

POLICY FOR ETHICAL REVIEW AND APPROVAL

Ethical review may be necessary for a variety of forms of research. It is a requirement of the University and of the majority of funding bodies that approval is sought and obtained for any research with certain defined characteristics (see [University of Aberdeen Research Governance Handbook](#)); this includes any research that involves human participants. The Physical Sciences & Engineering Board has developed a Policy for Ethical Review and Approval. This policy applies to research conducted as part of:

- Academic-led research projects.
- Postgraduate and undergraduate research projects, including dissertation and thesis projects.

It covers research in all areas of the physical sciences and engineering, and applies to staff and students from the Schools of Engineering, Geosciences and Natural and Computing Sciences. The Board also reviews and approves research projects from other areas of the University when appropriate, by arrangement with other University ethics committees.

It is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator or the Programme Co-ordinator to ensure this policy is adhered to. Further information about the Board's ethics process can be found [here](#).

Ethical approval should be sought as early in the research proposal process as possible, and **must** be in place **before the research activity commences**. For all research projects, the applicant should complete the self-assessment Ethical Review Checklist (Annex A) as described below to determine whether further ethical review will be required. All applicants must adhere to the University's Research Ethics requirements, and for **funded research projects** this includes abiding by any further ethics principles specified by the funding body.

1. Separate review processes

The Physical Sciences & Engineering Ethics Board is mainly concerned with research that involves human participants. The following types of research are handled using different processes.

(i) Any research involving NHS staff and patients (including their tissue and data) as well as NHS facilities and premises must be subjected to review by Research Governance (researchgovernance@abdn.ac.uk) who will confirm the appropriate Research Ethics Committee (REC) to submit the research to and any R&D requirements. 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 [here](#).

(ii) Research involving animal and biological materials regulated under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 will be referred to the University's Ethical Review Committee (ERC). Detailed information on the ERC and the applicable ethical review process is included in the [University's Code of Practice for Research Involving the Use of Animals](#).

(iii) If planned research involves the collection and utilisation of genetic resources (organisms, microorganisms, DNA, RNA, proteins, small molecules) that originate from signatories to the Convention on Biodiversity/Nagoya Protocol who exercise their sovereign rights over these resources, then a relevant agreement must be in place before this can begin. This agreement must provide prior informed consent with mutually agreed terms and it must be in keeping with the Convention on

Biodiversity/Nagoya Protocol and be obtained via the national focal point of the provider country. A statement to this effect must be included in grant applications that intend to make such collection. **Any research involving the collection of genetic resources must also undergo full ethical review as described below.**

2. Academic-led research projects

The ethical review process has two stages. All academic research projects must be ethically assessed by the researcher to determine whether there is a need for formal ethical approval, using the self-assessment process detailed below (Stage i). If formal ethical approval is required, the researcher must submit an application to the Physical Sciences & Engineering Ethics Board (Stage ii).

i. **Self-Assessment**

The researcher must determine by self-assessment whether the research requires formal ethical approval, using the Ethical Review Checklist (Annex A). If the answer to all of the questions is **NO**, the project needs no further ethical review.

ii. **Full Ethical Review and Approval**

If the answer to any of the questions in the Ethical Review Checklist is **YES**, the project must undergo a full ethical review. **The project cannot begin until approval has been granted.** If the project *is not* subject to review by an NHS REC or under Home Office regulations (see above), the researcher must prepare an application via the Worktribe Ethics process and submit it (plus any accompanying paperwork e.g. Annex A checklist, consent form, participant information sheet) to the Ethics Board for review. Applications will not be accepted by the Ethics Board from applicants who have not completed the [Research Ethics & Governance training](#).

The application will be checked for completeness (triage stage) before being forwarded for review to members of the Ethics Board (this will normally include a School representative). Applications demonstrating potentially complex ethical issues may also be reviewed by other members of the Board and/or the Board as a whole. Some applications may require additional advice from other University ethics committees, from the University Data Protection Officer, or on intellectual property issues from colleagues in Research & Innovation.

For applications that meet the submission standard (i.e. where all questions have been answered appropriately and additional documentation has been submitted, as required) a response will normally be provided to the applicant within 14-21 days, although very complex proposals may take longer. The outcome of the review will be communicated to the applicant via the Worktribe Ethics process as soon as practicable. Often the applicant will be asked to submit a revised application to resolve issues identified by the reviewer.

3. Postgraduate and undergraduate research projects

The University is responsible for all research activities undertaken at the University. The University must therefore be satisfied that research undertaken by students is in compliance with this procedure.

The checklist (Annex A) must be completed by all PGR, PGT students and undergraduate students before beginning a research project or preparing dissertation or thesis proposals. Students should discuss the checklist with their supervisor. If the answer to all of the questions is **NO**, the project needs no further ethical review.

If the answer to any of the questions on the checklist is **YES**, the research proposal needs further ethical review. **The project cannot begin until approval has been granted.**

- Applications for ethical review of research from **PGR students** should be submitted to the formal PSEEB review process (as per section 2ii above).
- **UG and PGT applications** are managed within the Schools, and UG and PGT students should consult their supervisor and/or Programme/Project Coordinator for further details.

For further information please contact the Clerk of the Ethics Board in the first instance, copsethics@abdn.ac.uk.

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