

Stellenbosch University Policy Statement on Safeguarding in Research¹

Type of Document	Policy Statement
Purpose	This policy statement serves as a reference document that defines safeguarding in the context of research and demonstrates the University's commitment to protecting everyone involved in research from harm. It identifies and consolidates the existing institutional governance documents, policies, and mechanisms that support safeguarding in research.
Approved by	SU Senate
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Institutional Curator	Division for Research Development
Responsible for development and revision	Director responsible for Research Integrity and Ethics
Keywords	Safeguarding in research; Vulnerable Populations, Protection from Harm
Validity	The English version of this Position Statement is the operative version, and the Afrikaans and the isiXhosa versions are the translations.

SU governance documents are available at

<https://www.su.ac.za/en/about/governance/registrar/governance-and-management-documents>

¹ **Acknowledgements:**

Parts of the content contained in this Policy Statement have been drawn from best practice and commonly used/general principles relating to Safeguarding. Specific acknowledgement is extended to the UCT Office for Research Integrity for permission to adopt and adapt their Safeguarding statement.

Preamble

In the context of research at Stellenbosch University, the term "safeguarding" refers to the protection of everyone involved in the research endeavour—researchers, support staff, affiliated and non-affiliated students, other team members, and research participants—from various harms, particularly those arising from power imbalances in relationships. Such harms encompass exploitation, bullying and abuse, sexual harassment, as well as racial and gender discrimination. Safeguarding is especially relevant to minors, young adults, and vulnerable adults.

Stellenbosch University is committed to upholding the aims of safeguarding and has demonstrated this commitment by enacting various governance documents that support safeguarding activities. This Safeguarding Policy Statement aims to highlight the specific governance documents and mechanisms that Stellenbosch University (SU) has in place to protect those involved in the research endeavour. The following governance documents should be considered alongside this statement:

[Code 2040](#)

[Disability Access Policy](#)

[Disciplinary Code for Students of SU](#)

[Management of Hazardous Waste Products](#)

[Occupational Health](#)

[Policy for Responsible Research Conduct at Stellenbosch University](#)

[Policy on Conflict of Interest](#)

[Policy on Unfair Discrimination and Harassment](#)

[Position Statement on Ethical Use of Artificial Intelligence in Research and Teaching-](#)

[Learning-Assessment](#)

[Privacy Regulation](#)

[Research Data Management Regulations](#)

[Risk Management Policy](#)

[Safeguard of campus community and student wellbeing in certain emergency situations](#)

[Stellenbosch University's procedure for the investigation of allegations of breach of research norms and standards](#)

[Student Mental Health Plan](#)

Definitions

For purposes of this statement, the following meaning is attached to the words used:

Abuse: To treat someone improperly to harmful effect or for a bad purpose, which includes misuse.

Minor: A person under the age of 18.

Harm: To cause hurt or injury to persons or groups that can be emotional or psychological, physical, social, or socio-economic.

Vulnerable adult: A person who, due to context or circumstance, may be disempowered or easily exploited.

Responsible party includes the institution and research project leaders, principal investigators, and others in similar research leadership positions.

Principles of Safeguarding

The following principles have been adapted to the research context and should serve as the foundation for safeguarding activities.

1. **Empowerment:** Recognise that inherent power imbalances exist in relationships within research contexts and take all reasonable steps to mitigate these, identifying reasonable mechanisms to empower those affected.
2. **Prevention:** Identifying contexts where harm could take place and putting reasonable steps in place to prevent this.
3. **Proportionality:** Action should be in proportion to the issue that has arisen and as unintrusive as possible while still being effective.
4. **Protection:** Confidentiality, support and representation should be provided to those affected by harm, including whistleblowers.
5. **Partnership:** Research team members across collaborations should work together to ensure that safeguarding activities are implemented consistently across different environments.
6. **Conflict of Interest:** Declaration and appropriate management of conflicts of interest and power differentials when responding to safeguarding concerns is essential.
7. **Accountability:** There should be both accountability and transparency in safeguarding practice.

Reporting of Safeguarding Concerns

Research environments—including centres, units, teams, and institutes—must establish clear and robust mechanisms for addressing safeguarding concerns in a manner consistent with the principles outlined above. This may include the development of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) tailored to specific research units or projects. These SOPs should:

- Reflect the safeguarding principles outlined in this statement;
- Clearly define procedures for raising and receiving concerns confidentially and securely;
- Ensure that communication channels are accessible and well-publicised to all stakeholders;
- Outline appropriate and timely response protocols.

Where applicable, the SOPs should align with and reference the relevant institutional policies listed above.

Review and Amendment of the Safeguarding Statement

The Division for Research Development may make editorial or typographical amendments to this safeguarding statement as needed, without requiring further approval. However, any revisions that alter the substance, intent, or scope of the statement must be subject to appropriate consultation and approval processes, including review by relevant governance structures.

[End]