Committee for Research Ethics & Governance in Arts, Social Sciences & Business

Policy and Procedure for the Ethical Review of Research

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1. Introduction

This document sets out the Committee policy on the ethical review of research activity. It adheres to University requirements and reflects sector developments which oblige research institutions and individual researchers to ensure that all research activity meets the highest ethical standards.

The policy is designed to meet as a minimum, institutional requirements for ethical review and those of various funders of arts, humanities and social science research. In addition, consideration has been given to guidance from professional associations relevant to the research that takes place within the Schools.

The policy of ethical review applies to all research activity carried out by staff and students across the Schools. The Committee recognises its duty to promote a culture which supports good practice in research, and the policy acknowledges that individual researchers have ultimate responsibility for ensuring that potential ethical issues are fully addressed when undertaking any and all research activity.

Carrying out research in an ethical and professional manner requires the balancing of a number of different principles which are frequently in tension with each other, and often requires researchers to make difficult professional decisions. The policy has been developed to recognise and respect different disciplinary and professional requirements, and requirements are based on the principle of proportionality.

An efficient and successful process for ethical review requires engagement from all relevant parties. With this in mind, the process has been designed to be supportive, collaborative and non-cumbersome. In addition to providing ethical oversight of research practice, it is intended to raise awareness of ethical issues and the increasing focus on this across the higher education sector. Ethical policy and practice within the Schools will be reviewed as understanding evolves.

2. Background

The University’s Research Policy Committee (RPC) is responsible for the development of the University’s Research Governance Handbook. The Handbook clearly sets out the University’s expectations from researchers throughout the institution and the administrative structures within which they operate, with the intention of ensuring that the University achieves the highest standards of research governance accountability and responsibility. The Handbook has been reviewed on an annual basis, with the current version updated in December 2018.

The University defines research as:

Any form of disciplined enquiry which aims to contribute towards a body of knowledge or theory.

The Committee policy for the Ethical Review of Research (Ethics Policy) uses this definition of research and the requirements of the policy to apply to all research activity, not only that for which external funding is sought.

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1 For the purposes of this Policy the general ethical principles are the adoption of the values of ‘doing positive good’ and ‘the avoidance of harm’

2 Incorporating the University Research Ethics Framework and the Institutional Statement on the Handling of Allegations of Unacceptable Research Conduct.
Further to this, the RPC provides overarching guidelines on the scope and operation of ethical approval processes. Its remit is to:

- Develop policy and guidance on research governance and ethical issues;
- Provide oversight of all research-related ethical issues within the University and ensure that appropriate structures are in place to encourage best practice;
- Maintain an interaction with the North of Scotland Research Ethics Service.

The University requires each Ethics Committee to manage its own ethical review processes to ensure ethical scrutiny of all research projects before they can commence.

The Ethics Policy ensures that all research activity is subject to some level of ethical scrutiny and supports retrospective approval in cases where approval is not required in advance of the commencement of research (e.g. as requested by external funders).

The Ethics Policy considers directly the requirements of relevant external funding bodies. The most notable examples of this are the Economic and Social Research Council, which will not fund research in institutions that do not have research ethics review policies that meet their minimum requirements, and the Arts and Humanities Research Council which requires Research Organisations to consider ethics in broad terms and grant approval to researchers in advance of the commencement of research activity. In addition, consideration has been given to Professional Associations which have codes of ethical practice to which they require their members to adhere (Appendix 3).

### 3. Principles

The underlying principles of the Ethics Policy are:

- Upholding scientific standards;
- Promoting honesty, integrity and credibility in research;
- Responsibility and accountability;
- Avoidance of social and personal harm;
- Respect;
- Compliance with all legal and ethical requirements (on behalf of the University and the individual researcher) relevant to the field of study;
- Proportionality.

While respecting the ethical traditions of disciplines, we can recognise that strong ethical principles are the common ground on which all disciplines meet. Ethics are about research quality and integrity, in order to ensure the best possible research; how research is conducted from start to finish; how those involved in research (and those affected by it) are treated; communicating research goals, procedures and findings as clearly as possible and recognising that research is supported by, and part of, wider society. Ethical principles are also important when considering the safe storage of, and where appropriate, access to, research data and the dissemination of findings subsequent to the activity of gathering data.

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3 The ESRC requires that ethical approval is given before work commences on a research project.
4. Good Research Practice

Prior to, during, and following the completion of all research activities, researchers are expected to consider how they can ensure good practice. In preparation for and during research activity, especially that which involves human subjects\(^4\), researchers are expected to consider the ethical implications of their research. Considerations include the nature of the research and the cultural, economic, psychological, physical, political, religious, spiritual and social consequences for all subjects.

5. Research Governance and Ethics Policy

Whilst the ultimate responsibility for good practice and the ethical conduct of research lies with each researcher, the Ethics policy is designed to support researchers when considering the wider consequences of their work.

A checklist (Appendix 2) of good research practice has been developed which researchers should consider when preparing for ethical review of research activity. This checklist provides guidance on some of the areas that should be considered when considering potential ethical consequences of research activity.

In accordance with University requirements, the Committee will ensure that all staff and students are made aware of the policy and provide opportunities for researchers to engage with institutional ethics training. School Ethics Officers will be responsible for monitoring compliance with the policy within their Schools and, through appropriate dissemination, will ensure that colleagues are aware of their responsibilities under the policy.

This policy applies to all research activity involving researchers within the Schools whether or not it is funded. Heads of School are responsible for any research performed in their School, and for ensuring the implementation of this policy. Guidance on any issues relating to research ethics should be sought from the appropriate School Ethics Officer.

Benefits that are expected through compliance with the policy are:

- Further embedding a research culture based upon good research principles;
- Demonstrating commitment to high-quality, transparent and accountable research practices;
- Ensuring the protection of the dignity, rights, safety and well-being of the subjects of research;
- Codifying the Committee’s position on research governance and research ethics, affirming our commitment to high ethical standards;
- Providing clear guidance for staff and students;
- Ensuring that all risks relating to research are closely considered, allowing steps to be taken to minimise risks to research subjects.
- Reducing risks to the University, the Schools and individual researchers;

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\(^4\) For the purposes of the policy, the term ‘research subjects’ encompasses all those who might be affected by the research from planning stages through data collection and following the publication of findings. This includes the observation of people and the use of secondary data and public engagement activity attached to research.
Strengthening the eligibility and quality of research funding applications.

In order to meet the commitment to proportionality in the process of the ethical review for research, researchers will be individually responsible for determining whether their own research activity requires formal ethical review within the terms of this policy. Formal ethical review is required where:

- Research activity (including public engagement) involves human subjects (or their remains)
- There are any issues which might raise any ethical concerns (for example, potential conflicts of interest; the use of artefacts; environmental impact; financial inducements for subjects).
- Research activity might involve the sharing of data or confidential information beyond the initial consent given (including where research relies solely on secondary data).
- It is a requirement for external funding.

6. Committee for Research Governance & Ethics in Arts, Social Sciences & Business (CREGASSB)

6.1 Committee Policy

The Committee Policy (revised in November 2018) states the responsibilities of the Committee (‘Terms of Reference’) as being:

1. To be responsible for the ongoing revision of the Ethics Policy in the Schools of Business; Divinity, History & Philosophy; Education; Language, Literature, Music & Visual Culture; Law; and Social Sciences and monitoring its implementation;

2. To develop policy and guidelines in accordance with research good practice and ethical issues as they relate to research undertaken in all areas of the Schools;

3. To keep apprised of developments in research ethics and good practice as applicable to the research disciplines in the Schools;

4. To review all applications made by staff and postgraduate research students for ethical approval received from the Schools (and other areas of the University as necessary) either through expedited or full Committee review.⁵⁶;

5. To give written decisions and, as appropriate, feedback for all applications received. This will be provided either through email (for those reviewed by expedited, electronic process) or through minutes (for those considered at meetings of the Committee)⁷;

6. To record and archive all applications, practices and decisions relating to the ethical review of research;

7. (Through School Ethics Officers) to ensure that researchers (staff and students) within the Schools are provided with information on good practice and ethical review requirements of the University, the Schools and disciplinary associations relevant to their

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⁵ To avoid potential delays in granting ethical approval of research activity, ethical review will normally be carried out by a single member of the Committee in consultation with other members of the Committee as necessary. In such circumstances, the Committee member considering the application must not be a member of the School, or Schools, submitting the application.

⁶ Where an application needs to be considered by the full Committee the Principal Investigator will be invited to attend the meeting.

⁷ It is not the intention of the Policy that research should be prevented. Rather, feedback will aim to enable the Principal Investigator to re-consider those aspects that have cause concern for the Committee prior to resubmission of a revised proposal.
research;
8. To ensure that staff and students in the Schools receive appropriate opportunities to take part in training in good research practice and ethical matters;
9. To report to the appropriate bodies in the University.

When a particular issue of research ethics cannot be resolved through either expedited review or in discussion with the Committee, the Chair will defer adjudication to the University’s Research Policy Committee.

The Chair will be invited to present an annual report on the Committee’s activities to the Research Policy Committee. The Dean of Research & Knowledge Exchange for Arts & Social Sciences is a member of the Research Policy Committee, and will, on behalf of the Chair, be responsible for maintaining a routine line of communication between this Committee, the Research Policy Committee and the Vice-Principal for Research & Knowledge Exchange.

6.2 Membership
- Chair - A senior academic from Arts, Social Sciences & Business, appointed on the recommendation of the Vice-Principal for Research & Knowledge Exchange
- Dean of Research & Knowledge Exchange for Arts & Social Sciences (if not Chair)
- One Academic member of staff from each of the Schools of Business; Divinity, History & Philosophy; Education; Language, Literature, Music & Visual Culture; Law; and Social Sciences (the School Ethics Officer, or where necessary, the Deputy School Ethics Officer – both nominated by the Head of School)
- A senior academic from outside the Schools with relevant experience (appointed by the Vice-Principal for Research & Knowledge Exchange on the recommendation of the Committee Chair)
- A senior representative from IT Services (appointed by the Committee Chair or the Dean of Research & Knowledge Exchange) to provide advice and guidance on ethical issues as they relate to information technology.

The Committee may also invite other members of staff to participate in Committee meetings, as necessary.

6.3 Committee Remit
The remit of the Committee is as follows:

The Committee for Research Ethics & Governance in Arts, Social Sciences and Business is responsible for maintaining and reviewing the Committee’s Research Governance and Ethics Policy, and for reviewing and adjudicating on all applications for ethical approval made by staff and postgraduate research students within the Schools.

6.4 Relationship of the Committee with the University’s Ethical Governance Structures
The Committee provides regular reports relating to ethical issues, reflects on wider ethical structures, provides opinions on where these might be adapted or changed, and provides input on any other matters relating to research governance within the Schools and to the University’s Research Policy Committee. The Dean of Research & Knowledge Exchange for Arts & Social Sciences is a member of the Research Policy Committee, and will, where appropriate, provide
feedback to the members of the Committee on how policy decisions made by the University Committee will apply to the Schools.

This Committee provides advocacy on how the disciplines within the Schools operate, and represents the needs of the Schools so that University policy can be informed by our practices.

The University Research Policy Committee has overarching responsibility for managing the University's research ethics and governance arrangements, and is a Committee of Court and Senate.

Across the University, the Deans of Research & Knowledge Exchange for the disciplines (Arts & Social Sciences, Physical Sciences & Engineering, and Life Sciences & Medicine) provide an interface between their local ethics governance structures and the University's Research Policy Committee, and also a link across the disciplines.

6.5 School Ethics Officers

This guidance is not intended to be exhaustive, however, it should be useful for both Ethics Officers and Heads of School when considering the requirements of the role. Heads of School have committed to ensuring that the commitments of School Ethics Officers are reflected in workload allocation.

Each School will designate an Ethics Officer and, normally, a Deputy\(^8\). The responsibilities of the School Ethics Officer are to:

- Be a member of the Committee for Research Ethics & Governance in Arts, Social Sciences & Business and participate in discussions of the Committee\(^9\);

- Ensure that there are effective mechanisms to bring any policy, guidelines or procedures developed by the University concerning the good conduct of research and research ethics to the attention of staff and students in the School. Mechanisms must make it clear that it is a University requirement that policies, guidelines and procedures are followed;

- Ensure that the Policy & Procedure for the Ethical Review of Research and any additional guidance developed by the group or the institutional Research Policy Committee are communicated to all staff and students within the school (this includes ensuring that all colleagues are aware of their own responsibility to apply for ethical review of research proposals as required by the policy);

- Be aware of relevant professional guidelines and other external guidance relevant to all disciplines within their School, and bring details of ongoing developments to the attention of staff and students within their School and to the Committee\(^10\);

- Advise faculty and students on matters relating to ethical scrutiny;

- Keep ethical issues in the School under review, and normally be members of School Research Committees or equivalent;

- Manage and monitor the implementation of research ethics procedures within the School;

- Ensure that appropriate records of applications and decisions for ethical review of research activity are kept for the School;

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\(^8\) The decision on whether or not to appoint a Deputy Officer will lie with the Head of School. The Deputy Officer will represent the School at CREGASSB meetings, share the responsibilities of the review process and help raise awareness of research ethics at School level.

\(^9\) The Committee will meet three times per year, or as appropriate.

\(^10\) Each School Ethics Officer must ensure that the Committee is informed of ethical expectations specific to research areas in their School. This will ensure that reviewers are aware of any potential.
• Report to the Head of School and the Committee where appropriate, on research ethics issues;
• Undertake the review of applications for the ethical approval of research activity;¹¹
• Provide advice to colleagues on matters relating to research ethics (including advising on the completion of the application form for the ethical review of research);
• If required, provide institutional training on research ethics to colleagues across the institution (Deputy Ethics Officers will not be expected to provide training).

6.5.1 Period of Office
The period of office will normally be four years, with the opportunity to renew/extend the appointment by agreement with the Head of School and the Chair of the Committee.

6.5.2 Additional Support
Newly appointed School Ethics Officers will receive mentoring from a Committee member. Further support and guidance will also be available from the Chair of the Committee.

6.6 Committee Research Ethics and Governance Administrator
The University will designate an administrator to be responsible for the administration of the Ethics Policy. They will report to the Dean of Research & Knowledge Exchange in Arts & Social Sciences (and the Committee Chair where different) and be responsible for:

• The organisation of meetings of the Committee, including the taking of minutes;
• The maintenance of the Research Ethics webpages and (in consultation with appropriate colleagues in IT Services) ensuring that the electronic process for ethical review is functioning properly;
• Ensuring that decisions made by the Committee or under expedited procedures are communicated to applicants;
• Bringing to each meeting of the Committee a report on all decisions made under the expedited procedures, and taken by Chair’s¹² action, since its last meeting;
• Drafting reports on the work of the Committee (to be approved by the Chair) to be presented to the University Research Policy Committee.

¹¹ This includes first level review of applications from within the School (to ensure that applications have been completed correctly) and full review of applications from colleagues/PhD students in other Schools associated with the Committee.
¹² The Chair may alone or in consultation with one or more members of the committee, make a decision on an application that is not eligible for the expedited procedure. This would normally only be in exceptional circumstances and when a decision cannot be delayed until the next scheduled meeting of the Committee.
7. Application Procedures

Where research activity includes any of the elements highlighted in section 5, each researcher (staff and students) is responsible for ensuring that they have adequate ethical approval. To gain approval, a researcher must complete an application for ethical approval of research activity (see 7.1, 7.2 or 7.3).

Where the application relates to a specific research project the application should be made by the Principal Investigator on the project.

Where a researcher is not embarking on a clearly defined research project, formal ethical approval of any ongoing research activity is required on a biennial basis.

In addition, any courses which contain an element of research are subject to the terms of the Ethics Policy. This includes taught courses requiring research involving human participants. In these cases, the application form for ethical approval should be completed by the Course Co-ordinator.

A copy of the application form is appended for information (Appendix 4).

When making an application for the ethical approval of research activity, researchers should first refer to the Checklist for Good Research Practice (Appendix 2) and contact their School Ethics Officer (or deputy) for advice on completing the application.

The application form (in combination with the checklist) has been developed with the intention of raising awareness of potential ethical considerations for the diverse research activity that takes place across the Schools. Colleagues are encouraged to be as thorough as possible when completing the application as ethical approval can only be granted for those research activities which are specified thereon. Should research methods ultimately differ from those presented within an approved application, the researcher will be responsible for ensuring that a new application is made to cover any additional activity. Similarly, if a researcher subsequently embarks on a piece of clearly defined research, they will be required to submit another application for ethical approval specific to the project.

Researchers should not regard the form as a ‘box-ticking’ exercise and must provide enough information to show the reviewer that they have fully considered the possible ethical implications of their research, allowing for an informed judgement to be taken by the reviewer before granting approval.

In considering requests for ethical review, the Committee will review guidance from relevant research agencies. Applications will need to demonstrate that the research follows good practice guidelines and addresses all relevant ethical issues including: safety and well-being; obtaining appropriate informed consent\(^{13}\) (including when the research involves vulnerable adults or children, or where it is proposed to use covert observation); payment to participants; principles of anonymity; confidentiality; and the General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018.

Where an application for ethical review is received, except where a full Committee review is required, a decision will normally be made within five working days.\(^{14}\)

\(^{13}\) Researchers will be required to demonstrate how research subjects will be informed in advance of giving consent.

\(^{14}\) Subject to operational requirements and potential delays outwith term-time.
As per the University Records retention schedule, applications for ethical approval of research submitted by staff/postgraduate research students will be retained until the end of the project plus six years. For applications submitted by undergraduate or postgraduate taught students, these will be retained until the end of the student's programme of study plus six years.

7.1 Staff Applications
Staff applications should be submitted using the online process at https://365abdn.sharepoint.com/sites/staffethics.

Once the application form has been completed, the applicant must attach any other relevant documentation (e.g. the research project proposal, consent forms, information sheet, etc.).

Once the researcher has submitted the online form, it will be forwarded to the School Research Ethics Officer for scrutiny. If the form has been completed correctly, it will be passed to the Committee for approval either through the expedited or full Committee procedures. The School Research Ethics Officer and the applicant will be informed of the reviewer's decision.

7.2 Research Postgraduate Student Applications
PGR applications should be submitted using the online system https://365abdn.sharepoint.com/sites/staffethics, whereby it will follow the same process for staff research projects (as per 7.1 above).

7.3 Undergraduate and Taught Postgraduate Student Applications
Undergraduate and Taught Postgraduate applications for ethical review are managed within the Schools, using a downloadable 'Word' application form (https://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/research/ethical-approval-2780.php#panel6497). The completed application form should then be emailed to the student's supervisor for full ethical review. The School Ethics Officer will provide advice and assistance to supervisors on request.

7.4 Appeals
In the event that ethical approval is refused, the applicant will be invited in the first instance to revise their research proposal or further explain the reasons for the research methodology which is proposed. If this is not appropriate, the researcher has the right to appeal the Committee’s decision to the University's Research Policy Committee using the procedures put in place by that Committee.

7.5 Exceptions
Some of the University's research will fall under the remit of an NHS Research Ethics Committee e.g. the North of Scotland Research Ethics Service (NoSRES) or other equivalent NHS ethics services. Subject to only a few specific exceptions, any research involving NHS staff and patients (including their tissue and data) as well as NHS facilities and premises must be subjected to ethical review by an NHS Research Ethics Committee (NHS REC). This includes research involving individuals when their status as NHS staff or patients is relevant to the research, even when a medical condition is not the subject of the research. Research involving participants who do not have the capacity to consent is subject to the same NHS ethical review procedures but must be reviewed by an NHS REC which has authority to review this type of study. Further guidance on whether your research will require NHS REC approval is available at http://www.hra-decisiontools.org.uk/ethics/. Your research should also be

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15 All colleagues with any undergraduate supervisory responsibility are therefore required to engage fully with the process of ethical review to ensure that they can fully consider the ethical implications of any research carried out by their students.
discussed with your School Ethics Officer.

Where a research project involves the NHS in any way, researchers are to discuss this with the clinical research governance team. Sponsorship for clinical research involving the NHS is arranged using the guidelines, templates and links available on the clinical research governance webpages and the Standard Operating Procedures and templates are available here. Any queries should be directed to researchgovernance@abdn.ac.uk.

7.6 External Ethical Approval

Should an applicant require access to participants through other organisations then they must contact the organisation, establish the mechanism for obtaining consent and take appropriate action to meet their internal requirements. However this does not override the requirement to meet with this University’s requirements in relation to ethical approval of research.

Once the research has received external ethical approval, formal evidence of that approval will normally be accepted as sufficient to meet the University’s own requirements, however confirmation that this approval meets with the University’s requirements should be sought from this Committee. Where the Committee is not satisfied that the review process provided by the external institution/organisation meets our own standards, further institutional review will be required.

For staff who are participating in a research project where the Principal Investigator (PI) is based at another institution, the primary responsibility for securing relevant ethical approval lies with the institution that employs the PI.

Where there is conflict between local customs and the ethical principles and values set out by the University this should be brought to the attention of the Chair of the ethics committee in the first instance, and also the Research Policy Committee.

For postgraduate research students who are undertaking a research degree programme as part of a validation agreement with an external institution, ethical approval should initially be sought from the external institution. A copy of the approved ethics application should then be submitted to this Committee in order to ensure it satisfies the requirements of the Committee’s research ethics approval procedures.

For students undertaking research at an external Aberdeen University campus, applications for ethical approval will be submitted using the appropriate Aberdeen process e.g. via word version of the application form for undergraduate students. External staff supervising these students will be required to undertake the online ethics training course to ensure they understand the required standards for ethical research, as they will be responsible for undertaking the ethical review of applications submitted by their students. School Ethics Officers at the University of Aberdeen will not be involved in reviewing ethics applications from external campuses unless additional guidance is requested. The external campus will be required to submit an annual report to the Committee on the operation of the ethics review process at the external campus e.g. number of applications received and approved, any issues arising, etc.

7.7 Formal Notifications

Once ethical review has been carried out, the applicant will be advised via email of the Committee’s (or, where appropriate, individual reviewer’s) decision. Where formal confirmation of ethical approval is required (e.g. for presentation to external partners), researchers should contact their School Ethics Officer in the first instance, who will arrange for a letter of confirmation, on headed paper, to be provided.
Appendix 1 – Guidance Email to Staff & Postgraduate Research Students

Policy and Procedure for the Ethical Review of Research

The revised policy for ethical review will require colleagues to determine whether or not their research activity requires ethical scrutiny.

To remind researchers of the requirement to consider the potential need for formal ethical approval of their research activity, the following email will be issued to all staff on a quarterly basis, accompanied by the Checklist of Good Research Practice (Appendix 3 of the policy document):

Message sent on behalf of Professor Michael Brown (Dean of Research & Knowledge Exchange for Arts & Social Sciences) and Dr Katarina Trimmings (Chair of the Committee for Research Ethics & Governance in Arts, Social Sciences & Business).

Dear Colleague

Under our Policy and Procedure for the Ethical Review of Research, all research active colleagues (including postgraduate research students) within the Schools of Business; Divinity, History & Philosophy; Education; Language, Literature, Music & Visual Culture; Law; and Social Science, are reminded that, further to any external funding requirements, you have a responsibility to apply for ethical approval if:

- Your research (including public engagement) involves human subjects (or their remains)
- There are any issues which you feel might raise any ethical concerns during proposed research activity (for example, potential conflicts of interest; the use of artefacts; environmental impact; financial inducements for subjects)
- Your research activity might involve the sharing of data or confidential information beyond the initial consent given (including where research relies solely on secondary data)
- Your research methodologies have changed since a previous award of ethical approval.

This applies to all research-related activity (including, but not limited to:- clearly defined research projects, research based teaching, 'general' ongoing research activity and public engagement). Note: Ongoing research activity related to these categories must be submitted for ethical approval on a biennial basis.

Ethical approval must be obtained before the commencement of your research.

If your ongoing research activity involves any of the categories above and have you not received ethical approval within the last two years, you are now required to make an application for ethical review by completing an electronic application at Ethics - Home.

The attached checklist has been developed for reference and should be reviewed by all colleagues to help determine whether or not review is required, and also when completing an application for review.

If you are unsure of your requirements for ethical review or have any other queries relating to research ethics, please contact your School Ethics Officer in the first instance.
instance. (School Ethics Officers are listed on the webpages here within the section ‘Arts, Social Sciences and Business’.)

**ETHICS TRAINING:** The University provides an online institutional training course on research ethics, which is available via the following webpage [http://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/research/institutional-training-in-research-ethics-2782.php](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/research/institutional-training-in-research-ethics-2782.php). All postgraduate research students are required to complete this training, and completion is strongly recommended for all staff engaged in research.

Best wishes

Michael Brown
Katarina Trimmings
Appendix 2 – Checklist of good research practice

Arts, Social Sciences and Business:

Checklist of good research practice: Points to consider when planning research and making an application for ethical approval

The checklist below has been taken from information that is available through research councils and disciplinary bodies relevant to the research that is carried out across the Schools of Business; Divinity, History & Philosophy; Education; Language, Literature, Music & Visual Culture; Law; and Social Sciences. It contains information provided by the ESRC and aims to facilitate the process of considering the ethical implications of research activity. Whilst the list is not definitive, colleagues are invited to consider it as a guide of potential issues to consider in advance of making an application for ethical approval of their research activity and when developing the ethics section of research proposals.

Before the commencement of research:

- Is your research question appropriate and designed to add to what is already known about the subject in question or the methods for researching the subject?
- Is your research design appropriate for the question(s) being asked?
- Will you have access to all necessary skills and resources to conduct the research?
- Have you made provision for all necessary monitoring and audit requirements?
- Are you in compliance with any contracts and financial guidelines relating to the project?
- Have you reached an agreement relating to intellectual property, publication and authorship if applicable?
- Have you reached an agreement relating to collaborative working, if applicable?
- Have you agreed the roles of researchers and responsibilities for management and supervision?
- Have all conflicts of interest relating to your research been identified and resolved?
- Are you aware of the guidance from all applicable organisations on misconduct in research?

Conducting research:

- Have you considered risks to:
  - the research team?
  - the research subjects/participants? (e.g. harm, deception, impact of outcomes)
    - the data collected? (e.g. storage, considerations of privacy, quality)
    - the research organisations, project partners and funders involved?
- Might anyone else be put at risk as a consequence of this research? What might these risks be?
• Are you following the agreed research design for the project? If not, have any changes to the project been reviewed and agreed?
• Is your research undergoing all necessary monitoring and audit?
• Does your research involve public engagement (e.g. through voluntary participation by individuals or groups)? What ethical implications have been considered relating to such engagement?
• How will you protect your data at the research site and away from the research site?

Details and recruitment of research subjects: What types of people will be recruited? (e.g. students, children, people with learning disabilities\(^1\), elderly)
• How will the competence of participants to give informed consent be determined?
• How, where, and by whom will participants be identified, approached, and recruited?
• What potential power imbalances might exist between the researcher and the research participant? (e.g. differences in educational background, protected characteristics)
• What pre-existing relationships exist between the researcher and the research participant? (e.g. Lecturer and student)
• Are there any benefits to participants?
• How, where, and by whom will participants be identified, approached, and recruited?
• What potential power imbalances might exist between the researcher and the research participant? (e.g. differences in educational background, protected characteristics)
• What pre-existing relationships exist between the researcher and the research participant? (e.g. Lecturer and student)
• Are there any benefits to participants?

Consent of research subjects
• If using secondary data, does the consent given with regard to the primary data cover further analysis?
• Can participants opt out?
• Does your information sheet (or equivalent) contain all the information participants need?
• If your research changes, how will consent be renegotiated?

\(^1\) All research which involves participants for whom provision is made under the Mental Capacity Act 2005 must be ethically reviewed by an NHS REC. Advice should be sought from researchgovernance@abdn.ac.uk in the first instance.
Following research

- Have you considered ethics within your plans for dissemination/impact?
- Will your research and its findings be reported accurately, honestly and promptly?
- Will all contributions to the research be acknowledged?
- Are agreements relating to intellectual property, publication and authorship being complied with?
- Will your research comply with all legal, ethical and contractual requirements?

Further considerations

- Are you conducting research outside the UK? Are there any additional issues that need to be considered as a result? (e.g. local customs, local ‘gatekeepers’, political sensitivities)
- Have you considered the time you need to gain ethics approval?
- Have you considered what legislation your project will need to abide by? (e.g. the General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018, Freedom of Information Act, Human Rights Act)
- How will the ethics aspects of the project be monitored throughout its course?
- How will unforeseen or adverse events in the course of research be managed? (e.g. do you have procedures to deal with any disclosures from vulnerable participants?)
Appendix 3 – Additional Resources

Institutional Documents

Research Governance Handbook

Code of Practice on Conflicts of Interest

Code of Practice on Student Discipline (Academic Quality Handbook)

Code of Practice for Postgraduate Taught Students, Programme Co-ordinators, Course Co-ordinators and Heads of School (Academic Quality Handbook)

Code of Practice for Research Students, Supervisors, Heads of School, Graduate School Officers and Dean of Postgraduate Research School (Academic Quality Handbook)

University Data Protection Policy

Disciplinary Procedures (Staff)

Good Research Conduct and Handling of Allegations of Unacceptable Research Conduct (section 4, Research Governance Handbook)

Guidelines on Keeping Research Records

Grievance Procedure

Academic Misconduct (Academic Quality Handbook)

Policy & Procedure on Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblowing)

External Documents

UKRI: Policy and Guidelines on Governance of Good Research Conduct (formerly RCUK)

UKRIO: Code of Practice for Research: Promoting Good Practice and Preventing Misconduct

Respect Code of Practice for Socio-economic Research

ESRC Framework for Research Ethics

MRC Ethics Series - Good research practice: Principles and guidelines

Universal Ethical Code for Scientists

Social Research Association Ethical Guidelines

British Sociological Association Statement of Ethical Practice

Social Anthropologists Ethical Guidelines for Good Research Practice

Socio-Legal Studies Association Statement of Principles of Ethical Research Practice
Appendix 4 – Application Form

Committee for Research Ethics & Governance in
Arts, Social Sciences & Business

Application Form for Ethical Approval of Research for
Undergraduate & Postgraduate Taught Research Projects

This form should be completed and submitted to the appropriate research supervisor.

Important Note: Subject to a few specific exceptions, any research involving NHS staff and patients (including their tissue and data) as well as NHS facilities and premises must be subjected to ethical review by an NHS Research Ethics Committee (NHS REC).

This includes research involving individuals when their status as NHS staff or patients is relevant to the research, even when a medical condition is not the subject of the research. Research involving participants who do not have the capacity to consent is subject to the same NHS ethical review procedures but must be reviewed by an NHS REC which has authority to review this type of study. Further guidance on whether your research will require NHS REC approval is available at http://www.hra-decisiontools.org.uk/ethics/. Further information can be obtained from researchgovernance@abdn.ac.uk.

BEFORE COMPLETING THIS FORM APPLICANTS SHOULD REFER TO:

1. The Checklist of Good Research Practice:
https://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/research/ethical-approval-2780.php#panel6497

2. The Research Ethics web pages:
https://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/research/ethical-approval-2780.php#panel6497

3. Information on data management:

4. Information on the General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018 requirements:
https://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/governance/data-protection-6958.php

5. Information on University Expectations of researchers can be found in the University’s Research Governance Handbook:
https://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/research/research-governance-304.php#panel6326

1 Applications for ethical approval of staff and PGR research projects should be submitted using the online application process https://365abdn.sharepoint.com/sites/staffethics/SitePages/Home.aspx
WHEN COMPLETING THE FORM APPLICANTS ARE REQUIRED TO:

1. Consider each question carefully and provide details of potential ethical issues which might arise, allowing the reviewer to make an informed decision on whether they have been addressed appropriately. Applicants are expected to provide additional information beyond the initial ‘yes’/‘no’ answer to the questions provided.

   Failure to provide enough information to allow the reviewer to provide informed approval of ethical issues within the research might result in the need to restart the review process.

2. For all applications, researchers must provide a brief explanation of the potential ethical issues which might arise when carrying out the research (e.g. justification of the need to use certain research methodologies which might raise potential ethical concerns) and how they are to be addressed. For clearly defined research projects, the project proposal should also be attached. Any other documents relevant to the research (e.g. consent forms) should also be attached to the application.

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<th>Title of Project:</th>
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<th>Name of Principal Investigator:</th>
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<th>Project Start Date:</th>
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<th>Additional Research staff (if applicable):</th>
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Recruitment procedures

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<th>Does your research activity involve persons less than 18 years of age? If yes, please provide further information.</th>
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<th>Does your research activity involve people with learning or communication difficulties? (Note: all research involving participants for whom provision is made under the Mental Capacity Act 2005 must be ethically reviewed by NHS NRES). If yes, please provide further information.</th>
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**Consent Procedures**

| 9 | Please provide details of the consent procedures that you intend to use for obtaining informed consent from all subjects (including parental consent for children). You should provide details of how you will let subjects know that participation is voluntary and that they can withdraw at any time. You should also provide details of the processes for giving potential subjects adequate time for considering participation and for obtaining written consent. If research is observational, please advise how subjects will provide consent for being observed. If any of these issues are not applicable to your research or if you do not intend to address them for reasons of research methodology, please provide further information. | Yes | No | N/A |

**Possible Harm to Researchers/Participants**

<p>| 10 | Are there any safety issues for you in conducting this research? If so, please provide details of what these might be and how you intend to address such issues. | Yes | No | N/A |</p>
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<th>Yes</th>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Is there any realistic risk of any subjects experiencing either physical or psychological discomfort or distress? Or any realistic risk of them experiencing a detriment to their interests as a result of participation? If so, please provide details of what this might be and how you intend to address such issues.</td>
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**Data Protection**

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<td>Please provide details of how you intend to ensure that data is stored securely and in line with the requirements of the Data Protection Act and the General Data Protection Regulations. Please refer to the University's Data Protection guidance (<a href="https://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/governance/data-protection-6958.php">https://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/governance/data-protection-6958.php</a>). Please give specific consideration to whether any non-anonymised and/or personalised data will be generated and/or stored and what precautions you will put in place regarding access you might have to documents containing sensitive data about living individuals that is not publicly available elsewhere? If your research relates to the latter, please consider the consent of the subjects including instances where consent is not sought.</td>
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**It is the responsibility of all researchers to ensure that they follow the University's various policies designed to ensure good research practice.** This includes providing appropriate participant information sheets and consent forms, and ensuring confidentiality in the storage and use of data. Any significant change in the question, design or conduct over the course of the research activity should be notified to your School Research Ethics Officer and will require a new application for ethics approval.
Please attach the following to this form:

- **Full proposal of relevant research project.** In order to speed up the process of review, applicants are advised to pay particular attention to those areas for which a ‘Yes’ has been ticked in the following form, either by providing an account of the procedures or training to be employed to ensure ethical practice, or an academic justification for the research strategy employed (or both).

- **Participant information sheet and consent form (where appropriate).**

**IMPORTANT NOTE:**
Please confirm if your research requires you to **travel outwith the UK?** YES/NO

If YES, please provide the following confirmation:

* I will comply with the requirements of the [University’s Overseas Travel Policy](https://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/working-here/travel-overseas-2130.php), including obtaining permission to travel (where required by the policy), completion of a [risk assessment](https://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/working-here/insurance-367.php#field-trip-and-travel-risk-assessment) and will obtain University travel insurance cover. [https://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/working-here/insurance-367.php#panel6305](https://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/working-here/insurance-367.php#panel6305)

Please tick the box to confirm □

---

**Applicant:**

Signature__________________________

Date______________________________

**Supervisor:** Approved/Not approved

Notes:

Signature__________________________

Date______________________________