improper dealing with allegations of misconduct				
Multiple areas of concern (when received in a single allegation)				
<i>Other*</i>				
Total:				