

NFER annual statement on research integrity 2025

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)	29/05/26
1D. Web address of organisation's research integrity page (if applicable)	https://www.nfer.ac.uk/about-nfer/research-integrity/
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

Please describe how the organisation maintains high standards of research integrity and promotes positive research culture. It should include information on the support provided to researchers to understand standards, values and behaviours, such as training, support and guidance for researchers at different career stages/ disciplines. You may find it helpful to consider the following broad headings:

- Policies and systems
- Communications and engagement
- Culture, development and leadership
- Monitoring and reporting

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 to Support Research Integrity and our associated Code of Practice. This includes oversight of research policies, research governance and ethics, and relevant training and development opportunities provided by NFER to its staff.

The Code of Practice operates through an internal Committee at NFER. In 2025, we began developing a refreshed Code of Practice Checklist to support teams to reflect on ethical considerations across the full project lifecycle and to help determine when formal ethical review by the Code of Practice Committee is required. The new checklist will be rolled out in 2026. Further details are provided in section 2B below.

The Code of Practice Committee 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 Research Integrity Training on an annual basis. This training provides:

- 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 how to report research misconduct;
- links to further guidance and who to contact for further support;
- an exercise to assess learning and create an audit trail of who has undertaken the research integrity training.

In 2025, we began migrating this training to an interactive online module to support consistent delivery, easier access, and an auditable record of completion. The module was tested with a range of staff and is currently being finalised, ahead of introduction in 2026. New joiners will complete the training as part of induction arrangements. Further details are provided in section 2B below.

Many of NFER's large-scale evaluations are for the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), 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 education outcomes for future generations underpins this. We 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

NFER promotes a culture of creativity and intellectual curiosity. A network of professional groupings, headed up by professional leads, ensures that staff are kept up to date with new methodological developments in their specialism. There are 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 Research Improvement Group leads on assuring and continually improving our research methods, conducting deep dives into our processes to ensure that they

are fit for purpose. In addition to this formal group, we conduct end of project reviews 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.

2B. Changes and developments during the period under review

Please provide an update on any changes made during the period, such as new initiatives, training, developments, also ongoing changes that are still underway. Drawing on Commitment 3 of the Concordat, please note any new or revised policies, practices and procedures to support researchers; training on research ethics and research integrity; training and mentoring opportunities to support the development of researchers' skills throughout their careers.

NFER governs its research carefully. Leadership is provided by the Research Governance Board (RGB), the Code of Practice Committee, Research Improvement Group and a quality management system, which support initiatives to help us strengthen our research methods and improve our operations.

In 2025, the co-chairs of the Code of Practice Committee continued to strengthen NFER's links with sector-wide research integrity developments. In June 2025, the co-chairs attended the UKRIO seminar *Research culture: practical initiatives for measurement and improvement*. In September 2025, they attended the seminar for the launch of UKRIO's 2025–2026 Work Programme, highlighting the key priorities, activities, and projects planned for the year ahead. Learning from these events will be incorporated into NFER's activities moving forward.

Also in 2025, membership of the Code of Practice Committee was extended to include colleagues from NFER's sales, marketing and impact department (SMI). While not actively involved in undertaking research, SMI staff play a crucial role in supporting research dissemination and impact. It was felt the Committee would benefit from their contribution to steering our research integrity work, and that participation would support upskilling of SMI colleagues in research integrity processes and procedures.

As stated in section 2A, we are also migrating our annual Research Integrity Training from a webinar to an online module. The new module has been tested with a range of staff and final revisions are currently being made. The module will include interactive components and will follow an annual cadence, with new joiners completing the training as part of induction arrangements. It is due to be introduced in 2026.

A new Code of Practice Checklist is also being developed for rollout in 2026. Meetings are being scheduled with centres and departments to introduce the checklist and to answer any questions. The checklist is designed to help NFER staff reflect on and assess ethical considerations throughout all stages of the project lifecycle. It aligns with the principles and expectations set out in the NFER Code of

Practice, ensuring that research is conducted with integrity, responsibility, respect, fairness, and transparency.

The revised checklist is designed to help staff:

- ensure participants' rights and wellbeing are protected;
- confirm that data protection, safeguarding, and agreement procedures are in place;
- reflect on ethical practice at key milestones in a project;
- demonstrate compliance with internal and external ethical standards; and
- identify areas for improvement or additional support.

The checklist includes a mixture of closed and open-ended questions to encourage both accountability and critical reflection. While completing it is not a formal ethics review, it supports a culture of ethical awareness and responsibility in all research activities.

2C. Reflections on progress and plans for future developments

This should include a reflection on the previous year's activity including a review of progress and impact of initiatives if known relating to activities referenced in the previous year's statement. Note any issues that have hindered progress, e.g. resourcing or other issues.

We are committed to continually strengthening our approach to research integrity so that it remains robust, relevant and aligned with evolving sector best practice. Building on the developments set out above—including learning from UKRIO events and the broadened membership of the Code of Practice Committee—we will embed this learning into our guidance, training and governance arrangements. In light of the 2025 updated *Concordat to Support Research Integrity*, we have reviewed our policy documentation and processes, and updated our training materials to ensure they remain current and aligned with the Concordat's expectations.

In 2026 we will roll out a refreshed Code of Practice Checklist to support teams to identify and address ethical considerations throughout the full project lifecycle, and to help determine when formal review by the Code of Practice Committee is required. We will also introduce the new interactive online Research Integrity Training module (tested with staff in 2025), supporting consistent delivery, accessibility and a clear audit trail of completion, with new joiners completing the training as part of induction.

Alongside this, we are beginning to explore the potential role of AI in our research processes, initially focusing on supporting the analysis of secondary sources (for example, policy documentation). Any use of AI tools will be subject to appropriate oversight and will be implemented in a way that maintains transparency, protects data, and upholds the standards set out in our Code of Practice. Finally, we have agreed a schedule for reviewing and updating our Code of Practice documentation to ensure it remains current and aligned with relevant standards and expectations.

Section 3: Addressing research misconduct.

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

Please provide:

- a brief summary of relevant organisation policies/ processes (e.g. research misconduct procedure, whistle-blowing policy, bullying/harassment policy; appointment of a third party to act as confidential liaison for persons wishing to raise concerns) and brief information on the periodic review of research misconduct processes (e.g. date of last review; any major changes during the period under review; date when processes will next be reviewed).
- information on how the organisation creates and embeds a research environment in which all staff, researchers and students feel comfortable to report instances of misconduct (e.g. code of practice for research, whistle-blowing, research misconduct procedure, informal liaison process, website signposting for reporting systems, training, mentoring, reflection and evaluation of policies, practices and procedures).
- anonymised key lessons learned from any investigations into allegations of misconduct which either identified opportunities for improvements in the organisation's investigation procedure and/or related policies / processes/ culture or which showed that they were working well.

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. In addition, our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy promotes diversity in our workforce which we believe supports research quality.

To protect researchers from undue influence we have a Conflict-of-Interest Policy, and an Anti-Bribery and Corruption Policy. We also have a Whistle Blowing policy, a Grievance Policy and a Disciplinary Policy.

The 2025 updated *Concordat to Support Research Integrity* places a new emphasis on addressing *questionable research practices* (QRPs) alongside potential research misconduct. NFER recognises that QRPs can arise across the research lifecycle (for example, through poor record keeping, insufficient transparency, weak quality assurance, or inappropriate use of tools and methods) and that early identification and constructive challenge are essential to preventing harm and strengthening trust in our work. We encourage staff to raise concerns promptly and without fear of reprisal, and we use reflection and learning from issues (formal or informal) to improve guidance, training and processes.

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. These policies and processes are kept under review and, in light

of the 2025 updated *Concordat to Support Research Integrity*, we have reviewed our documentation, and updates will be reinforced through the rollout of the new Code of Practice Checklist and the interactive online Research Integrity Training module.

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

Please complete the table on the number of **formal investigations completed during the period under review** (including investigations which completed during this period but started in a previous academic year). Information from ongoing investigations should not be submitted. An organisation's procedure may include an initial, preliminary, or screening stage to determine whether a formal investigation needs to be completed. These allegations should be included in the first column but only those that proceeded past this stage, to formal investigations, should be included in the second column.

In 2025 there were no formal complaints of research misconduct.