

University of Edinburgh Business School Research Ethics Policy

The purpose of the ethical standards embodied in this policy is not to limit research activities, but to promote and facilitate the conduct of all research in ways that respect the dignity and preserve the well-being of human research participants and the researchers. Researchers are advised to refer to the comprehensive CAHSS Research Ethics Framework (2017) published by the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Science¹. Where research requires ethical approval by external bodies, it must comply with whatever is the most rigorous relevant ethical framework.

Guiding principles

In line with the CAHSS Research Ethics Framework (2017) and UK Research Integrity Office's Code (2009), the School Research Ethics Policy is guided by the principles of: beneficence and non-maleficence; dignity and respect; voluntary and informed consent; confidentiality and data protection; integrity and transparency; responsibility and accountability; excellence; honesty; co-operation; and safety.

In particular, researchers are obliged to:

- (i) Conduct research as capably as their knowledge permits,
- (ii) Protect the dignity and preserve the wellbeing of human research participants.

The latter includes:

- (i) **Respect for Free and Informed Consent**, respecting the exercise of individual free and informed consent by the research participant. Free and informed consent must be voluntarily given, without manipulation, undue influence or coercion. Participants have given free and informed consent when they have freely agreed to serve in the study on the basis of well-understood information about the objectives of the research. They must be fully informed of all anticipated risks and possible benefits of their participation. Voluntary participation requires that participants are assured that at any time they may withdraw their consent to the research. In the case of behavioural and questionnaire research where full disclosure about the nature and objectives of the research could bias and invalidate results (for example, in communications intended to change attitudes or in studies of incidental learning), the explanation should be given immediately after data collection or as soon as is consistent with the research design and methods. Participants should be fully informed as soon as possible of the purposes and aims of the research, and any uncertainties should be removed. The investigator should remove any misconceptions that may have been fostered and should re-establish any trust in the research community that may have been lost.

¹ <http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/humanities-soc-sci/research-ke/support-for-staff/college-research/ethics-framework> & <https://uoesharepoint.com/sites/hss/college-office/research-ke/ethics/Guidance/Forms/AllItems.aspx?web=1&id=%2Fsites%2Fhss%2Fcollege%2Doffice%2Fresearch%2Dke%2Fethics%2FGuidance%2FCAHSS%20Research%20Ethics%20Framework%20%2D%20approved%20Oct17%2Epdf&parent=%2Fsites%2Fhss%2Fcollege%2Doffice%2Fresearch%2Dke%2Fethics%2FGuidance>

(ii) **Respect for Privacy, Anonymity and Confidentiality**; access, control and dissemination of personal information must be protected to ensure privacy, confidentiality and anonymity respected and comply with data protection law. If anonymity and confidentiality cannot be assured or granted, potential participants must be made aware of the limitations and of the possible consequences before they are asked for their consent to participate.

(iii) **Respect for Vulnerable Persons**, children, institutionalized persons or others who are vulnerable are entitled to protection and special procedures to protect their interests.

(iv) **Respect for the physical and psychological safety of researchers**; risks to the researcher, and ways of addressing these, must be given careful consideration.

Participant information and consent forms

Participant information and consent forms must comply with Data Protection Law² and should contain the charitable status strapline, in accordance with the instructions on Page 13 at https://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/uoel_guidelines_chapter_6_publishing.pdf. These forms should inform (potential) participants of how to make a complaint about the project, and that ethical concerns should be directed to ethics@business-school.ed.ac.uk.

Ethics approval

You need to apply for ethics approval if you want to collect data in your research that involves human subject participation, animal subjects, and/or undertake any form of research related to terrorism.

This applies to any person within the Business School community who conducts research, including academics, emeritus, staff, teaching staff, administrators, students (all UG and PG students conducting research for dissertations, theses *and coursework*), visiting or adjunct scholars, fellows and chairs, paid and unpaid research associates and assistants, whether acting as a principal investigator, a junior collaborator or in some other capacity

and

- (i) whether it is funded (e.g., by grant, award, fellowship, contract) or is non-funded;
- (ii) whether funding is internal (i.e., University) or is from an external source (including domestic and foreign public, governmental, and private sources);
- (iii) whether participants are drawn from University sources or from any other sources (e.g., workplaces, other universities, etc.);
- (iv) whether participants are paid or unpaid;
- (v) whether it is conducted inside or outside Scotland;
- (vi) whether it is conducted on University property or at any other location;
- (vii) whether it is conducted in a laboratory or in the field;

² <https://uoel.sharepoint.com/sites/hss/uebs/researchandphd/research-ethics-integrity/Shared%20Documents/GDPR%20Guidance%20and%20flowchart%20for%20Researchers.pdf>

- (viii) whether it is conducted in person or by some other means (e.g., mail, telephone, internet);
- (ix) whether information is collected via direct observation, apparatus, questionnaire, interview, or review of records or other materials not normally available to the public;
- (x) whether it is experimental, correlational, qualitative, or descriptive in nature;
- (xi) whether it is conducted to acquire basic or applied knowledge (e.g., product development assessments, personnel selection, consumer preferences, and product evaluation);
- (xii) whether the information collected has as its focus the human participant or some aspect of the environment with which the human participant interacts;
- (xiii) whether the research is a pilot study or a fully developed project;
- (xiv) whether it is primarily for teaching or demonstration purposes or whether the primary purpose is the acquisition of new knowledge;
- (xv) whether or not it is intended for publication or other public presentation.

Researchers need to consider the ethical implications of:

- (i) the type of data to be collected;
- (ii) the purpose for which the data shall be used;
- (iii) the use, disclosure, and retention of the data;

In all cases there should be appropriate safeguards for security and confidentiality.

Three levels of ethical concern for research projects

Level one: applies to research which does not involve human subject participation (observation, assessment, or recording of public meetings, observation of general behaviour in public spaces or similar activities, and research using many forms of publicly available information).

Please note however that the rise in digital and social media research raises particular issues and studies relying on online or social media data require attention to complex questions around privacy, informed consent and potential harm and cannot be assumed to be Level 1. If you are undertaking research involving material available from online or social media sources please consult <https://uoel.sharepoint.com/sites/hss/uebs/researchandphd/research-ethics-integrity/SitePages/Home.aspx> for guidance on these issues.

Level two: applies to 'straightforward' non-intervention (observation, questionnaires, etc.) and engagement with participants or participant groups (interviews, focus groups, ethnography, etc.)

Level three: applies to research that uses novel procedures (where there is no recognized protocol for guiding research); is potentially problematic in that it might incorporate inherent physical or emotional risk to researchers or research participants; involves vulnerable people: children (under 18), institutionalised people, or other individuals who are vulnerable or unable to give consent; involves staff members asking students on their own courses to participate in their research projects.

Procedure for Applying for Ethical Approval: Staff

Level 1:

Level 1 research does not require ethics approval. It would however be extremely helpful to notify the Research Office of these studies, by emailing a copy of the Level 1 form to ethics@business-school.ed.ac.uk. This confirms and ensures that ethical issues have not simply been overlooked for a particular project.

Level 2: applicants should complete the appropriate self-report form and submit this to ethics@business-school.ed.ac.uk.

Level 3: applicants should complete the School's Research Ethics Checklist and submit this to ethics@business-school.ed.ac.uk for consideration by the School Ethics Committee. Ethical approval for all projects must be obtained before beginning fieldwork.

Researchers who are uncertain as to exactly which level their project falls under should consult their Group Research Representative, Deputy Director of Research (Ethics) or the Research Office on ethics@business-school.ed.ac.uk.

Please also note that research is dynamic and research projects evolve. Being an ethical researcher involves more than filling the correct form at the start of a project: ethical issues should be reviewed throughout the life of a project, from conception to publication/dissemination of results. In some cases it may be necessary to make a revised ethics application to reflect unanticipated changes in the project; please contact the Research Office on ethics@business-school.ed.ac.uk with any queries.

In addition to ethical approval, some research projects have particular legal/insurance implications. The Research Office should be contacted for studies involving

- children under 5 years old
- participants who are pregnant
- participants from outside the UK
- data from outside the UK (particularly the US)
- health and social care research

Health research is defined as “any research into matters relating to people’s physical or mental health” and social care research is defined as “any research into matters relating to personal care or other practical assistance for individuals (in England and Scotland, specifically individuals aged 18 or over) who are in need of care or assistance because of age, physical or mental illness, disability, pregnancy, childbirth, dependence on alcohol or drugs or other similar circumstances.”

Procedure for Applying for Ethical Approval: Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught Students

Dissertations:

Ethical approval for all projects must be obtained before beginning fieldwork. Forms and guidance are available through the ATLAS Dissertation System accessed through LEARN.

Level 1 forms should be completed in ATLAS, this will confirm and ensure that ethical issues have not been overlooked for a particular project. These will be forwarded for sign off by dissertation advisors and processed by the Research Office.

Level 2 applications should be completed on ATLAS. These will be forwarded for sign off by dissertation advisors and processed by the Research Office.

Level 3 applicants should complete the School's Research Ethics Checklist³, obtain the signature of their dissertation advisor, and submit it to ethics@business-school.ed.ac.uk for consideration by the School Ethics committee.

Dissertation students who are uncertain as to exactly which level their project falls under should consult their dissertation advisor, Course Organiser or Programme Director.

Please also note that research is dynamic and research projects evolve. Being an ethical researcher involves more than filling the correct form at the start of a project: ethical issues should be reviewed throughout the life of a project, from conception to publication/dissemination of results. In some cases it may be necessary to make a revised ethics application to reflect unanticipated changes in the project; please contact the Research Office on ethics@business-school.ed.ac.uk with any queries.

Research for coursework projects

Students undertaking primary research for coursework should submit the appropriate forms [Level 1, 2 or 3, available from ethics@business-school.ed.ac.uk] to their Course Organiser for sign off and then submit this to the Research Office [ethics@business-school.ed.ac.uk]. Fieldwork must not start until ethical approval has been granted.

Procedure for Applying for Ethical Approval: Postgraduate Research Students

PGR students can access the appropriate forms on the LEARN PGR Students Information Area. Following discussion with their supervisor, they should submit the completed form to their programme administrator either before any fieldwork commences or at their first annual review at the latest. Subsequently, they should include a revised/updated self-report form as an appendix to their report as part of their Annual Doctoral Presentations, and submit a revised form should their research design change. Ethical approval for all projects must be obtained before beginning fieldwork. Where relevant, annual presentations and reports should refer to how ethical issues are being addressed throughout the PhD process.

Those students undertaking Level 3 research should complete the School's Research Ethics Checklist and submit this to ethics@business-school.ed.ac.uk for consideration by the School Ethics Committee.

For research not requiring ethics approval, it would be extremely helpful if a Level 1 form could be completed and sent to ethics@business-school.ed.ac.uk, as this would confirm and ensure that ethical issues have not been overlooked for a particular project.

Students who are uncertain as to exactly which level their project falls under should consult their supervisor, Group PGR Representative or Programme Director.

Please also note that research is dynamic and research projects evolve. Being an ethical researcher involves more than filling the correct form at the start of a project: ethical issues should be reviewed throughout the life of a project, from conception to publication/ dissemination of results. In some cases it may be necessary to make a revised ethics application to reflect unanticipated changes in the project; please contact the Research Office on ethics@business-school.ed.ac.uk with any queries.

The use of School-wide student surveys

In line with the policy of the University's Student Survey Ethics Committee, any student or member of staff wishing to undertake a School-wide student survey needs permission from the Head of School.

Any student or member of staff wishing to undertake a College-level survey must be referred to the Student Survey Ethics Committee.

School Ethics Committee

The School Ethics Committee is a sub-committee of the Research Committee, chaired by the Deputy Director of Research (Ethics). The Director of Research will continue to act as a member of the School Ethics Committee. Three members are necessary to be quorate, including the relevant subject group representative³. It will meet as directed by the Deputy Director of Research (Ethics) to decide whether a Level 3 proposal should be approved. Any issues arising from the School Ethics Committee review should be resolved by discussion with the applicant. If issues cannot be resolved at this level, the matter will be referred to the College Research Ethics Committee, which has an audit (receiving annual reports), enhancement (conduit for recommendations), and maintenance (ensuring ethics procedure function in Schools) role.

³ If a Level 3 application is being made by an RC member, or a student supervised by an RC member, a suitably experienced colleague from that subject group should be co-opted onto the sub-committee. Where the Deputy Director of Research (Ethics) role is undertaken by a Subject Group Research Champion, an additional member of faculty will act as their subject group ethics representative.