

GUIDELINES

Common questions on research ethics submissions

Q.1. What kinds of research proposal require ethical approval?

A. Any research proposal in the College which:

- involves experimentation on or contact with humans
- affects individuals' personal information, rights and freedoms

requires ethical approval if such interaction presents possible risks beyond those of everyday life.

Q.2. What research procedures or circumstances might make ethical approval necessary?

A. If your research involves any of the following, you probably will have to submit an application for ethics review:

- A vulnerable or dependent population (e.g. children, mentally disabled, ethnic groups)
- A situation where participants¹ may feel obligated to take part, or where participation may not be voluntary (e.g. students in a class, employees in their workplace, prisoners, patients in a hospital)
- Access to records that include personal information
- Observing people
- Risk of creating psychological stress
- Risk of identifying distressed or disturbed individuals
- Risk to a participant's reputation
- Risk that participants might suffer any economic loss by participating in the study.
- Risk that participants might be stigmatized by participating in the study
- Political or physical risk to a participant/researcher in an international setting (e.g. unauthorized contact with a foreigner)
- Risk that participants' personal information may not be kept confidential
- Risk that participants may suffer through loss of anonymity

For further advice, please consult the research coordinator about the specifics of your research.

Q.3. Whose research requires ethical approval?

A. Research involving human participants conducted by any student or employee of the College as part of his/her study or employment with the College, including projects carried out by research students and surveys or questionnaires undertaken by the College administration or student services concerning organisational practices, requires ethical approval. If you are an undergraduate or postgraduate student, contact your supervisor in the first instance. Members of staff should contact the Office of the Research Coordinator.

¹ In all SPCD REC documentation, the term 'human participant' means a living individual about whom an investigator (whether professional or student) conducting research obtains (1) data through intervention or interaction with the individual, or (2) identifiable private information. (US Code of Federal Regulation 45 CFR 46.102)

Q.4. What issues need to be considered in relation to human participants?

A. Researchers should adopt the following guidelines

- Research should aim to benefit society and/or increase knowledge
- Research should preferably benefit the direct participants
- Research should not cause harm to participants
- Research should be carried out to the highest possible standards, giving due respect to participants' commitment of time, and to the commitment of resources, in projects
- Potential participants should be free from coercion of any kind and should not be pressured to participate in a study
- Potential participants have the right to receive clear information about the research in advance from the researcher
- Participants in a research study have the right to give their informed consent before participating, and to withdraw that consent at any time
- Researchers should actively seek the consent and/or assent of vulnerable participants
- Honesty should be central to the relationship between researcher, participant and institutional representatives
- Participants' confidentiality and anonymity should be respected

The collection and storage of research data by researchers must comply with the Data Protection Act

Researchers have a duty to disseminate their research findings to all appropriate parties

Q.5. Is the remuneration of participants permitted?

A. Reimbursement for participants' out-of pocket expenses, time, and any discomfort or inconvenience is permissible, only to the extent that this constitutes recompense. Remuneration is not permitted that might operate to induce people to participate who might otherwise not do so, or that might discriminate improperly between different types of participants, or between participants and non-participants.

PROCEDURAL ISSUES

Q.6. Whose responsibility is ethical approval of a research project?

A. It is the researcher's responsibility to seek and to ensure that the College gives approval to relevant research projects before contact is made with human participants.

Q.7. How do I seek ethical review of my project?

A. Students should fill in the form entitled **APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL OF A PROJECT INVOLVING HUMAN PARTICIPANTS**, and submit it to their supervisors. A member of staff should submit it to the Office of the Research Coordinator. In the case of student research, the supervisor may sign his/her approval, **or** may refer the application to the HOD/Programme Board Director, **or** to the Office of the Research Coordinator. Contact should not be made with the human participants in the research project until approval is received. In many cases this will be indicated by the supervisor's signature on the ethics approval form. Otherwise, the HOD or the Office of the Research Coordinator will indicate its approval.

Q.8. When should I seek ethical review?

A. You should seek an ethical review before you make contact with human participants as part of your research.

Q.9. How long will this take?

A. Your application may be given an expedited review by your supervisor, which can be done relatively quickly. But it is imperative that you allow adequate time within your research schedule, in case a full review is required.

Q.10. How can I ensure that I won't have problems with my research ethics review?

Talk to the chair informally about any problems you may have with the form before you officially submit the application. Read and follow the instructions at the end of the form. Often the pro-forma responses to be found [here](#) will guide you.

Ensure that you answer all the questions.

Q.11. Why am I asked to allow up to three months for the review of my research ethics application?

All applications submitted by members of academic staff and PhD students must be assessed by members of the ethics committee, who will then report to the chair who collates the responses and the administrator then writes to the applicant indicating the outcome of the review, listing alterations requested and indicating a final date for resubmission of the revised application. Committee members need time to review each application and to prepare a considered response. Furthermore, the volume of applications can be considerable. A member may review more than one application in any given period.

Applicants should allow time to revise their applications and resubmit them.

Contact with research participants should not begin until a final letter of clearance has been received.

Q. 12. What kind of alterations is the REC likely to request?

The most likely reason for returning an application is that not all the questions have been answered.

What other reasons?

Care needs to be taken with Plain Language Statements (PLSs) and Informed Consent Forms (ICFs). They should be formulated in language appropriate to the cohort they are intended for. Jargon should be avoided and technical terms explained. A high level of literacy should not be assumed. This means that several different PLSs/ICFs may be necessary, depending on whether they address, e.g., teachers, parents, or children. PLSs and ICFs should contain ALL relevant information, including the title of the project. The signed ICF should be retained by the researcher, while the PLS should be retained by the participant.

Q.13. Will every adaptation of my instruments etc require a further review process?

A. All relevant instruments and elements of the research which differ from those outlined at the stage at which clearance has been given in a way that relates to ethical issues, should be ethically reviewed by your supervisor at every stage in their evolution and before any contact is made with human participants. If s/he deems necessary, they may be referred to the HOD/Programme Board Director, **or** to the Office of the Research Coordinator.

Q.14. I am a member of academic staff. Does my project need ethical review?

A. All members of academic staff should submit their relevant research projects to the Office of the Research Coordinator for review, unless the projects have already been reviewed by another *bona fide* Higher Education Institution (or equivalent) REC. In this case evidence of approval should be lodged with the Office of the Research Coordinator.