UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

**COMMITTEE FOR RESEARCH ETHICS & GOVERNANCE IN
ARTS, SOCIAL SCIENCES AND BUSINESS:**

**Good research practice: Points to consider when planning research and making an
application for ethical approval**

Reminder: You have a responsibility to apply for ethical approval if your research project or
research-related activity involves any of the following:
- Your research involves human participants (or their remains), or where the
  research involves personal data;
- There are any issues which might raise ethical concerns during proposed
  research activity (for example, potential conflicts of interest; the use of artefacts;
  environmental impact; financial inducements for participants; potential to cause
  reputational damage);
- 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);
- It is a requirement of external funding for your research;
- Your research methodologies have changed since a previous award of ethical
  approval.

Ethical approval must be obtained **before** the research activity can commence.

The following list of questions have 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 Science. 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 to 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?

- Any considerations or determinations concerning human participants in research are inherently value-laden. Have you considered your research from the standpoint of the research participants, and any other persons, groups or communities who may be potentially affected by the research, with the aim of avoiding potential risks to their psychological well-being, mental health, personal values, invasion of their privacy or their dignity?

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?

- Do chosen software, online platforms or third-party services fulfil data protection obligations (such as online surveys, video calling platforms, transcription services etc)? Please consult https://www.abdn.ac.uk/research/digital-research/data-collection-1095.php

Details and recruitment of research subjects:

- What types of people will be recruited? (e.g. students, children, people who are covered by the Mental Capacity Act (2005), the 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). Protected characteristics (under the Equality Act 2010) are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. It is against the law to discriminate against someone because of these characteristics.

- What pre-existing relationships exist between the researcher and the research participant? (e.g. Lecturer and student)

- Are there any benefits to participants?

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- Is there a need for participants to be de-briefed? By whom?

- What information will participants be given about the research?

- Who will benefit from this research?

- Have you considered anonymity and confidentiality?

- How will you store your collected data? (e.g. Please refer to guidance at https://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/working-here/it-services/datastorage.php#panel2066)

- How will data be disposed of and after how long?

- Are there any conflicts of interest in undertaking this research? (e.g. financial reward for outcomes etc.)

- Will you be collecting information through a third party?

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? How will participants be able to withdraw their active participation? Will you want to keep the data that has been collected until that point?

- Can participants withdraw their data after collection is completed? Until when will this be possible (please consider a specific time frame/date)?

- Does your information sheet (or equivalent) contain all the information participants need to make an informed decision?

- If your research changes, how will consent be renegotiated?

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?)