



Biotechnology and
Biological Sciences
Research Council

Responsible Research & Innovation: update

Sophia Abbasi, Head of Policy, SPEE domain, BBSRC
BBSRC SPU Research Office Networks Meeting, 12th November 2025

BBSRC / MRC joint statement

- A **BBSRC & MRC joint policy statement** was first published in 2015.
 - Needed accessibility and policy reference updates
- Since COVID-19:
 - Public awareness of biosafety / biological security (“lab leak”; “gain of function”)
 - Advancing enabling technologies & approaches: predictive technologies and AI, gene synthesis, Eng Bio, etc.
 - Heightened and dynamic geopolitical tensions and international / overseas policies changing or expanding
 - UK policy changes
 - National Security – [NSIA 2021](#) (several of the [17 areas](#) are BBSRC/MRC relevant)
 - Trusted Research & Innovation – [UKRI policy](#)
 - Gene Synthesis Screening [voluntary guidance](#)

The revised statement: key features

- **Definition:** *research that is undertaken to provide benefits but may have the potential to be used for harmful purposes, cause harm through accidental release, or be targeted for malicious intent*
- **Statement applies to all:** research-related activities funded by BBSRC and MRC, including internationally collaborative research
- **Covers:** microorganisms, animals and plants
- **Retains:** underlying principle of self-governance but clearer emphasis on a responsible research approach, within legal, regulatory and policy requirements
- **No policy change:** on the research we will consider – more explicit assurance on benefits vs. risks



Managing risks of research misuse: joint policy statement – UKRI

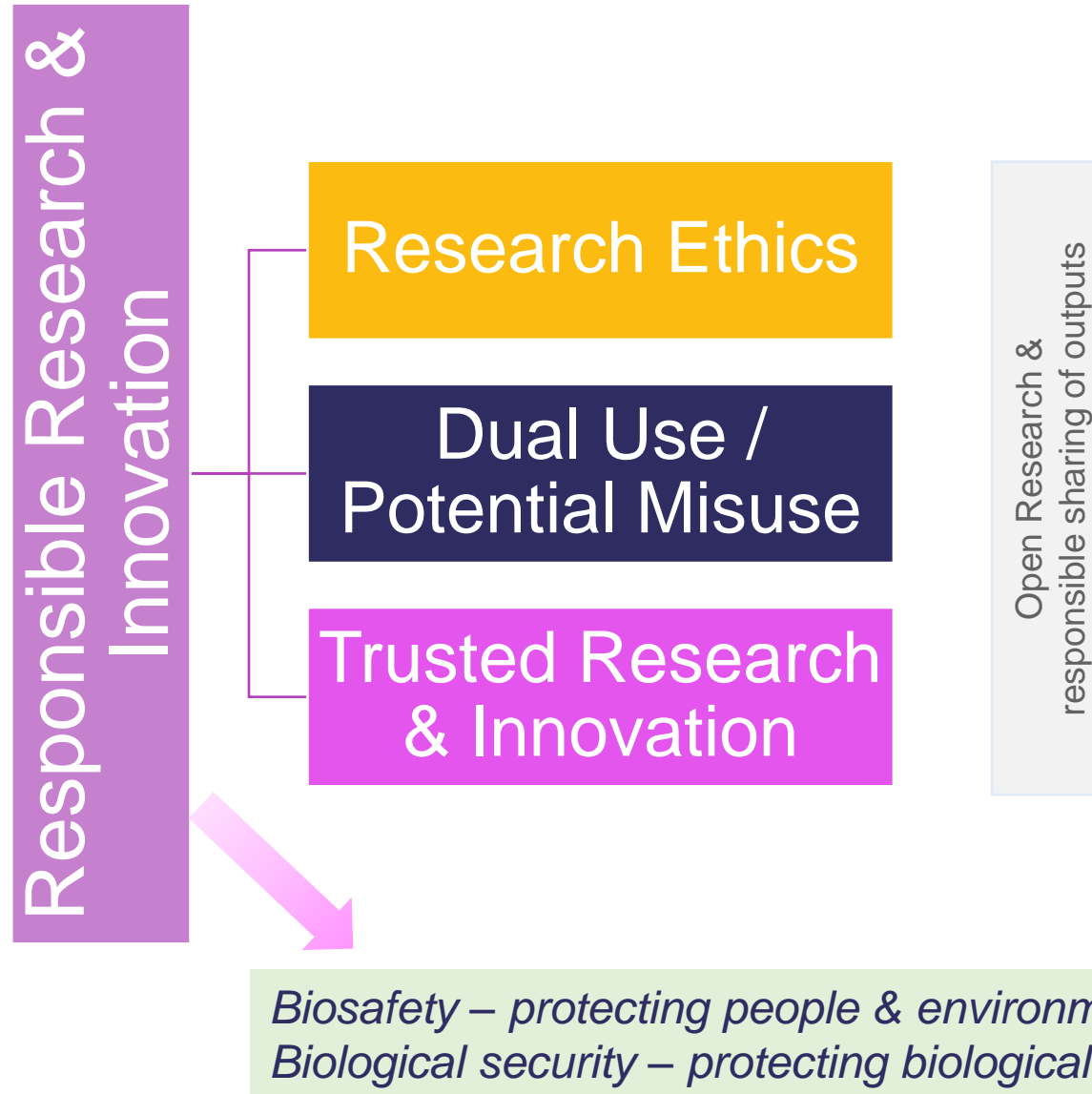
Published 16th October 2025

Joint statement post-publication actions

- **Further guidance** for researchers, reviewers / assessment panels
 - Infographic to accompany the statement
 - Renewed emphasis on consideration of Ethics / RRI by assessment panels, including their advice to BBSRC and MRC
 - Ensure proportionate RRI measures in grants at pre-award
- **Revised Ethics and RRI section on UKRI Funding Service (TFS)**
 - Research misuse risks
 - Update expected in early-mid 2026
- **Related TFS sections updates**
 - Genetic & Biological Risk section to include genetic technologies
 - Trusted Research & Innovation section expanding
- **Discussions** to potentially cover all UKRI life sciences funding



Responsible Research & Innovation



Four points from NPSA

- ✓ Know your research
- ✓ Know your partners
- ✓ Know your threats
- ✓ Know your legal obligations

*Assurance to HMG that the academic sector can self-regulate
... rather than need more legislation...*



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Trusted Research & Innovation

- BBSRC, MRC and UKRI TR&I Shared Capability joint working for the life sciences
 - NSIA [17 areas](#)
 - Export Controls
 - National and international instruments: laws, treaties, policies (annex to joint [statement](#))
 - Revisions to HMG guidance, changes to Export Controls regs
 - Ensuring TR&I / EC capabilities in CUIs outside the universities sector
 - Understanding risks and ensuring risk management *specifically in the life sciences*
 - Seek to harmonise due process across UKRI wherever possible; shared learning
- BBSRC TR&I processes
 - Continuous improvement to business as usual
 - Pre-award checks on all grants with international partnering, in NSIA 17 areas and/or other sensitive areas (e.g., pathogen research)
 - TR&I built proportionately into Targeted Mode funding opportunities
 - TR&I reminders in award letters, or specific additional conditions of funding
 - Post-award M&E for major Targeted Mode initiatives

Discussion

RRI in the life sciences

- ☐ Any initial feedback on the joint statement?
- ☐ Awareness among researchers of laws and treaties (e.g., UK Anti-Terrorism legislation, [UN BWC](#))
- ☐ Ethics and RRI training in your institute
- ☐ Is a culture change needed on RRI? (*cf.* Ethics and RRI responses in BBSRC grant applications)

TR&I

- ☐ Progress in life sciences departments – awareness, understanding
- ☐ NSIA 17 areas and Export Controls policy – your current experience for life sciences research
- ☐ Any specific issues, challenges or wins in the life sciences?

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