



Ethical Guidelines

Introduction

The British Educational Research Association adopted the following set of ethical guidelines at its Annual General Meeting on 28 August 1992. These are based on guidelines developed at a BERA seminar in March 1988 (published in *Research Intelligence*, February 1989) and the proposed ethical standards of the American Educational Research Association as published in *Educational Researcher*, December 1991. (We are grateful to the AERA Committee on Standards for permission to adapt their guidelines.)

The Guidelines

1. The British Educational Research Association believes that all educational research should be conducted within an ethic of respect for persons, respect for knowledge, respect for democratic values, and respect for the quality of educational research.

Responsibility to the research profession

2. Educational researchers should aim to avoid fabrication, falsification, or misrepresentation of evidence, data, findings, or conclusions.
3. Educational researchers should aim to report their findings to all relevant stakeholders and so refrain from keeping secret or selectively communicating their findings.
4. Educational researchers should aim to report research conceptions, procedures, results, and analyses accurately and in sufficient detail to allow other researchers to understand and interpret them.
5. Educational researchers should aim to decline requests to review the work of others when strong conflicts of interest are involved or when such requests cannot be conscientiously fulfilled on time. Materials sent for review should be read in their entirety and considered carefully, with evaluative comments justified with explicit reasons.
6. Educational researchers should aim to conduct their professional lives in such a way that they do not jeopardize future research, the public standing of the field, or the publication of results.

Responsibility to the participants

7. Participants in a research study have the right to be informed about the aims, purposes and likely publication of findings involved in the research and of potential consequences for participants, and to give their informed consent before participating in research.
8. Care should be taken when interviewing children and students up to school leaving age; permission should be obtained from the school, and if they so suggest, the parents.

9. Honesty and openness should characterize the relationship between researchers, participants and institutional representatives.

10. Participants have the right to withdraw from a study at any time.

11. Researchers have a responsibility to be mindful of cultural, religious, gendered, and other significant differences within the research population in the planning, conducting, and reporting of their research.

Responsibility to the public

12. Educational researchers should communicate their findings and the practical significance of their research in clear, straightforward, and appropriate language to relevant research populations, institutional representatives, and other stakeholders.

13. Informants and participants have a right to remain anonymous. This right should be respected when no clear understanding to the contrary has been reached. Researchers are responsible for taking appropriate precautions to protect the confidentiality of both participants and data. However, participants should also be made aware that in certain situations anonymity cannot be achieved.

Relationship with funding agencies

14. The data and results of a research study belong to the researchers who designed and conducted the study unless alternative contractual arrangements have been made with respect to either the data or the results or both.

15. Educational researchers should remain free to interpret and publish their findings without censorship or approval from individuals or organizations, including sponsors, funding agencies, participants, colleagues, supervisors, or administrators. This understanding should be conveyed to participants as part of the responsibility to secure informed consent. This does not mean however that researchers should not take every care to ensure that agreements on publication are reached.

16. Educational researchers should not agree to conduct research that conflicts with academic freedom, nor should they agree to undue or questionable influence by government or other funding agencies. Examples of such improper influence include endeavours to interfere with the conduct of research, the analysis of findings, or the reporting of interpretations. Researchers should report to BERA attempts by sponsors or funding agencies to use any questionable influence, so that BERA may respond publicly as an association on behalf of its members thereby protecting any individual or contract.

17. The aims and sponsorship of research should be made explicit by the researcher. Sponsors or funders have the right to have disclaimers included in research reports to differentiate their sponsorship from the conclusions of the research.

18. Educational researchers should fulfil their responsibilities to agencies funding research, which are entitled to an account of the use of their funds, and to a report of the procedures, findings, and implications of the funded research.

19 The host institution should appoint staff in the light of its routine practices

and according to its normal criteria. The funding agency may have an advisory role in this respect, but should not have control over appointments.

20. Sponsored research projects should have an advisory group consisting of representatives from those groups and agencies which have a legitimate interest in the area of inquiry. This advisory group should facilitate access of the researcher(s) to sources of data, other specialists in the field and the wider educational community.

21. The funding agency should respect the right of the researcher(s) to keep his or her sources of data confidential.

22. In the event of a dispute between the funding agency and researcher(s) over the conduct of the research, or threatened termination of contract, the terms of the dispute and/or grounds for termination should be made explicit by the funding agency or researcher and be open to scrutiny by the advisory group. If either party feels that grounds for termination are unreasonable then there should be recourse to arbitration by a body or individual acceptable to both parties.

Publication

23. Researcher(s) have a duty to report both to the funding agency and to the wider public, including educational practitioners and other interested parties. The right to publish is therefore entailed by this duty to report. Researchers conducting sponsored research should retain the right to publish the findings under their own names. The right to publish is essential to the long-term viability of any research activity, to the credibility of the researcher (and of the funding agency in seeking to use research findings) and in the interests of an open society. The methodological principle of maximising the dissemination of information to all interested parties is an integral part of research strategy aimed at testing on a continuous basis the relevance, accuracy and comprehensiveness of findings as they emerge within the process of inquiry.

24. The conditions under which the right to publish might be legitimately restricted are:

general legislation (e.g. in the area of libel or race relations);
undertakings given to participants concerning confidentiality and generally not to cause unnecessary harm to those affected by the research findings; and
failure to report findings in a manner consistent with the values of inquiry i.e. to report findings honestly, accurately, comprehensively, in context, and without undue sensationalisation.

25. Publications should indicate whether or not they are subject to reporting restrictions.

26. The researcher(s) should have the right, as a last resort and following discussions with the funding agency and advisory group, to publicly dissociate themselves from misleadingly selective accounts of the research.

27. Funding bodies should not be allowed to exercise restrictions on publication by default, e.g. by failing to answer requests for permission to publish, or by undue delay.

28. Resources need to be made available for dissemination and publication and should be built in to funding.

29. In the event of a dispute over publication, the researcher should seek recourse first to the advisory group and secondly to an independent arbitration body or individual.

Intellectual ownership

30. Authorship should be determined on the basis that all those, regardless of status, who have made a substantive and/or creative contribution to the generation of an intellectual product are entitled to be listed as authors of that product. (Examples of creative contributions are: writing first drafts or substantial portions; significant rewriting or substantive editing; contributing generative ideas or basic conceptual schema or analytic categories; collecting data which requires significant interpretation or judgement; and interpreting data.)

31. First authorship and order of authorship should be the consequence of relative leadership and creative contribution.

Relationship with host institution

32. Institutions should both develop their own codes of practice which govern ethical principles and establish appropriate standards of academic freedom, including the freedom to disseminate research findings. While such codes should be observed within all research, including non-contract research, they are particularly important in respect of contract research. Such codes should be honoured by institutions and researchers in the negotiation of contractual arrangements put forward by funding agencies, and in the carrying out of these obligations once they have been agreed.

33. While academic staff should not engage in contract research without agreement by the institution, the latter should not be allowed to compel academic staff to engage in particular contract research.

34. It is assumed that contracts will in all cases be interpreted reasonably and with regard to due process. However, should a legitimate disagreement arise between the funding agency and the researchers engaged on it, then the researchers' institutions should give the researchers full and loyal support in resolving this disagreement.