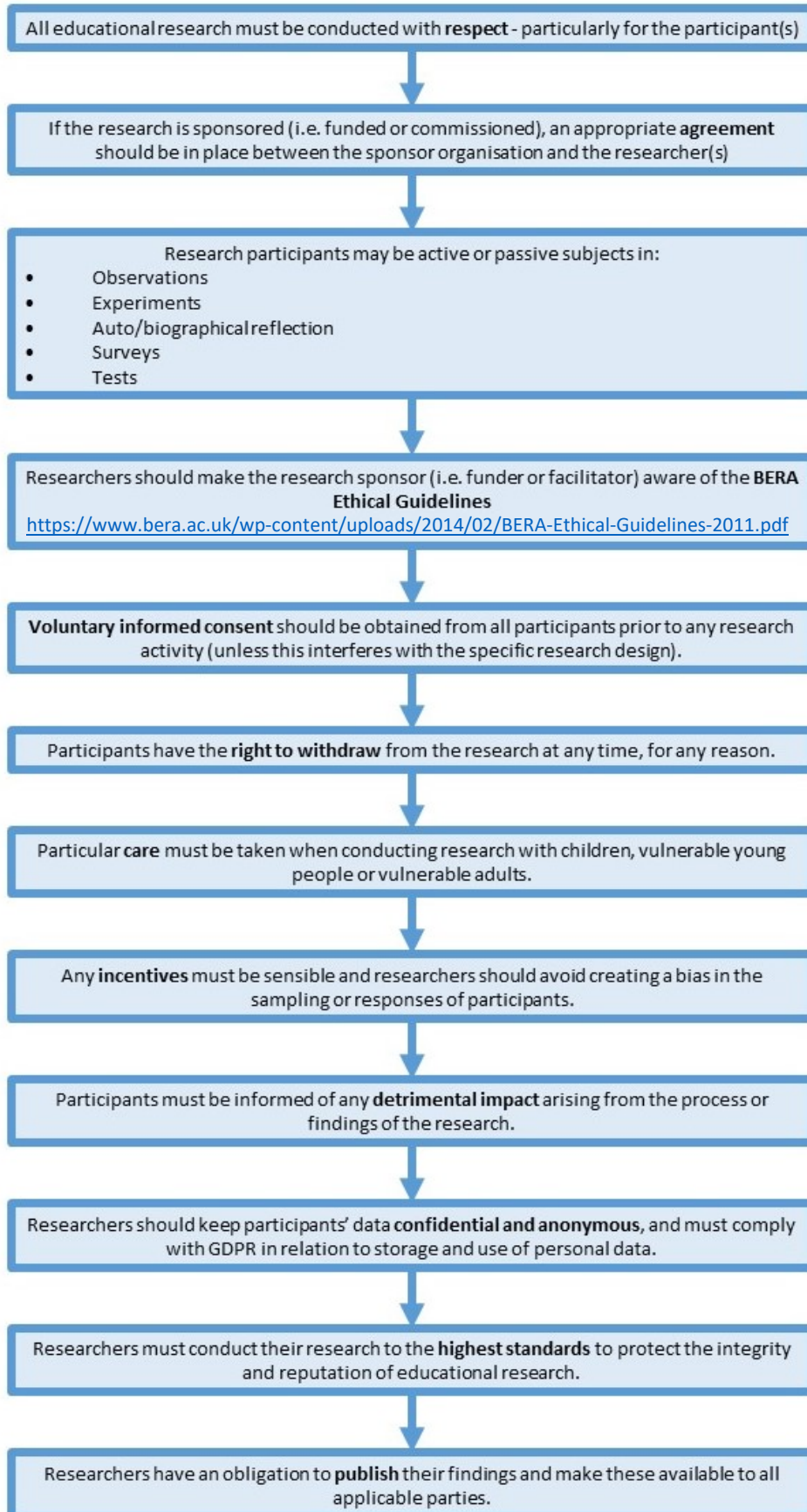




# Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research 2011 – A Summary

## British Educational Research Association (BERA)





## **1) Introduction**

Educational researchers are multi-disciplinary and aim to extend knowledge and understanding in all areas of educational activity.

All educational research should be conducted with respect for:

- The person
- Knowledge
- Democratic values
- The quality of educational research
- Academic freedom

## **2) Responsibilities to Participants**

Research participants may be active or passive subjects in:

- Observations
- Experiments
- Auto/biographical reflection
- Surveys
- Tests

Educational researchers should respect all persons involved in their research. Individuals (researchers and participants alike) should be treated:

- Fairly
- Sensitively
- With dignity
- With freedom of prejudice regardless of:
  - Age
  - Gender
  - Sexuality
  - Race
  - Ethnicity
  - Class
  - Nationality
  - Cultural identity
  - Partnership status
  - Faith
  - Disability
  - Political belief
  - Any other significant difference



### **Voluntary Informed Consent**

Wherever possible, participants should give voluntary informed consent (without duress) before participating in a research project. Researchers must ensure participants understand:

- The process they will be engaged in (particularly important if social networking/other on-line activities are being monitored and analysed for the research)
- Why their participation is necessary
- How the data will be used
- Who the data will be reported to

If researchers have a dual role (e.g. teacher and researcher) they must consider the impact of this research on other individuals (e.g. students and colleagues). Particular attention must be paid to issues of confidentiality in this context.

Educational research undertaken by UK researchers outside of the UK must adhere to the same ethical standards as research in the UK, whilst also observing the regulations and cultural sensitivities of that country.

### **Openness and Disclosure**

Obtaining participants' voluntary informed consent before the research starts is considered the norm. Deception or subterfuge must be avoided unless the research design specifically requires it to ensure appropriate data is collected or to avoid jeopardising the researchers' welfare. If non-disclosure or subterfuge is used this must be fully deliberated and disclosed in reporting. Approval for research involving deception should be obtained from the relevant ethics committee. If possible, researchers must seek consent on a post-hoc basis if it was not possible to seek it before undertaking the research.

### **Right to Withdraw**

Researchers must inform participants that they have the right to withdraw from the research for any or no reason, at any time. Researchers may carefully attempt to persuade the participant to re-engage, but must not use coercion or duress, and must accept the participant's decision. Where a participant is contractually obliged to participate as part of their employment, the researcher may contact the relevant third party to request compliance.

### **Children, Vulnerable Young People and Vulnerable Adults**

In accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the best interests of the child must be the primary consideration in all actions concerning children. Where possible, children should be facilitated to give fully informed consent, as should young people and vulnerable adults. Where participants are limited in their ability to voluntarily consent, researchers must seek the consent of parents/carers or 'responsible others' e.g. social workers.

Researchers must ensure that they, their collaborators and research assistants comply with legal requirements in relation to working with children, vulnerable young people and adults.

Participants may experience distress or discomfort in the research process, so researchers must take all necessary steps to reduce the sense of intrusion and put participants at ease. If any part of the research process causes emotional or other harm, it must be stopped immediately. Researchers should also minimise the impact of their research on participants (particularly in the case of surveys which are time-intensive).



## **Incentives**

If incentives are offered to participants, they must be sensible (e.g. avoid offering sweets to school-children due to the impact on their health). Researchers must be aware that the use of incentives might be problematic in the design/reporting of their research, for example it could create a bias in sampling or participant responses.

## **Detriment Arising from Participation in Research**

Researchers must tell participants (or guardians/responsible others) any detrimental impact arising from the process or findings of the research. Any detrimental impact identified during the research must immediately be brought to their attention.

If a research project has an advantage (or perceived advantage) for one group of participants over the others, the researcher must take steps to minimise the effect of the design (e.g. in an experimental study where a treatment is considered a desirable intervention and is not available to the control group).

## **Privacy**

Researchers should keep participants' data confidential and anonymous, unless the participant/guardian/responsible other has specifically and willingly waived that right in which case a written waiver should be obtained. Conversely, participants may wish to be identified with any publication of their original works or other inputs, and researchers must recognise this right.

Researchers must comply with legal requirements in relation to the storage and use of personal data. Participants are entitled to know:

- How and why their personal data is being stored
- What it's being used for
- Who will have access to it

Researchers must have permission to disclose participants' personal information to third parties and must ensure the third party is permitted to have access to the information. Researchers must independently confirm the identity of third parties and keep a record of any disclosures (whether written, electronic, verbal or visual).

Researchers must store data securely and ensure that any form of publication does not directly or indirectly lead to a breach of agreed confidentiality and anonymity.

## **Disclosure**

If any illegal behaviour is identified as a result of the research, and maintaining the confidentiality and anonymity agreements in place with the participant will allow that illegal behaviour to continue, the researcher must carefully consider making disclosure to the appropriate authorities. Also, if behaviour is likely to be harmful to the participants or others, the researcher must consider disclosure. Researchers must inform the participant (or guardian/responsible other) of their intentions and reasons for disclosure, unless it would undermine or obviate the disclosure.

Overriding confidentiality and anonymity agreements must only be done after careful and thorough deliberation. In these circumstances it is in the researcher's interests to make detailed notes of their decisions and the reasoning behind them, in case a complaint or other serious consequence arises.

It is good practice to debrief participants at the end of the research and provide them with copies of reports/publications related to their participation. If the scale of the research makes this impractical, other means of informing the participants of the outcomes should be used (e.g. a website).



### **3) Responsibilities to Sponsors of Research**

A sponsor of research is a person or body that funds research (e.g. research charity or government body) or facilitates it by allowing and enabling access to data and participants (e.g. examinations body).

Researchers should make sponsors of research aware of the BERA Ethical Guidelines (<https://www.bera.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/BERA-Ethical-Guidelines-2011.pdf>).

It is usual to have written agreements for funded or commissioned research. Consider that the results, particularly of publicly funded research, need to be made available to applicable parties. The agreement should cover:

- Research purpose
- Method(s) to be used
- Conditions of access to data and/or participants
- Ownership of data
- Researcher's right to publish
- Requirements for reporting and dissemination
- Deadlines for completion
- Finance
- Provision for negotiating changes requested by the researcher or sponsor

It is in the researcher's interest to agree responsibilities and entitlements with the sponsor at the start of the research. If the sponsor is acting as a host or facilitator for research, the researcher must inform them of their proposed work (e.g. a group of teachers undertaking research as part of curriculum renewal should inform the school management).

Researchers must be honest about their competence and capacity to undertake the proposed research when negotiating sponsored research. Researchers should be unbiased in the design, analysis and interpretation of the research. Where they have a vested interest in the outcome, this should be declared and amenable to scrutiny.

#### **Methods**

If the researcher has preferred methods/theories/philosophies, the sponsor should be assured that the researcher has considered all options and the methods to be used are fit for purpose. Researchers must demonstrate that the data collection, analysis and results are reliable and valid and declare to what extent they can be applied to the general population.

#### **Publication**

Familiarisation with the BERA Good Practice on Educational Research Writing guidelines is recommended (<https://www.bera.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/goodpr1.pdf>).

Even in sponsored research, it is normal for researchers to be allowed to publish the findings of their own research. This meets their obligation to ensure their findings are made available to applicable parties (e.g. educational practitioners, policy makers, parents, pupils and the wider public).

Sponsors should not place conditions on the methods/reported outcomes of the research. Researchers must avoid agreeing to any sponsor's conditions that contravene the BERA guidelines, and any attempt by a sponsor/funding agency to use questionable influence should be reported to BERA.

Researchers and sponsors have the right to dissociate themselves from any presentation of the research which they consider to be misleading. Wherever possible this situation should be prevented by agreements on publication (through arbitration if necessary).



#### **4) Responsibilities to the Community of Educational Researchers**

The community of educational researchers includes academics, public/private professionals, teachers and students involved in research.

##### **Misconduct**

Researchers must protect the integrity and reputation of educational research by ensuring they conduct their research to the highest standards. For example, researchers must avoid bringing research into disrepute by:

- Falsifying, 'sensationalising' or distorting findings
- Criticising other researchers
- Exploiting research staff
- Compromising the objectivity of the research
- Taking personal credit for joint research
- Using research for fraudulent or illegal purposes

Researchers should raise concerns of malpractice with the researcher(s) involved in the first instance, and avoid bringing the research community into disrepute unless it compromises the public's right to know.

Researchers must make their data, methods, results and findings available to external scrutiny, subject to confidentiality and anonymity agreements.

##### **Authorship**

The authorship of publications should include everyone who has made significant contribution to the conduct, analysis and writing up of the research. The order of authorship should reflect level of contribution rather than academic status or seniority.

#### **5) Responsibilities to Educational Professionals, Policy Makers and the General Public**

Researchers should make the results of their research public for the benefit of educational professionals, policy makers and the wider public. Findings and their practical significance should be communicated clearly and appropriately for the intended audience.