

# Student Applications for Ethics Review: A Guide for Supervisors

## Introduction

Research ethics should be taken into account at an early stage in the development of the project. Ethics approval must be obtained **BEFORE** any of the research starts. If your student has already started or completed their research without gaining the necessary ethics approval, this could be classed as research misconduct in accordance with the University's [Research Ethics Policy](#). Seeking retrospective ethics approval is not possible in most cases, and may be considered only in 'exceptional' circumstances. If you have any concerns, please contact the relevant [Research Ethics Subcommittee \(S-REC\) Chair](#) immediately.

## What is research ethics?

The University is committed to providing high ethical standards in research and safeguarding the dignity, rights and welfare of all those involved in research and the implementation of its results, as a fundamental part of its principles of research integrity.

For every project undertaken, the researcher needs to:

- Act with skill and care;
- Take steps to prevent corrupt practices and unethical practices;
- Identify and declare conflicts of interest;
- Respect, life, law and the public good, and
- Minimise and justify any adverse effects the project may have on people, animals, cultural objects and the natural environment

The consideration of the ethical issues which may arise during the complete lifecycle of a project (including impact activities) is part of good research practice at the University.

Specific Research Ethics Guidance Notes issued by the University Research Ethics Committee (U-REC) are [available](#) to help researchers.

## Who is responsible for seeking ethics review?

Researchers are individually responsible for adhering to the University's Research Ethics Policy. Students are governed by the General Regulations for Students which are available within the annual University Calendar or on the [University website](#).

Students should complete their own ethics review application paperwork but may need guidance from their Supervisor. Supervisors are required to read and countersign the ethics review application form for student projects, so they will need to make sure they are happy with the content of the application and the ethical nature of the research to be conducted. As the S-REC may have questions, Supervisors **MUST** ensure they (or an informed colleague) are available to assist their students after the application has been submitted otherwise there may be a **delay** in reaching the final decision about ethics approval.

## When is ethics review needed?

All research undertaken at the University that involves human participants (or their tissue or data), or animals, or which may have an impact on the environment or cultural objects, requires a form of ethics review. Ethics review is also required for research in virtual environments which involves living human participants who are potentially identifiable.

If a Supervisor is not sure whether their student's project needs ethics review, they may wish to seek advice from the Chair of the [S-REC](#) which seems most appropriate for the subject of their research.

If undertaking health-related research, NHS REC ethics review via [the Integrated Research Application System \(IRAS\)](#) takes precedence over the University's S-REC ethics review. To help decide whether a project needs NHS REC ethics review, please refer to the [HRA decision tool](#).

### Examples of when ethics review is needed by the student

It is not just clearly-defined research activities that require ethics review - all the below scenarios have ethical implications (and please note, this is not an exhaustive list):

- If you are talking to any members of the public (including students and staff where the discussion is not part of their work role) and you want/plan to use their responses (even if aggregated/anonymised) in anything you are putting into writing that will become 'published' or accessible by third parties
  - Even if they are here at the University for another reason
  - Even if you are doing/supervising a taught masters or working on papers as part of your teaching role
- If you are looking at internet blogs and other social media sites and want to use anything 'freely available' on those sites as part of anything you are doing. (This DOES NOT include citing or statementing extracts from formal academic publications which is assumed as standard academic research - but the rules must still be followed).
- If you want to seek people's advice/comments via internet/social media sites
- If you want to use pictures, film clips of real people in any presentation, publication
  - Even if they are really old such that everyone within is likely to be deceased
- If you want to conduct any kind of survey of people either in writing or verbally
  - Even if it is over the internet
- If you want to make a 'real life' film as part of your role at the University
- If you are talking with companies or other business organisations and want to include statements about them in anything you publish
- Reviewing video recordings/CCTV evidence/tapes/audio recordings
- Reviewing and analysing personal records or pseudo anonymised records where it could be possible for persons to be identified
- Where you need to go onto premises belonging to another to conduct your research.

## **What paperwork is required for an application to the S-REC for ethics review?**

The ethics review application paperwork usually consists of:

- A completed ethics application form;
- A research protocol (details of how the research will be conducted, and should include any ethical or governance/management considerations. If relevant, it should include details of how informed consent will be secured and documented), and
- Examples of participant information sheets, consent forms, or any other relevant documents.

For more information, useful documents, forms and details of how to apply for ethics review, please refer to the relevant [S-REC webpages](#). At least 10 working days should be allowed for an initial ethics review. It can take **MUCH LONGER** than this if the S-REC has questions or requires further documentation.

**THE SUPERVISOR SHOULD HAVE OVERSIGHT OF THE APPLICATION AND COUNTERSIGN TO AGREE THAT THE PROJECT PROPOSED IS IN LINE WITH PRIOR DISCUSSIONS WITH THE STUDENT. IF THE SUPERVISOR IS GOING TO BE AWAY DURING THE REVIEW PLEASE ENSURE THAT AN ALTERNATIVE STAFF MEMBER IS AVAILABLE TO ASSIST THE STUDENT IF NEEDED.**

## **How can a concern about the outcome of the ethics review within the University be raised?**

The University has formal Ethics Review Appeals Procedures to allow the University's staff or students proposing projects or revisions to on-going projects to formally raise concerns about the results of the ethics review process or circumstances relating to this.

Researchers are encouraged to try to resolve any ethics review matter they are concerned about informally with the relevant S-REC Chair before beginning the University's formal Procedure.

## **Further information**

For important information regarding ethical conduct in research, please refer to the [Research and Innovation Services' Research Integrity webpages](#).

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