

Final | Confidential

Cordis Bright

Research Governance Framework

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Executive summary

Cordis Bright believes that the research that we carry out is of the highest quality and matches work carried out by any academic institution. In line with our commitment to undertaking rigorous, professional and robust research we have developed this Research Governance Framework, much of which is adapted from ethical/research frameworks of professional bodies such as the NHS Health Research Authority and the British Sociological Association.

Below, we set out our five core principles in conducting social research. We then go on to explain how we apply these five core principles through the life of a research project. Each of the five core principles is denoted by an icon. These icons are then used throughout in-depth descriptions of our ethical practice at each research stage, in order to demonstrate how and where each principle is applied.

1 Core Principles of Research

1.1 Integrity, quality and transparency

Cordis Bright aims to conduct high-quality and robust research for its clients. The company has a responsibility to report its findings accurately and truthfully.

To ensure that all our work is carried out to the highest standards, we have in place an internal quality assurance system which is set out in detail in our *Quality Assurance* policy.

In addition, we will ensure that all our research adheres to any applicable external Research Governance Framework or similar document (e.g. UK Framework for Health and Social Care Research) and in addition will seek out ethical approval of our proposed work through formal (e.g. Health Research Authority Research Ethics Committee Approval) or informal means as appropriate.

1.2 Safety and wellbeing

Research should aim to maximize benefit for individuals and society and minimize risk and harm and the company has a responsibility both to safeguard the proper interests of those involved in or affected by its work. Research should use the HRA Decision tool to determine ethical requirements.

Staff members have a responsibility to ensure that the physical, social and psychological well-being of research participants is not adversely affected by their research. Wherever possible researchers should attempt to anticipate and to guard against harmful consequences for research participants. Researchers are not absolved from this responsibility by the consent given by research participants.

Staff should seek to actively promote the wellbeing of research participants and where possible enable participants to benefit directly from participation in research through providing remuneration, training and learning opportunities, and opportunities for networking and referral. The rights and dignity of individuals and groups should be respected and participation should be voluntary and appropriately informed.

Furthermore, staff members need to consider the effects of their involvement and the consequences of their work or its misuse for both those they study and other interested parties.

In addition, researchers face a range of potential risks to their safety. The design and conduct of research projects should take safety issues into account and all

staff should adopt procedures to reduce the risk to researchers. All staff should adhere to Cordis Bright's comprehensive *Health and Safety* policy.

1.3

Legality



Researchers should note that there are national laws and administrative regulations (for example the Data Protection Act, the Human Rights Act, copyright and libel laws) which may affect the conduct of their research, data dissemination and storage, publication, rights of research participants, clients and employers, etc.

1.4

Financial responsibility



When financial support or sponsorship has been accepted, staff members must make every reasonable effort to complete the proposed research on schedule, including reports to the funding source. A research study should not normally be undertaken where it is anticipated that resources will be inadequate.

1.5

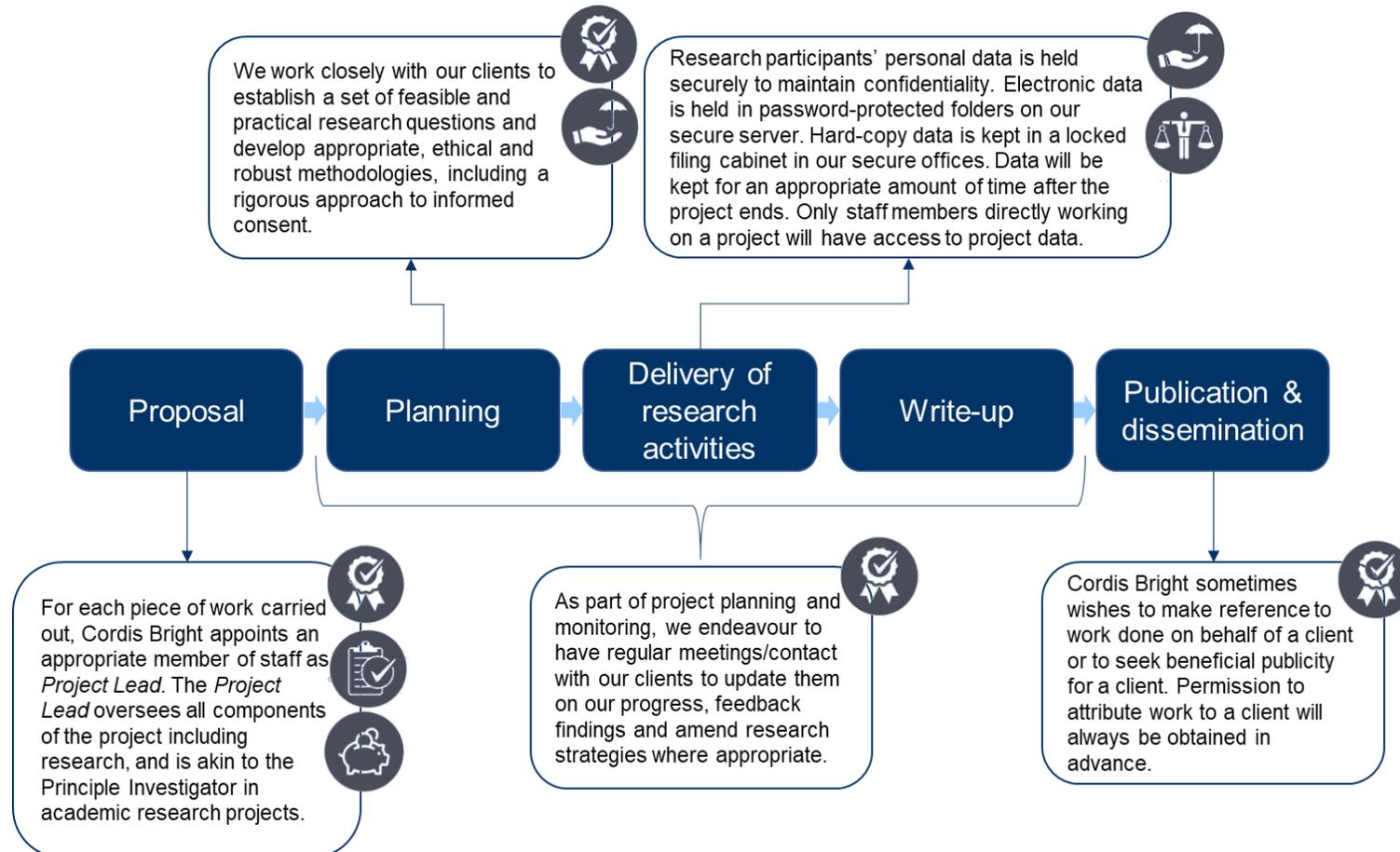
Competence



While recognising that training and skill are necessary to the conduct of social research, members of staff should recognise the boundaries of their own professional competence. They should not accept work of a kind that they are not qualified to carry out, should satisfy themselves that the research they undertake is worthwhile and that the techniques proposed are appropriate.

2 Governance and the stages of the research process

Figure 1: An overview of our research governance and ethical practice across different stages of the research process.



3 Breakdown of ethical practices

This section provides an in-depth break down of our ethical practices at each stage of the research process.

3.1 Recruitment of research participants

Cordis Bright staff will follow the principles of equal opportunity in relation to all of the company's research activities. We appreciate that carrying out research with different sections of the population requires different strategies depending on participants' cultural, linguistic, communication and other needs and preferences. We pride ourselves in being able to engage with many different client groups including those characterised as 'hard to reach' (e.g. people with lived experience of the criminal justice system, homelessness, and mental health conditions). Staff members should adhere to our internal *Equal Opportunities* policy.

3.1.1 Use of 'gatekeepers'

In some situations, access to a research setting is gained via a 'gatekeeper'. Since the relationship between the research participant and the gatekeeper may continue long after the researcher has left the research setting, researchers should take care not to compromise existing relationships.

Where clients and funders also act directly or indirectly as gatekeepers and control access to participants, researchers should not devolve their responsibility to protect the participants' interests onto the gatekeeper.

3.1.2 Use of 'proxies'

In some situations, proxies may need to be used in order to gather data. Where proxies are used, care should be taken not to intrude on the personal space of the person to whom the data ultimately refer, or to disturb the relationship between this person and the proxy. Where the researcher can infer that the person about whom data are sought would object to supplying certain kinds of information, that material should not be sought from the proxy.

3.2 Informed consent

As far as possible, participation in research should be based on the freely given informed consent of individual participants. It is the researcher's responsibility to explain in appropriate detail, and in terms meaningful to participants, what the research is about, who is undertaking and financing it, why it is being undertaken, and how it is to be disseminated and used.

Research participants should be made aware of their right to refuse participation whenever and for whatever reason they wish and at any stage of the research process, without any adverse consequences. It is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that the participant gives their ongoing consent to participate in the research.

Where access to a research setting is gained via a 'gatekeeper', researchers should obtain informed consent directly from the research participants.

3.3 Working with vulnerable groups

Special care should be taken where research participants are particularly vulnerable by virtue of factors such as age, disability, migration status, or their physical or mental health. Staff members should adhere to Cordis Bright's *Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults* policy, which sets out in more detail procedures and appropriate conduct in this area. All staff members at Cordis Bright have a full DBS check carried out on their behalf.

Researchers will need to take into account the legal and ethical complexities involved in those circumstances where there are particular difficulties in eliciting fully informed consent.

3.4 Participant anonymity and confidentiality

Researchers must respect the anonymity and privacy of those who participate in the research process. In some cases, it may be necessary to decide whether it is proper or appropriate even to record certain kinds of sensitive information.

Where appropriate and practicable, methods for preserving anonymity should be used including the removal of identifiers, the use of pseudonyms and other technical means for breaking the link between data and identifiable individuals.

Personal information concerning research participants should be kept confidential. Researchers should be careful, on the one hand, not to give unrealistic guarantees of confidentiality and, on the other, not to permit communication of research transcripts or records to audiences other than those to which the research participants have agreed.

Research participants should understand how far they will be afforded anonymity and confidentiality and should be able to reject the use of data-gathering methods such as audio and video recording if they so wish.

Staff members should keep in mind that decisions made on the basis of research may have effects on individuals as members of a group, even if individual research participants are protected by confidentiality and anonymity. Where possible, threats to the confidentiality and anonymity of research data should be anticipated by researchers.

Guarantees of confidentiality and anonymity given to research participants must be honoured, unless there are clear and overriding reasons to do otherwise (for example in relation to disclosure of abuse). Other people, such as colleagues, research staff or others, given access to the data must also be made aware of their obligations in this respect.

3.5 Involvement of research participants

When making notes, filming or recording for research purposes, researchers should make clear to research participants the purpose of the notes, filming or recording, and, as precisely as possible, to whom it will be communicated. It should be recognised that research participants have contractual and/or legal interests and rights in data, recordings and publications.

Interviewers should clarify that research participants are allowed to see transcripts of interviews and field notes and to alter the content, withdraw statements, to provide additional information or to add glosses on interpretations.

Clarification should also be given to research participants regarding the degree to which they will be consulted prior to publication. Where appropriate and feasible, participants should be offered the chance to review findings prior to publication.

3.6 Data protection, sharing and storage

Appropriate measures should be taken to store research data in a secure manner. Staff members should have regard to their obligations under the Data Protection Acts.

Data should be kept intact for any legally specified period and otherwise for three years at least, subject to any legal, ethical or other requirements, from the end of the project. It should be kept in a form that would enable retrieval by a third party, subject to limitations imposed by legislation and general principles of confidentiality.

Staff should also take care to prevent data being published or released in a form that would permit the actual or potential identification of research participants without prior written consent of the participants.

Potential research participants, especially those possessing a combination of attributes that make them readily identifiable, may need to be reminded that it can be difficult to disguise their identity without introducing an unacceptably large measure of distortion into the data.

3.7 Complaints

If a client or other related party (e.g. research participant) has any complaints or comments about the conduct of our research, they should address these to our Head of Research, Dr Stephen Boxford. Whilst we welcome an informal discussion around any such issues (e.g. via telephone), any formal written comments or complaints (via email or letter) will be responded to, in writing within 28 days of initial receipt.

Should these mechanisms prove unsatisfactory to our clients, we also have separate *Service Guarantee and Complaints* policies and procedures in place.

4 Relationships with clients and funders

Staff should ensure that clients and/or funders appreciate the obligations that researchers have not only to them, but also to the wider community, research participants and professional colleagues. In research projects involving multiple funders or inter-disciplinary teams, researchers should consider circulating this Statement to colleagues as an aid to the discussion and negotiation of ethical practice.

4.1 Client contracts

Staff members should clarify in advance the respective obligations of funders and researchers where possible in the form of a written contract. Researchers should also be careful not to promise or imply acceptance of conditions which are contrary to their professional ethics or competing research commitments.

Staff members should also recognise their own general or specific obligations to the clients whether contractually defined or only the subject of informal and often unwritten agreements. They should be honest and candid about their qualifications and expertise, the limitations, advantages and disadvantages of the various methods of analysis and data sources and acknowledge the necessity for discretion with confidential information obtained from clients. They should also try not to conceal factors that are likely to affect satisfactory conditions or the completion of a proposed research project or contract.

Staff members have a responsibility to notify the client and/or funder of any proposed departure from the terms of reference of the proposed change in the nature of the contracted research.

4.2 Research integrity

Research should be undertaken with a view to providing information or explanation rather than being constrained to reach particular conclusions or prescribe particular courses of action.

Researchers should not accept contractual conditions that are contingent upon a particular outcome or set of findings from a proposed inquiry. A conflict of obligations may also occur if the funder requires particular methods to be used.

4.3 Disclosure of research, publication and dissemination

Researchers should clarify their right to publish and disseminate the results of their research.

Staff members should clarify, before signing the contract, how far they are entitled to be able to disclose the source of their funds, the personnel, aims and purposes of the project.

5 Resources and further reading

Other relevant internal policy documents that can be read in conjunction with this Research Governance Framework are:

- Cordis Bright Equal Opportunities Policy
- Cordis Bright Health and Safety Policy
- Cordis Bright Quality Assurance Policy
- Cordis Bright Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults Policy
- Cordis Bright Service Guarantee and Complaints Policy
- Cordis Bright Training and Development Policy
- Cordis Bright Terms of Business

6 Checklist

Below we provide a checklist of key components to agree during research

- Ethics
- Data sharing protocol
- Reporting requirements
- Anonymity and confidentiality
- Incentives
- Safeguarding protocol
- Complaints process
- Analysis and quality assurance processes
- Informed consent
- Degree of co-production of research methodology with service users
- Duty of care (e.g. in Newham we have to provide further information in case of triggers)
- Lone working protocol



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