

# Guide to the updated Research Society Code of Professional Behaviour 2020

## Background

The Professional Standards Committee recently concluded a review of the Research Society Code of Professional Behaviour (The Research Society Code). Reviews are conducted periodically and are designed to ensure that The Research Society Code remains fit for purpose and

- keeps up to date with the changing nature of research and the digital environment
- keeps up to date with the latest developments in data protection and privacy law
- reflects the latest Australian legislation
- is clear and easily understood by members.

The overall structure of The Research Society Code is unchanged. There is one significant change, but most updates have been made to expand and clarify the Rules. Note that some Rule numbers have changed because a new Rule has been added.

This Guide explains the key updates and the reasoning behind them.

The new Research Society Code is operative from 2 March 2020.

## The change to information disclosure

The major change in the updated Research Society Code is that Research Society Members may now collect data for research purposes and disclose the identified responses to their clients for other uses - for example to add into their customer databases. Until now, the disclosure of some participant responses has been allowed with informed consent; The Research Society Code now allows for a more

general disclosure of all participants' information. The requirement for informed consent remains.

This change does not mean that the need to clearly differentiate research from other activities is at all diminished. The primary purpose of the data collection must remain research and this must be made clear to participants. The client is not allowed to use the identified responses they receive for any marketing activity directed at the participant as a direct result of taking part in the project, as detailed in Rule 9.

Members must also take reasonable precautions to ensure that participants are not harmed or adversely affected if their identified information is disclosed to the client (Rule 8).

This change remains in alignment with the requirements of the Australian Privacy Principles (APPs).

## Changes in detail

This section reviews the updates to The Research Society Code. It does not discuss any changes to wording that do not change the meaning of a Rule or Comment.

### 1. Introduction

The introduction to The Research Society Code has been simplified, clarified and shortened.

The scope of The Research Society (and therefore The Research Society Code) is redefined as *'the peak body in Australia for everyone engaged or interested in market, social and opinion research, whether you use it or provide it, and data analytics, customer experience and insight'*

The introduction makes it clear that The Research Society Code applies to Research Society Members, Company Partners and Client Partners. Company and Client Partner organisations are required to ensure that all individuals employed or engaged by them (whether Research Society Members or not) comply with The Research Society Code as if they are Members.

The Research Society Code now refers throughout to the profession of research. It also now refers to “Members”, rather than “Researchers”, reflecting the fact that some Members may not consider themselves to be Researchers and that The Research Society Code covers its Members only.

The Research Society has adopted the approach of the MRS UK with regard to permission and consent. Permission is a general term – ‘she has given permission to be interviewed’ and consent is an indication of a person’s specific informed wishes – ‘she has given consent for her personal details to be handed to the client’.

### 2. Definitions

The following definitions have been added:

- Consent: to clarify its meaning and differentiate it from permission
- Member: to define who is covered by the Research Society Code
- Profession: to define the term
- Reasonable steps: to clarify the meaning of the term as used in the Research Society Code.

The following definition have been updated:

- Research has been updated to include the broader scope of activities covered

The following definitions have been removed:

- Non-research activity: no longer used in the Research Society Code Rules
- Researcher: replaced with Member.

### 3. General Rules of Professional Behaviour

A Principle at the beginning of this section has been removed. Two amendments to the Rules of professional behaviour (Rules 1-8) make it clear that the Research Society Code covers Members’ behaviour only in the context of their professional research dealings. Outside the research context, the Research Society Code applies only where Members’ behaviour might lead to a loss of public confidence in the research profession or otherwise bring discredit on the research profession.

Rule 2 now states that “*Members must be honest and objective when conducting their professional activities ...*”

Rule 3 now refers to “*Members’ professional activities.*”

### 4. Distinguishing research from other activities

A new Rule has been included to emphasise that certain activities must never be undertaken by Members: “*Members must never undertake any activities, under the guise of research, that aim to manipulate, mislead or coerce individuals.*” Sugging, frugging, pugging and media-mugging are specifically mentioned and defined.

This Rule is now Rule 10.

### 5. Disclosure of identifiable research information

A new Rule 11 has replaced the previous Rule on participant anonymity and disclosure of information. The new Rule allows Members to collect data for research purposes and disclose the identifiable research information to their clients for another purpose - for example to add into their customer databases. It specifies the circumstances under which this disclosure may be undertaken.

People must be informed at the start of the data collection exercise whether their personal information and responses will be kept anonymous or disclosed to the client. Participants must give their consent to having this information disclosed and must be informed of the recipient of the information at this stage (unless methodological issues preclude this) and the purpose for which it will be used. They must be reminded of the disclosure at the end of the exercise, again informed of the details of client and purpose and must reconfirm their consent for this disclosure.

The client may use the disclosed information only for the purpose for which informed consent was given.

Members must still clearly differentiate research from other activities (Rule 9) and ensure no harm to participants as a result of their participation in the project (Rule 8).

### 6. Order change

Within the Research Society Code, the heading ‘Informed consent’ has been deleted, Rules 23 and 24 have been included in the Section on ‘Data collection and handling’ and some of the Rules in that Section have been re-ordered. The order now more closely resembles the flow of a data collection exercise for the sake of clarity.