

University of York Research: Research Reputation and Social Responsibility Framework

Institutional statements

1. The University's [Vision for York](#) reaffirms the founding principle that the University of York exists for public good.

The Vision states the four core University Principles:

- Environmental Sustainability
- Collaboration across multidisciplinary boundaries
- Internationalism
- Equality, diversity and inclusion

The [University of York Research Strategy](#) 2023-2030 describes how these core principles apply to research at the University of York:

- *Environmental Sustainability: Improving environmental conditions is not only a prerequisite for societies and economies to flourish, and for people to live healthy and fulfilled lives; it is also a powerful driver for research, education and partnerships. The complexity of environmental sustainability requires distinctly new knowledge, fundamentally new ways of generating it and radically new ways of understanding and acting on it.*
- *Collaboration: Through the partnerships we create in research, education and engagement, we put to rest the assumption that competition alone lies at the heart of progress. Instead, it will be the collaboration across different disciplines, with people from different backgrounds, with different expertise, experiences and insight, that will create a more equitable and sustainable future for all.*
- *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: Freedom of inquiry and expression are central to intellectual advancement and to social and economic development. Upholding them is tantamount to assuring that every single member of our community is treated with the same respect, is afforded equitable opportunities and feels at ease.*
- *Internationalism: We embrace global awareness and responsibility in all that we do. We seek partners with complementary skill sets, ambitions and networks, so that together we can address pressing and emerging environmental, social and economic challenges efficiently and effectively.*

Research oversight

2. The statements in this document and any associated processes apply to research, collaborative research, contract research, and consultancy. The statements and processes apply whether activity is funded or unfunded, including collaborative work even where the University is not the lead collaborator. The statements and processes apply to all staff, students (including postgraduate researchers), visiting or emeritus

staff, associates, honorary or clinical contract holders, contractors and consultants, across all subject disciplines and fields of study. Other aspects of University business (e.g. teaching, careers, placements, and on campus events, CPD, philanthropy and investments) are outside the scope of this document and any necessary escalation in relation to these aspects of University business are or will be handled elsewhere.

3. The University of York is committed to academic freedom, as described in its Charter¹. It also recognises that all research must be undertaken within the expected standards including legislative frameworks, accepted UK integrity and ethical standards, funder regulation, and institutional policies.
4. Whilst it is the norm that projects that meet University ethical standards will proceed, the University acknowledges that research activities undertaken in association with particular funders, corporations, agencies or states may, even with the highest ethical governance, cause considerable harm to the reputation or undermine the social responsibilities of the University either directly or indirectly. Such harm may be due to the practices or reputation of the funder or partner itself. The University recognises the importance of a clear decision-making process by which activities with, or supported by, such funders or partners are limited, as well as a clear escalation route for concerns.
5. The ethical review and associated escalation assesses ethics around the project as well as reputational risks that may come from a funder or partner, and the broader context within which the project takes place (company, country, etc.). It may therefore be the case that a proposed research activity is deemed acceptable when carried out with organisation A but deemed unacceptable when carried out with organisation B.
6. In a research context, approval is granted at individual project level, and all research projects fall under the current institutional ethics framework. There are no research projects that are out of scope.

Policy and procedure documents relating to research activity at University of York include (see [Research Policies webpage](#) for the full list):

- Research Strategy
- Code of Practice on Research Integrity
- Research Data Management Policy
- Code of Practice and Principles for Good Ethical Governance
- Policy and Procedure for the Investigation of Allegations of Research Misconduct
- Due Diligence processes
- Export Control
- Code of Practice for Sustainable Research

¹[University Charter](#) paragraph 8: The University shall uphold and promote academic freedom, and staff engaged in teaching or research or directly supporting it shall have freedom within the law to question and test received wisdom and to put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions without placing themselves in jeopardy of losing their jobs or privileges.

7. An academic, whether working as a Principal Investigator (PI) or a supervisor of PGRs, must always consider whether ethics approval, due diligence or other oversight is needed, and if any are needed conduct these in accordance with University policy and/or procedure.
8. In addition to the responsibilities mentioned above (paragraph 7), everyone with knowledge of a project has the right and responsibility to raise issues around ethics and research practices. In addition to research-specific policies, the University has a [Whistleblowing policy](#) for raising matters of concern.
9. It is understood that the need for approvals (see paragraph 7) can change as a project evolves. It is important for all involved in the project to continue to review whether approvals are required for a project or if any approval granted at the outset is no longer appropriate and/or sufficient for the work being undertaken.
10. The University has scope to impose a requirement for additional scrutiny or an exclusion on specific academic activities if it is deemed there would be a detrimental impact on the wider institution from starting, maintaining, changing or ending an aspect of research activity.
11. Decisions on imposing additional scrutiny or an exclusion of specific academic activities rest at institutional level, and such decisions must be taken under the authority of the University Executive Board (UEB). UEB may delegate decision-making whilst remaining responsible and accountable, using the oversight and escalation process set out in paragraphs 12-20.

Research Reputation & Social Responsibility Review Panels

12. Project-level ethical oversight normally rests with local ethics committees. Local ethics committees will offer discipline-level guidance and examples to academic colleagues on when a higher level decision may be required. Ethics decisions are context-dependent and dealt with on a case-by-case basis, and may include consideration of the proposed research activity alongside the profile of the funder(s) and partner(s).
13. In cases where local ethics committees cannot resolve issues raised, advice and guidance is provided by the Academic Ethics Compliance Committee (AECC).
14. Where decisions are deemed to have high reputational risk and/or AECC determines that the matter needs corporate-level oversight, cases will be escalated to a Research Reputation & Social Responsibility Review Panel which will have delegated authority from UEB to make decisions on behalf of the University. This escalation route will also support academics by allowing detailed consideration and the expression of institutional support for research activity where there is high interest, scrutiny, controversy or concern from outside the University.

15. In parallel to the ethics process, cases of Research Reputation and Social Responsibility may be raised directly. Research Reputation and Social Responsibility cases may be raised in a variety of circumstances, including:
- When an academic has questions about a project they are developing;
 - When a HOD has questions about a project they have been asked to approve;
 - When a colleague has become aware of a project where reputational concerns may exist.
- The priority is to encourage colleagues working on projects where there may be concern about Research Reputation and Social Responsibility to make this known at the earliest opportunity to enable a Review Panel to arrive at a timely decision.
16. The Policy, Integrity and Performance team (PIP) will maintain a list of possible research areas or funders/partners where additional scrutiny may be required. It is accepted that the list can not be exhaustive and PIs will be expected to seek guidance at an early stage if they have any questions about a possible project. The list can be reviewed at the request of the PVCR and a suitable Research Reputation and Social Responsibility Review Panel will be convened to consider amendments.
17. A Research Reputation & Social Responsibility Review Panel will be chaired by the Pro-Vice Chancellor for Research. The decision panel will ordinarily include the Pro-Vice Chancellor for Research as Chair, Director of RIKE, Director of External Relations, Dean and/or Associate Dean for Research from the relevant Faculty and will draw on relevant expertise from senior academic colleagues, as well as professional services staff, as required by the specifics of a case. Projects will be reviewed at any stage and may be prevented if appropriate approval has not been sought or if the position of any partner or funder has changed.
18. Decisions made by a Research Reputation and Social Responsibility Review Panel will be project-specific and will not automatically lead to amendments to existing University policies. Any change to policies deemed necessary following a decision by a Research Reputation and Social Responsibility Review Panel will be made through the customary governance structures in accordance with the [Institutional Policy Framework](#).
19. Cases for consideration by a Research Reputation and Social Responsibility Review Panel will be escalated via PIP. PIP will be responsible for supporting the panel's operation and recording all decisions. PIP will communicate, as appropriate, with the relevant ethics committees and the researcher(s) seeking to engage with partners or funders on projects that are being assessed.
20. The escalation process will be:
- a. The Head of PIP is the key contact point for any advice on the Research Reputation and Social Responsibility Framework and should be swiftly informed of any issue requiring escalation.

- b. PIP will collect documentation and seek any clarifying information to prepare guidance material for panel review.
- c. Research Reputation & Social Responsibility Review Panel members may request additional expert contribution for further information where relevant.
- d. The Research Reputation & Social Responsibility Review Panel will decide on the best course of action, which may include: approving the activity, approving the activity with mitigations implemented; vetoing the activity.
- e. The outcome will be published in the appropriate location for sign-off according to the case (e.g. AECC minutes, Local Research Ethics Committees approval register, due diligence approval). The risk will also be recorded on the appropriate risk register and shared with other relevant parties (e.g. Office of Philanthropic Partnerships and Alumni).

See also: Research Review and Social Responsibility Framework Appendix