

# Chartered Association of Business Schools Transnational Research (TNR) Policy Statement

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## 1. Purpose

Transnational Research is increasingly central to the research strategies of UK business schools. Global challenges, interdisciplinary work, and large-scale funding programmes often require collaboration across borders. At the same time, expectations for research integrity, ethics, security, data governance, and institutional accountability have become more explicit.

The core risk is rarely collaboration itself. Problems are more likely when collaboration is uncoordinated, for example when decisions on partnerships, data sharing, visiting arrangements, funding routes, and public communications develop informally at person-to-person level without appropriate institutional oversight and support.

This Policy Statement is intended to provide guidance and common principles to help members design, approve, and manage transnational research partnerships that are strategic, ethical, high quality, and trusted.

## 2. Definition and scope

Transnational Research (TNR) refers to institutionally governed cross border research partnerships and platforms with shared objectives and explicit arrangements for governance, ethics and integrity, data and intellectual property, risk management, and impact.

TNR is distinct from routine international collaboration and is typically characterised by one or more of the following:

- An institution-to-institution framework agreement, such as a strategic partnership, consortium agreement, or joint centre.
- A programme of research activity spanning multiple projects over time, rather than a single stand-alone study.
- Shared research infrastructure, shared datasets, or shared digital research environments across jurisdictions.
- Structured doctoral training, joint supervision, or mobility pipelines embedded in the partnership.

- Co funding or sustained joint investment with formal governance and review.

TNR may be conducted in the United Kingdom, in partner countries, or through distributed and hybrid models. The defining feature is governance across borders, not a single location of activity.

### **3. Intended audience and use**

This statement is intended for:

- Deans, Associate Deans for International, Associate Deans for Research, Research Directors, International Directors, and research committees.
- Professional services lead to supporting partnerships, contracts, ethics, integrity, governance, data protection, and cyber security.
- Partnership leads and principal investigators, as a reference for expectations and escalation routes.
- Research degree students as a reference for expectations and escalation routes.
- Industry partners and transnational educational bodies as reference for expectations and evaluating research agreements.

It is designed to support coherent institutional strategy, improve partnership quality and reciprocity, and reduce avoidable risks without undermining open and legitimate collaboration.

### **4. Alignment with established guidance and principles**

This statement is designed to be compatible with widely used UK and international frameworks, including:

- UK Research and Innovation: Trusted Research and Innovation guidance and good practice resources.
- Universities UK: Managing risks in international research and innovation, including related sector cyber security guidance.
- The Concordat to Support Research Integrity and related UK research integrity expectations.
- UK Research Integrity Office guidance on good research practice.
- International research integrity norms such as the ALLEA European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity.
- UNESCO Recommendation on Open Science and associated open science principles.
- OECD analysis on integrity and security in the global research ecosystem.
- Responsible research assessment principles such as DORA and the wider movement to align incentives with quality and integrity.

## **5. Principles for Transnational Research**

Members are encouraged to apply the following guidance and principles proportionately, based on the scale and risk of the partnership.

### **5.1 Strategic intent and institutional accountability**

TNR should be shaped by clear institutional intent and ownership. For major partnerships, institutions should establish governance that clarifies decision rights, defines escalation routes, and enables periodic review. This supports sustainability and reduces reliance on informal arrangements.

### **5.2 Reciprocity, equity, and partnership quality**

TNR should be built on mutual benefit and fair practice. This includes shared agenda setting, transparent resourcing, fair recognition of contributions, and attention to power imbalances that can lead to extractive research behaviours. In particular, how contributions will be assessed and acknowledged should be clearly agreed by all partners in advance.

TNR focus on policies and processes across collaborative centres to achieve clear uniform activities that do not create or fuel prejudice. TNR should promote fairness by ensuring that ethics dumping and attempts to avoid legislation are discouraged.

International partners should ensure a culture of positive and responsible conduct of research in TNR, including authorship.

TNR should recognise the plurality of research types, outcomes, and outputs, including the different expectations attached to different dissemination methods, particularly in interdisciplinary research, and the varying rules of engagement across regions. Partnership agreements should clearly define the expected impact of research projects.

### **5.3 Research integrity and ethical practice across jurisdictions**

TNR must maintain high standards of integrity and ethics across differing legal and cultural contexts. Ethics review and safeguarding arrangements should be robust and consistent. Institutions should avoid forum shopping for the least demanding approval route and should agree on how divergences in standards will be managed.

TNR must ensure that standards complement legal requirements rather than replacing them and commit to protecting intellectual property and sensitive data during international partnership collaboration projects.

TNR should comply with laws regulating research activities within domestic and foreign jurisdictions. Ideally, ethics reviews should be conducted in all participating countries, those where the work will be carried out as well as those paying for it.

## 5.4 Trusted research and proportionate risk management

TNR should use risk based and proportionate safeguards to protect people, knowledge, data, and infrastructure. Where risks are higher, institutions should apply structured due diligence for partners and funding routes, specify escalation triggers, and ensure accessible advice routes for researchers.

TNR should safeguard the safety of researchers, particularly those undertaking fieldwork, including doctoral students, in countries where political, security, or cultural risks may arise. TNR should also take account of academic freedom, freedom of speech, and the legal context within which international collaborations operate.

UK export controls apply to academic research. Despite limited scope of export controls in a business school context, cautions should be taken especially when sensitive technology and data are potentially involved.

Personal data must be handled with great caution when shared with sanctioned countries and where there is a potential risk of exploitation or misuse. Applicable data protection regulations such as GDPR should be complied. Risk assessment and management and care should include staff mobility both ways, including own staff travelling needs as well as inviting visitors from sanctioned jurisdictions.

More broadly, research partnerships and fund transfers involving sanctioned jurisdictions carry potentially significant legal, financial, and reputational implications. Institutions should ensure compliance with applicable sanctions and export control regimes, and should establish clear internal processes, including due diligence on partners, documented risk assessment, senior-level approval, and access to specialist legal advice before entering such partnerships or transferring funds. These compliance processes should also extend to partnerships with institutions in countries that may not be formally sanctioned, but where there are significant concerns regarding research safety, academic freedom, human rights, or institutional values.

Partnership agreements should also address security clearance requirements for international researchers, particularly where access restrictions apply in certain research environment.

## 5.5 Data governance, cyber resilience, and digital research infrastructure

Given TNR increasingly depends on shared digital environments, data governance and cyber resilience should be designed into partnerships from the outset. Agreements should clarify data ownership, access, retention, and cross border transfers, and specify cyber responsibilities and incident response expectations.

## **5.6 Contracting, intellectual property, and publication expectations**

Partnership agreements should clearly set out governance and responsibilities, intellectual property arrangements, publication rights, confidentiality expectations, data management terms, dispute resolution, and exit provisions. Clear contracting supports trust and reduces downstream disputes.

## **5.7 Open research, responsible dissemination, and societal value**

Where appropriate, TNR should support responsible dissemination and open research practices that increase social value, while recognising that some contexts may require controlled access or careful communication of sensitive findings. Expectations should be clear and compatible with funder requirements. Where a project involves data collection with potential societal or public benefit, partners are strongly encouraged to share the data with other institutions and researchers.

Under certain exceptional conditions, preserving unclassified research may be required to restrict access to foreign and outside scholars in line with established policy guidelines; while conflicts of interests are recognised with regulations/guidelines promulgated to shape disclosures of all foreign activities. TNR should ensure that institutional collaboration does not compromise transparency, objectivity or induce individual conflict of interest without upholding institutional obligations.

## **5.8 Responsible research assessment and healthy incentives**

Institutions should ensure that internal incentives do not encourage superficial or risk blind partnership proliferation. Evaluation should recognise responsible research behaviours, contribution diversity, and partnership stewardship alongside outputs and impact, specifically academic, educational, social, business, public, and economic impact.

This requires an emphasis on equity and reciprocity which uphold mutual benefit without disproportionately burdening collaborators.

Priorities and fair access to funding must be encouraged and capacity-building should be managed fairly to address power imbalances.

## **6. Implementation approach**

The Chartered ABS recommends a tiered approach so that governance is proportionate and practical:

1. Tier 1: Routine international collaboration. Low risk, project level activity supported by baseline ethics, integrity, and data guidance.
2. Tier 2: Structured partnerships. Framework agreements and recurring programmes supported by central expertise on contracting, data, and governance.
3. Tier 3: Strategic or higher risk TNR. Partnerships involving sensitive data, security sensitive topics, complex geopolitics, or large infrastructure require formal oversight, documented due diligence, and explicit escalation routes.

## **Annex A. One page partnership checklist**

Use this checklist for structured partnerships and higher risk collaborations.

### **A. Partnership classification**

- What type of partnership is this and what is the expected duration?
- Who owns governance internally and what is the decision-making route?
- What are the expected benefits for each partner and how will they be evidenced?

### **B. Strategic fit and resourcing**

- How does this align with institutional research strategy and strengths?
- What institutional resources are required, including staff time and infrastructure?
- How will capability building and long-term sustainability be supported?

### **C. Reciprocity and equity**

- Is agenda setting shared and is local relevance considered?
- How will authorship, credit, and contribution recognition be handled?
- Are there risks of extractive practice and how will they be mitigated?

### **D. Integrity, ethics, and safeguarding**

- Which ethics approvals are required in each jurisdiction?
- How will differing standards be reconciled and what triggers escalation?
- Are there safeguarding needs due to topic sensitivity or participant vulnerability?

### **E. Trusted research, security, and data**

- Are there sensitive datasets, unusual funding routes, or constraints on academic freedom and freedom of speech?
- What due diligence is needed for partners, funders, and visiting arrangements?
- What data environment is appropriate and what cyber controls are required?

## **F. Contracting and monitoring**

- Do agreements cover intellectual property, publications, confidentiality, data, dispute resolution, and exit?
- What governance forum will monitor progress, risk, and partnership health?
- What are the review points and success criteria?

## **Selected reference sources**

The following sources are provided to support alignment and further reading:

- [UK Research and Innovation: Trusted Research and Innovation guidance](#)
- [Universities UK: Managing risks in international research and innovation](#)
- [Universities UK: Concordat to Support Research Integrity](#)
- [UK Research Integrity Office: Code of Practice for Research](#)
- [ALLEA: European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity](#)
- [World Conference on Research Integrity: Singapore Statement on Research Integrity](#)
- [UNESCO: Recommendation on Open Science](#)
- [OECD: Integrity and security in the global research ecosystem](#)
- [San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment \(DORA\)](#)