

## A Brief Student Guide to Research Ethics

**Why is ethical review needed?** Ethical review aims to protect welfare, dignity and rights of participants in research – including those of the researcher. Researchers should reflect on the ethical issues that are raised by their research and be able to justify, in ethical terms, the practices and procedures that they intend to adopt during their research. See: <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/rs/ethicsandintegrity/ethicspolicy/general-principles/homepage>

**Does my project need to be ethically reviewed?** If your research project involves human participants, personal data or human tissue then it needs to be ethically reviewed – the involvement of human participants could include any activities from an anonymous online questionnaire, to face-to-face interviews to a clinical trial. Your supervisor will be able to advise if ethical review is required.

**When should I submit my project for ethical review?** Your project must have ethical approval before you commence any research activities which involve human participants, personal data or human tissue.

**How should I submit my project for review?** You need to complete an online ethics application form and submit it with any supporting documentation – such as information sheets and consent forms. You should discuss your ethics application with your supervisor who will decide if it is low risk or potentially high risk, and advise you how to submit for review accordingly. The link to the online ethics system and a list of Ethics Administrators can be found here: <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/rs/ethicsandintegrity/ethicspolicy/educationresources/onlinesystem>

**What ethical issues do I need to consider?** Every project will present different ethical issues which need to be considered – it is impossible to provide a generic list of ethical issues. Thinking about these issues will actually help to improve the research itself, so ethical review should not be thought of as a 'box-ticking' exercise. Central to the Ethics Policy is the premise that participants have a right to:

- consent to participate, withdraw from, or refuse to take part in research projects;
- confidentiality: personal information or identifiable data should not be disclosed without participants' consent;
- security: data and samples collected should be kept secure and anonymised where appropriate; and
- safety: participants should not be exposed to unnecessary or disproportionate levels of risk.

Further information can be found at

<https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/rs/ethicsandintegrity/ethicspolicy/general-principles/homepage>

**What level of detail do I need to include in my ethics application, information sheet and consent form?**

The ethics application form should contain sufficient detail for someone who is not familiar with the research to be able to fully understand the proposed project. Help with completing the application form, and a sample information sheet and consent form, can be found at:

<https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/rs/ethicsandintegrity/ethicspolicy/further-guidance/homepage>

**What are the outcomes of ethical review?** A project can either be: approved, approved with suggested amendments which you can choose to take on board or ignore, approved with compulsory amendments which you must make before resubmitting for ethics approval, approved with suggested and compulsory amendments or not approved.

**Where I can I get more help with my ethics application?** You can find further supporting guidance in the University's Research Ethics Policy, including a series of detailed Policy Notes and a number of Specialist Research Ethics Guidance Papers see: <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/rs/ethicsandintegrity/ethicspolicy/further-guidance/homepage>