

Gloucestershire County Council

Research Governance Framework

Summary



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What is the purpose of this framework?

This framework sets out how GCC ensures that any research involving council resources (e.g., data, staff, settings, service providers, people drawing on GCC services) is carried out safely, ethically and legally and in line with council priorities. It explains:

The standards and requirements that all research must meet

The process for requesting and gaining approval to use council resources for research

Researchers and council's responsibilities during, and after research

Why is it important?

Local authorities are investing in research to inform decision-making, improve services, and attract external funding. To do this they need a consistent approach to governing and monitoring research to ensure that research activity is coordinated, any risks are managed, and benefits are fully and comprehensively realised.

This Research Governance Framework:

- **Delivers strategic value** by enabling staff to conduct and support research aligned with council priorities and attracts funding; positioning the council as a trusted research partner for universities and external organisations.
- **Provides legal and ethical assurance** by ensuring research involving council resources complies with data protection requirements, safeguarding responsibilities, and recognised ethical standards.
- **Supports workforce development** by building staff confidence, skills, and opportunities to engage in high-quality research projects and collaborations.

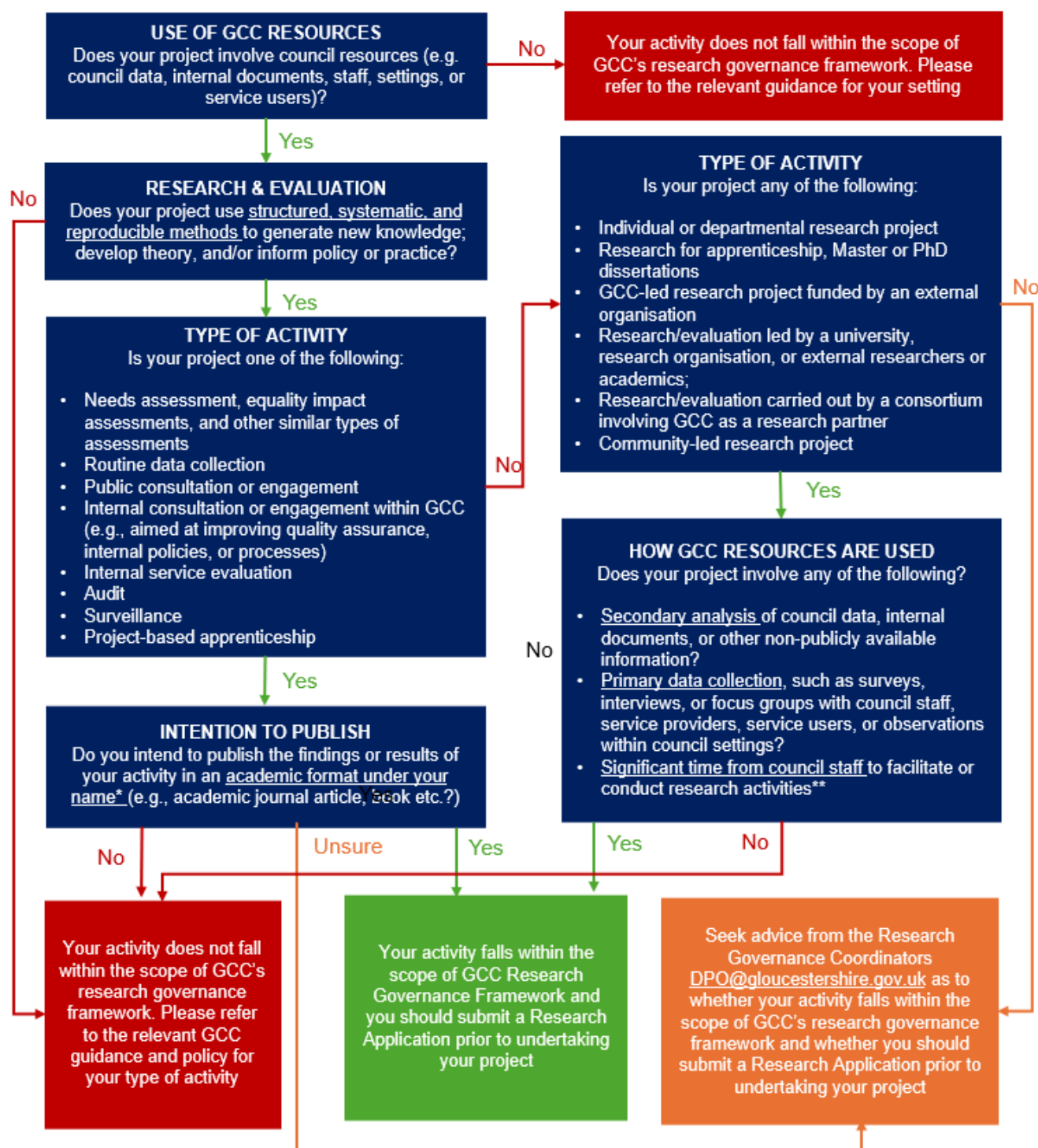
What does it cover?

Research with a big 'R'. This refers to research and evaluation projects that **use structured, organised and reproducible methods** to produce **generalisable knowledge** and/or **support decision-making**, that use **GCC resources** and are intended for **publication**.

What does it not cover?

Research with a small 'r', that is: 'everyday activities staff already do that involve gathering information, exploring questions, and learning from people and practice'¹. This framework does not cover **activities that are conducted internally to GCC as part of business as usual and which are already covered by existing policies and frameworks**, including: needs assessments; equality impact assessments and other 'assessments'; routine data collection; public consultations; internal consultations aimed at improving quality assurance, internal policies, or processes; internal service evaluations; audits; and surveillance.

¹ Crocker, S. (2026). 'Big R – small r': developing a more inclusive way to talk about research. ADASS. <https://www.adass.org.uk/big-r-small-r-developing-a-more-inclusive-way-to-talk-about-research/>



* If you intend to publish findings and results from your research projects in an academic format under your name, you must ensure that appropriate research ethics are followed and that the council is sighted and given the opportunity to assess risks related to publication. Academic publishers require that participants are fully informed and have given consent for their data to be used for research and publication purposes. They also often expect that the study has received ethical clearance from the appropriate body. Please refer to the GCC's Research Governance Framework.

** This excludes staff who have been released from their usual duties to undertake part-time apprenticeships, master's, or PhD research.

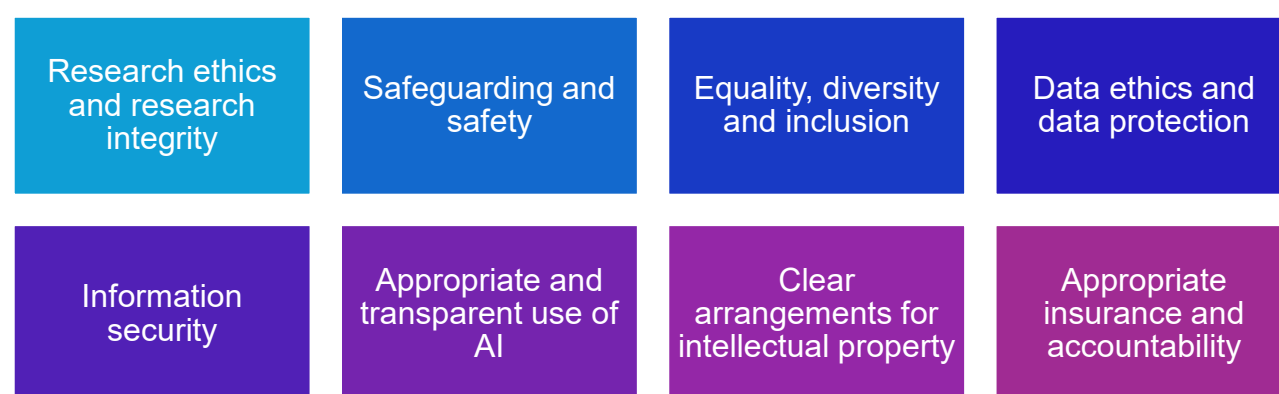
Who is it for?

This framework applies to anyone seeking to access or use council resources for research:

- **Internal to the council:** For example, council staff conducting research as part of their part-time Master's or PhD studies or as part of an externally funded research project.
- **External to the council:** For example, academics, research fellows, visiting scholars; university students; researchers funded by government departments; charities conducting research; or commercial research companies.

The **screening tool** above helps determine if a project falls into the scope of this framework.

What standards must research meet?



How does the process work?

Those who want to use council resources for research should follow the following process. All forms can be downloaded from the [research governance page on the Research & Evaluation intranet site](#) and the **dedicated** [research page on GCC's public facing website](#) .

STEP 1: BEFORE APPLYING	• Review the research governance framework • Take five minutes to check whether the project is in scope by using the 'Screening Tool' • Contact the Research Governance Coordinators for advice if needed DPO@gloucestershire.gov.uk
STEP 2: APPLICATION	• Complete the Research Application Form • Fill out the Self-Assessment Risk Tool • Submit them alongside relevant supporting documents to the Research Governance Coordinators at DPO@gloucestershire.gov.uk
STEP 3: REVIEW	The application will be reviewed using the Research Review Form based on its level of risk:

	• Low risk: reviewed by Research Governance Coordinators • Medium risk: reviewed by members of the Research Advisory Group and relevant teams depending on the subject area • High risk: reviewed by members of the Research Advisory Group and relevant teams depending on the subject area, with final decision made by the relevant directorate leadership
STEP 3: DECISION	The review can result in the following outcomes: • Approved (with or without conditions) • Request for clarification or amendments • Declined
STEP 4: AFTER APPROVAL	• Follow the agreed conditions and standards • Keep GCC informed of progress • Share findings and outputs with the council

What roles and responsibilities does it outline?

The framework outlines the following roles and responsibilities:

- **Applicants** are responsible for designing ethical, compliant research; submitting complete applications; following agreed standards and conditions; managing risks; and sharing progress and findings with GCC
- **GCC's Research Governance Coordinators**, who sit in Information Management Service, act as the central point of contact. They provide advice, manage and log applications in the central GCC Research Register, and coordinate the review process for low-risk studies.
- **GCC's Research Advisory Group** maintains oversight of research requests through GCC's Research Register, coordinates the review of medium-risk studies, supports risk assessment and escalation, promotes good practice across the organisation, and ensures learning from research is shared.
- **GCC's Senior Leadership Teams** review and make decisions on high-risk or high-impact research relevant to their directorates, ensuring appropriate oversight where there are significant risks or opportunities for learning.