

Ethics Policy

Effective from 10 June 2009



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Preamble

All University formal documents relate to the policies, strategies, procedures and regulations of the University having been approved by the appropriate formally recognised and constituted body. All University staff and students are required to adhere to the formal processes and regulations of the University.

This document should not be read in isolation as other University processes/formal documents could be relevant. A full listing of all formal documents is available on the University's website.

Any interpretation of the content of this formal document will be at the discretion of the Chair of the University Research Committee.

All previous versions of this document as approved by Senate before June 2009 shall be rescinded.

The names of committees and titles of posts may change from time to time. This shall not invalidate the powers of the equivalent successor committees or post holders.

If required this formal document is available in an alternative format eg Braille, tape, disc, email or a larger font size. Please contact Student and Academic Services.

1 Guiding Principles

The University recognises its obligation to maintain high ethical standards across the breadth of its activities.

The University seeks to achieve this through raising awareness of ethical issues through debate and by formulating codes, guidelines and procedures as are necessary to ensure that a high regard to ethical, social and environmental issues is embedded throughout its activities.

Definitions and manifestations of ethical issues are subject to change. Therefore the development of codes of practice, guidelines and procedures will be an ongoing process.

2 Ethical Principles & Considerations

In broad terms, ethical considerations apply to all activities in the University.

The Nolan Committee Report on 'Standards in Public Life' (1995) indicated seven principles of conduct which underpin public life: integrity; selflessness; objectivity; accountability; openness; honesty; and leadership, and all members of staff are expected to embrace these principles.

All members of staff should observe codes of professional conduct that may relate to their specific discipline or area and be familiar with relevant internal policies and procedures that are in place (e.g. Data Protection Policy).

3 Ethics and Research

A more specific and well-recognised area of ethical consideration relates to research projects. All researchers are expected to conduct their research in accordance with internationally accepted ethical and professional standards and ensure they are cognisant of the University Code of Good Research Practice.

Researchers are expected to be honest in respect of their own actions in their research and in their responses to the actions of other researchers. Anyone who witnesses or suspects fraud or misconduct, should raise concerns with their line manager. Misconduct in research not only implicates the individuals directly responsible, but also threatens the integrity of all individuals associated with the research and the integrity of the University. The University will investigate all allegations of research misconduct fully and expeditiously.

When researchers cannot avoid real or perceived conflicts of interest, they should consult with their Supervisor or Line Manager in the first instance and take active steps to minimise bias, flawed judgement, harm or exploitation.

Researchers should be aware of and stay informed of professional, institutional and governmental regulations and policies in proposing, conducting and reporting research.

4 Fundamental Ethical Standards for Research Involving Human Participants

The University recognises the following general standards that apply to research involving human participants and have been widely adopted by diverse disciplines:

4.1 No research should cause harm (Non-maleficence):

Researchers have a duty to avoid, prevent, or minimise harm to others in the widest sense. Participants should not be subjected to unnecessary risks or discomfort and their participation in the project must be essential to achieving aims that could not be realised without their participation. The principle of minimising harm also requires that the minimum number of participants that will ensure valid data should be employed.

4.2 Research should ideally benefit the participant (Beneficence):

The physical, mental and social well being of the participant should be promoted. Protection of the participant is the most important responsibility of the researcher.

4.3 Consideration should be given to the risks versus the benefits of the study:

Ethics concerns minimisation of risk and weighing risk against benefits. All researchers should be aware of the ethical issues that may arise in the course of their work and should be encouraged to take responsibility for their own ethical actions.

4.4 Respect for justice:

Everyone involved in a project should be treated fairly. Researchers should weigh up and make judgements about competing claims and interest of all involved in the research, regardless of the vested interests of the researchers. Participants should be selected in an equitable way avoiding any populations that may be coerced into taking part. There should be equality in distribution of benefits and risks among the population group(s) likely to benefit from the research.

4.5 Researchers should seek free and informed consent from participants:

Participants must give their informed consent before taking part in a study. Valid consent must be given voluntarily (not forced by coercion or manipulation) by participants who are competent (not undermined by mental status, disease or emergency) and given sufficient information (i.e. 'informed') to make the judgement. Issues may arise where there are power imbalances or where informed consent is not always methodologically feasible. Participants should be informed of: the purpose of the research and the procedure to be followed; any potential benefits from participation; any potential risks or discomfort; the extent to which the results will be kept confidential; contact details of the researcher and given a statement that participation is voluntary and that they are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

4.6 Honesty should be central to the relationship between research and participant:

Deception (i.e. providing false information to the participant about the nature and/or purpose of the study) is discouraged, but on the rare occasion that it is required in order to conduct a valid research study the researcher must provide an in-depth justification that the use of deception is essential to the study. In this instance it is imperative that the participants are debriefed as soon as possible following their involvement to inform the participant about deceptive aspects of the study and to alleviate any stress or other undesirable feelings that the study may have caused. The use of one-way mirrors for observation in any study must be clearly justified.

4.7 Researchers should respect privacy and confidentiality of participants:

Researchers should take precautions to protect confidentiality of participants and data. Standards of privacy and confidentiality protect the access, control and dissemination of personal information. (Research that makes reference to the deceased may raise issues of privacy and confidentiality with regard to living relatives).

4.8 Consent of vulnerable people or groups or their representative's assent should be actively sought:

Respect for human dignity entails an ethical obligation towards vulnerable people or groups whose diminished decision making capacity makes them vulnerable. Vulnerable people include children, prisoners and adults with mental health problems or learning disabilities. The consent of individuals in a potential dependency relationship where there is an imbalance of power (e.g. students, patients and employees) should be carefully considered as their willingness to participate may be unduly influenced by the relationship.

4.9 Collection and storage of research data must comply with the Data Protection Act (1998) and other legislation:

Researchers are expected to comply with the Data Protection Act (1998) and comply with the University Data Protection Policy and Guidelines.

5 Ethics Framework

The University has adopted a two-tier approach using a checklist for all research to determine whether a research proposal requires full ethical review. The checklist will determine whether formal ethical review is required, and, if so, by which reviewing body. Where the potential for risk of harm to participants and others affected by the proposed research is minimal, an expedited review will be carried out. All research requiring formal ethical review will normally be submitted to the requisite

Faculty Research Ethics Committee. Approval for any research proposals involving NHS patients, patient records, staff or premises should be submitted using the NHS online Integrated Research Application System (IRAS). The University Research Ethics and Governance Committee will monitor and review the University's Ethics Framework in the light of the external ethics environment and will propose changes as required.

6 References and Further Sources of Information

The University Code of Good Research Practice

Medical Research Council Ethics and Research Governance:

<http://www.mrc.ac.uk/Newspublications/Publications/Ethicsandguidance/index.htm>

British Psychological Association – Code of conduct, ethical principles and guidelines:

http://www.bps.org.uk/the-society/code-of-conduct/code-of-conduct_home.cfm

NHS National Research Ethics Service:

<http://www.nres.npsa.nhs.uk/>

Statement of ethical practice for the British Sociological Association:

<http://www.sociology.org.uk/as4bsoce.pdf>

ESRC Research Ethics Framework:

http://www.esrc.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/Images/ESRC_Re_Ethics_Frame_tcm6-11291.pdf

EPSRC Guide to Good Practice in Science and Engineering Research,

<http://www.epsrc.ac.uk/ResearchFunding/GrantHolders/GuideToGoodPracticeInResearch.htm>

Human Rights Act (1998):

http://www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts1998/ukpga_19980042_en_1

Social Research Association (2003), Ethical Guidelines:

<http://www.the-sra.org.uk/ethical.htm>

British Educational Research Association Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2004):

<http://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/category/publications/guidelines/>

The RESPECT project:

<http://www.respectproject.org/main/index.php>

UK Data Archive (UKDA), Consent, confidentiality and ethics in data sharing

<http://www.data-archive.ac.uk/sharing/confidential.asp>

Research Ethics in Art, Design and Media

<http://www.biad.uce.ac.uk/research/rti/ethics/about.html>

Prepared by:	Research Unit	Date:	14 May 2009
Final Approval by:	Senate, 10 June 2009		
Review Date:			
Updated on:			