

UK Arctic code of conduct

While the United Kingdom is not an Arctic State, we have a strong and enduring connection to the region through a long history of science, commerce and exploration and as the Arctic's nearest neighbour. The UK's past research activity in the Arctic has often disregarded its geopolitical context and particularly has disregarded the Indigenous communities whose lands are used for UK research. Organisational codes of conduct have not done enough to prevent the exploitation of Indigenous lands.

Structure and purpose

The UK's Arctic Policy Framework sets the UK commitment to maintain the Arctic as somewhere safe, secure, peaceful, and well governed, protecting its environment and the communities who call the Arctic their home. This code of conduct sets out the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO)'s expectations to support that commitment with an inclusive, updated approach to Arctic research activity.

In this code of conduct, we identify four values for UK research operations and identify what individuals, research organisations and funding organisations must do to uphold each.

“The UK has an active presence in the Arctic, not least as one of the leading contributors to Arctic science. We want to ensure that all UK-based research activities are safe, free from discrimination, and respectful to local communities”

*James Jansen,
Senior Arctic Lead,
FCDO*

Those who work in the Arctic work on Indigenous lands. Respect and inclusion of local and Indigenous knowledge systems, norms and guidelines is crucial.

Individuals

You should understand the right of Indigenous peoples to self-determination and how this affects your activities.

You should set aside time to learn about the (colonial and pre-colonial) history, current reality, culture and governance structures of the specific regions and communities you work in. Find resources for this below.

You should respect Indigenous knowledge systems by:

- valuing residents' knowledge
- giving residents credit for providing services, data or expertise to your work
- co-creating respectfully with members of the community you work in
- being open to the perspective of residents where it is different to yours
- considering how your biases influence your interpretation and analysis of your data and being open to contextualising it with community knowledge.

Research institutions

You should communicate this expectation to those working with you.

You should ensure projects that your institution is aligned with respect Indigenous knowledge systems and communities in these ways and in line with the relevant resources below.

Funding institutions

You should ensure funding areas align with Indigenous priorities.

You should ensure funding structures do not pose a barrier to co-creation with Indigenous communities. This means it should be possible to develop the entire lifecycle of a project collaboratively with Indigenous communities.

You should ensure funding structures do not pose a barrier to working respectfully with Indigenous communities. This means funding should be available to ensure Indigenous work is fairly paid. This also means funding timelines should be flexible to accommodate the patterns and availability of Indigenous communities.

The UK's presence and activity in the Arctic should not have a significant negative impact on the physical environment.

Individuals

You should identify and take time to understand local laws protecting the physical environment and you must follow these.

You should plan how you will minimise pollution and prevent disturbance to flora and fauna.

Research institutions

You should provide individuals with necessary training for effective management of impacts on the physical environment. You should oversee environmental management strategies put in place.

Funding institutions

You should consider your environmental impact metrics and the way in which they reflect Indigenous environmental priorities.

No activities in the Arctic should happen without clear oversight and reporting processes.

Individuals

You should make sure you understand how your organisation complies with the code of conduct, including how you can access support and report problems.

You should challenge your organisation if you feel its rules and processes do not reflect this code of conduct and the values it sets out.

Research institutions

You must have complete processes ensuring the safety of individuals. These processes should give individuals safe and regular access to impartial support, a robust reporting mechanism and a clear outline of what they can expect from each.

You should ensure that anyone conducting activities in the Arctic on behalf of your organisation understands their role in the oversight and reporting process. This includes knowing who at the organisation is responsible for the processes that keep them safe.

Unacceptable behaviour should result in action, which may range from a warning to a permanent ban from team spaces or recommendations for firing, demotion, or elimination of funding privileges.

Funding institutions

You should expect transparency from research institutions you work with about their oversight and reporting processes.

Work in the Arctic should take place in an environment that is safe and free from discrimination.

Individuals

You have a personal responsibility to prevent your behaviour having an unfair or discriminatory effect on others.

You should accept diverse views, where those views are not discriminatory.

If you are in a leadership position, you should systematically communicate your expectations of behaviour.

Field activities are an extension of a work environment so you should assess the impacts of crossing the boundaries of a professional relationship.

Research Institutions

You should provide explicit guidance on expected and unacceptable behaviours.

You should put in place and oversee a system that ensures leaders systematically communicate behavioural expectations to staff.

You should put in place a system where leaders identify and act on the input of their team members.

You should set guidelines regarding appropriate, respectful, and safe relationships in a work setting.

Funding institutions

You should ensure that your funding calls and decisions do not perpetuate structural and cultural discrimination.

Discrimination takes lots of forms and reflects many themes, which are often incorrect assumptions we, consciously or subconsciously, use to justify our behaviour. Here we have set out common themes to help individuals and organisations challenge their own thinking and recognise discrimination.

Denying the problem involves the assumption that we have made so much progress that a group is no longer discriminated against (or that there was not a problem in the first place). This can either be personal ('I don't see colour'), institutional ('but we have more women than men working here') or systematic ('feminism has achieved enough').

Cultural normativity is the implicit assumption that the culture of the dominant group has more value and that everyone should assimilate to the dominant culture. 'Culture' is broad here – every group has a culture. In practice, this often means assuming that the existing culture of an organisation is correct and shouldn't change. This could mean assuming that speech is a better way of communicating than sign language or thinking it's normal to talk about car maintenance at work but not bath bombs. This often leads to 'tone policing' where people's communication is challenged if it does not match the dominant style.

The myth of meritocracy is the belief that performance alone is enough to earn recognition, promotion and so on. It discounts the importance of networks and advocacy to secure opportunities. This also takes the form of assuming that groups are marginalised in an area because they 'don't want to' or 'aren't good enough to' work in that area.

The myth of positive discrimination is the belief that efforts to prevent or address discrimination against marginalised groups end up discriminating against the dominant group.

Discrimination isn't always explicit and obvious. Here we have set out some mechanisms of discrimination to help identify discrimination that may otherwise be overlooked.

Exclusion can be obvious or hidden and conscious or subconscious. It is not always in a work setting—exclusion can mean anything that ends up isolating someone from the group. It is usually not deliberate; it often occurs because we perceive someone as different or as not having much in common with us but this often stems from someone's membership of a marginalised group so leads to discrimination.

Slurs and insults often communicate that it is a bad thing to be a part of a certain demographic. Slurs get their offensiveness by referencing membership of a marginalised group, implying that that is a bad thing. Insults, particularly gendered ones like b*tch or c*nt, can do the same thing.

Obscenity can be a form of sexual harassment and contributes to an unsafe environment for everyone. It can include obscene gestures or jokes, unwanted sexual discussions, comments about people's bodies, sexual teasing or nude images in a workplace.

Assigning work, and who we choose to assign it to, is based on our assumptions about people's capabilities and what work they are suited to. This is often shaped by unconscious bias – such as assuming that a woman is a better note taker, that a man is better at moving boxes or that a disabled person cannot do any physical tasks, regardless of their exact disability. This can end up limiting people to the types of work that we judge them as good at and can impede their career progression and access to opportunities.

‘Debating’ the status and rights of marginalised groups is at the cost of members of those groups. Writing off discussions as ‘healthy debate’ often means treating issues that affect people’s lives as if they were purely theoretical and ignoring the very real pain involved.

Inflexibility is often caused by the assumption that if something is the same for everyone then it is fair and inclusive. This leads to not accommodating people’s differences to make their lives easier, usually with the justification that there is a policy or standard way that can’t be changed. It can also lead to disabled people being denied the reasonable adjustments that they are entitled to.

Failure to act on reports of discrimination or harassment and lack of transparency about misconduct processes leads to an unsafe environment for members of marginalised groups. This itself furthers the discrimination against the group.

Failure to take the problem seriously at a senior level is not just failing to act on reports of past misconduct; leaders within an organisation can further discrimination by failing to actively protect members of marginalised groups from future harm. Leaders must also model safe and inclusive behaviour.

Microaggressions are subtle instances of discrimination which can fall under any of these categories. They are often easy to deny or played off as a joke, but members of marginalised groups experience them constantly and they cause significant harm. Systematic discrimination at an institutional level is largely made up of individuals’ microaggressions.

Resources

The **United Nations [Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#)** was a result of the UN's identification of the systematic "oppression, marginalization and exploitation suffered by Indigenous Peoples". It "emphasizes the rights of indigenous peoples to live in dignity, to maintain and strengthen their own institutions, cultures and traditions and to pursue their self-determined development, in keeping with their own needs and aspirations."

The **ArcticNet [Arctic Research Code of Conduct](#)** emerged from ArcticNet's desire to promote positive changes and cultural inclusion within the research community. The content has been developed with specific appreciation for the socio-political context and colonial history of the Arctic. This code of conduct inspired the creation of the UK Arctic code of conduct and can be used as an example for organisations wishing to update their own code.

The Inuit Circumpolar Council represents around 180,000 Inuit people from across Alaska, Canada, Greenland and Chukotka (Russia) as "one people, in a single homeland, across four countries". They have published [Circumpolar Inuit Protocols for Equitable and Ethical Engagement](#) as "invitation to consult and cooperate with Inuit" by "recognizing the interrelated, interdependent and indivisible rights of Inuit."

Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) is the national representational organisation protecting and advancing the rights and interests of Inuit in Canada. ITK has created and published a [National Inuit Strategy on Research \(NISR\)](#) to strengthen the usefulness of Inuit Nunangat research for Inuit and decentre the population and their land as isolated research subjects.

[Towards reconciliation: 10 Calls to Action to natural scientists working in Canada](#) recognises the need for reconciliation in the natural sciences after the historic exploitation of Indigenous communities and suggests actions to "help natural scientists build a foundation of mutual respect and understanding with Indigenous peoples that allows for direct reconciliatory actions" when working in Canada.

ArcticHub is a centre supporting research activities in Greenland. They have created a [guide to getting started with conducting respectful research in Greenland](#) and run engagement activities to help translate their priorities to the wider community. You can also book a meeting to get customised advice.

ISAAFFIK Arctic Gateway provides an overview of Arctic research and infrastructure projects. [Create a project profile on ISAAFFIK](#) to inform Greenlandic stakeholders about your activities on their land and to explore the possibility of fruitful collaboration.

The Nunavut Research Institute, along with ITK, have published [Negotiating research relationships with Inuit communities: A guide for researchers](#). This helps researchers understand and navigate community concerns and expectations and create meaningful relationships with the communities in which they work.

The University of Alberta Faculty of Native Studies runs a free course, [Indigenous Canada](#), exploring the histories and contemporary perspectives of Indigenous peoples in Canada. The course also has [watch-along](#) by filmmaker and comedian Dan Levy in discussion with Dr. Paul Gareau and Dr. Savage Bear.

NWT Cumulative Impact Monitoring Program and the **Aurora Research Institute's** [Working Together: Towards relevant environmental monitoring and research in the NWT](#) guides individuals through respectful cooperation at every stage of a project.

The Saami Council promotes Saami rights in the four states in which Saami people live: Finland, Sweden, Norway and Russia. They have published a discussion paper: [Working towards ethical guidelines for research involving the Sámi](#).