

# Research Ethics and a Code of Practice

This Code of Practice describes the ethical standards by which the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) (henceforth RGS-IBG) abides in supporting geographical research through its various activities (conferences, research funding, and publication). These standards embody the principles of equity, integrity and confidentiality for all who are involved in these activities. The Code is also intended to act as guidance to assessors in discharging the responsibilities placed on them in assessing proposals, and sets out the proper conduct expected of them. The Code is intended to be proportional to the likely risk that the individual application will carry.

## Information for applicants

**Application procedures** For each of its research awards, the RGS-IBG issues guidelines on the information to be supplied by applicants in support of bids for funds, details of the criteria against which the application will be assessed, and the process and timescale for assessment of the application.

**Data Protection** Applicants are required to sign the application to indicate that the information provided therein is, to the best of their knowledge, complete and accurate. The RGS-IBG is registered under the Data Protection Act 1998 and adheres to its data protection principles. Applicants should be aware that information they provide will be stored and circulated as necessary for the assessment procedures to be followed. Application forms, papers and references will be destroyed 24 months after the decision on the application has been made. Details of award holders (including name, institution, project details and amount of award) may be used to compile lists of supported research to be published on the Internet, and to produce statistical and historical information. Queries submitted under the terms of the Data Protection Act about the processing of personal data should be addressed to the RGS-IBG's Head of Finance.

**Data monitoring** Personal information provided by applicants will be used for monitoring and statistical purposes only, and will not form any part of the assessment process.

**Equal opportunities** The RGS-IBG is committed social inclusion, diversity and equal opportunities throughout the geographical professions and is opposed to any indirect discrimination on the grounds of social class, race, ethnic origin, sex, age, religion, sexual preference, and disability. All applicants receive equal treatment.

**Ethics policy** The RGS-IBG requires the research it funds to be conducted in an ethical manner. The following considerations should therefore apply to all research supported by the RGS-IBG, whether through financial support, or implicit support through presentation at RGS-IBG, Research Group conferences, or other RGS-IBG events or publication in RGS-IBG journals:

- accurate reporting of findings, and a commitment to enabling others to replicate results where possible;
- fair dealing in respect of other researchers and their intellectual property;
- honesty to research staff and students about the purpose, methods and intended and possible use of the research and any risks involved;
- confidentiality of information supplied by research subjects and anonymity of respondents (unless otherwise agreed with research subjects and respondents); and
- independence and impartiality of researchers to the subject of the research.

Additionally, proposals may raise one or more of the following considerations:



- the involvement of human participants;
- the study of non-human animals;
- destructive analysis of historic artefacts;
- research that may result in damage to the natural or historic environment; and
- the use of sensitive social, economic or political data.

The review process should be proportional to the likely risk (for example, research on vulnerable groups or at-risk populations demands more careful attention than other forms of research). Wherever necessary, appropriate consent should be obtained from or on behalf of participants or others affected by the research. Applicants should indicate whether their proposed research raises any special ethical issues, and whether their application has been approved by their institution's Research Ethics Committee or equivalent body. Independent researchers without access to formal ethical scrutiny and approval should briefly describe any special ethical issues, and explain how they will be addressed. Independent researchers who wish to have further guidance should contact the Grants Officer.

**Assessment process** All applications are judged on their academic merit through a process of peer review by appropriate experts. Recommendations are passed to the relevant awarding committee for final decision on awards.

**Outcome of applications** Applicants are informed in writing of the outcome of their application. The RGS-IBG is regrettably unable to enter into correspondence concerning the decision of assessment panels.

**Conditions of awards** Recipients of awards are made aware of regulations governing any scheme in which they have been successful and are required to adhere to those regulations.

**Appeals** All applications receive careful scrutiny by the assessors. Appeals may therefore not be made against the academic judgement of the Society's assessors, panels, or Committees. The sole ground on which an appeal may be made is one of improper procedure. Anyone wishing to make an appeal against a decision should write to the Grants Officer no later than two months after the result of the competition is announced, citing the specific decision and setting out clearly the substantive basis of the appeal. The Grants Officer will respond in writing within 30 days.

**Information for assessors**

**Confidentiality** Those who undertake assessment of applications are required to give an undertaking that all information which they acquire in the discharge of their duties be kept confidential and secure, and not be transmitted to any persons other than in accordance with the prescribed procedures for the selection process. Information provided to assessors in an application for funding may only be used for the purposes of evaluating the proposal in accordance with the RGS-IBG's guidelines.

**Conflict of interest** Those who undertake any responsibility for assessing applications for funds, are required to declare actual or potential conflicts of interest and observe the following guidelines:

*References* Assessors shall not act as referees for proposals for support in which they are involved in any capacity.

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*Institutional affiliation* Assessors shall not participate in the evaluation of any proposal emanating from their own institution or to any institution which they are affiliated closely to.

*Other connections* Where an application involves a former pupil, close colleague or co-researcher, a family member, or a person with whom there is or has been a current or prior relationship, a potential assessor is required to declare any conflict of interest to the relevant RGS-IBG officer so that the proposal can be redirected, and shall abstain from participating in evaluation of that particular proposal.

*Assessors as applicants* Fellows and others who wish to apply for RGS-IBG support during the period in which they are serving in any capacity as an assessor must abstain from any involvement in the competition to which they are applying, that is, they may not assess or comment or vote on any application in that round of the competition.

If assessors are unsure whether their ability to assess a proposal is compromised in any way, they should inform the relevant RGS-IBG officer of the circumstances so that guidance can be sought on individual cases.

**Fair evaluation** Assessors are normally drawn from subject-specific experts within the RGS-IBG's Fellowship and wider geographical community. In cases where individual assessors feel unable to offer an informed view on a proposal, they should decline to act as an assessor, and the relevant RGS-IBG officer will seek an alternative assessor.

Approved by Council 19.06.06