# DecorativeOpen University Ethical Research Statement

Version 5

Approved by Research Committee July 2025

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[Open University Ethical Research Statement 1](#_Toc204778856)

In accordance with its charitable status as a UK Higher Education provider, The Open University seeks to uphold its values of social justice and environmental responsibility, to work in the interests of the common good, and in the public interest. In pursuit of its research, knowledge exchange and enterprise activities it is committed to the [principles of academic freedom](https://about.open.ac.uk/policies-and-reports/policies-and-statements/freedom-speech-academic-freedom), and further seeks to protect its integrity and its reputation by applying the following additional principles.

1. Where the process of the research poses ethical and legal risks to the individual researcher(s), and/or research participants and by extension, to the University, or to wider society, the University will undertake a risk assessment and ethics review.

2. Where the proposed research or potential research results could be misused for purposes that are illegal or harmful, e.g. have ‘dual use’, i.e. have both civilian and defence applications, or could potentially have a detrimental environmental, societal or public health impact, the University will undertake a risk assessment and ethics review.

3. Where the research topic, process, outputs and/or associated knowledge exchange or public engagement activities could have harmful implications in respect of [human rights](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/human-rights-the-uks-international-human-rights-obligations), discrimination, equality, diversity and inclusion, the University will undertake a risk assessment and ethics review.

4. The Open University and its researchers will not pursue research or knowledge exchange partnerships with, nor accept funding[[1]](#footnote-2) from:

a) The tobacco industry[[2]](#footnote-3).

b) Any party that is involved in illegal or unethical activity, including but not restricted to slavery, pornography, the sex industry and child labour.

c) Any party that would require Open University researchers to breach the principles of academic freedom, research integrity, deviate from scientific norms and research conventions, restrict publication or suppress research findings[[3]](#footnote-4), inappropriately influence the presentation or interpretation of research findings.

d) Any party that would require an embargo on being named as a funder or collaborator.

5. Where the funder or collaborator has, or is perceived to have, incompatible values, such as irresponsible employment practices, irresponsible environmental practices or failures of corporate governance and could potentially bring the University into disrepute by association, the University will undertake a risk assessment and ethics review.

6. The University does not preclude researchers from collaborating with the defence sector. Nevertheless, all research involving potential or actual defence and/or security application will be subject to risk assessment and ethics review.



1. Where a funding source is a philanthropic donation to Open University research, it will be subject to the [Philanthropic Gift Policy](https://giving.open.ac.uk/privacy). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Definition of tobacco industry funding to align with [Cancer Research UK Code of Practice on Tobacco Industry Funding to Universities](https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/funding-for-researchers/applying-for-funding/policies-that-affect-your-grant/tobacco-industry-funding-to-universities). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. In respect of publication, an exception would be for commercial or other sensitive research. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)