



Research Ethics Policy and Procedures

1. Which proposals need to be reviewed?

1.1 General guidance

The University's ethics policy for research projects means that all relevant proposals for research projects (**by members of staff or their students**) must be reviewed to check their ethical content. It is the responsibility of individual researchers to consider any possible ethical or legal implications of research that they are undertaking; and the joint responsibility of supervisors and students to consider these together.

'Relevant' in the previous paragraph means an ethics review is required for any research project that:

- (i) Directly involves people in the research
- (ii) Indirectly involves people in the research through access to personal data and/or tissue
- (iii) Involves people on behalf of others (e.g., parents, guardians etc)

Personal data in item (ii) above means any data, including archival data, from which living individuals can be identified. Any research project involving the analysis of an anonymous dataset that has been provided to you (for example the British Household Panel Survey, many of those supplied by the ESRC Data Archive, and most other nationally and internationally provided data sets) does **not** have to be ethically reviewed.

However, if any new research project you are formulating involves the direct participation of individuals (most likely through interviews or questionnaires – i.e. you are devising the sample and doing the interviews or distributing the questionnaires yourself or via a team working for you) then you **must** first get the proposal ethically reviewed. Note that this is the case even if the questionnaires are returned to you anonymously, since people have been directly involved in your research project (item (i) above).

Similarly, if a dataset has been provided to you in which individuals can be identified (either directly or indirectly, e.g. through their names or if they could in principle be identified from the responses they give), then again you **must** first get the proposal ethically reviewed. Examples of the latter could be datasets that include detailed postcodes alongside background characteristics.

1.2 Research conducted overseas or in collaboration with another UK university

If research with the characteristics described in item 1.1 will take place in another country, or if the University is collaborating with another United Kingdom university and the latter is the lead partner, alternative ethics review procedures apply. Please refer to the University's [Alternative Ethics Review Procedures](#) webpage for detailed information.

1.3 What if I am still in doubt about whether my proposal needs ethical approval?

If after reading all the information above you are still in any doubt about whether your proposal should be ethically reviewed, you should read the more detailed information available from the University's [Research Ethics and Integrity](#) website, particularly the section 'Policies and Guidance'. You can also complete this [Ethics Checklist](#).

This should enable you to decide, but please contact the Departmental Ethics Administrator, Rodrigo Moreno-Serra (r.a.morenoserra@sheffield.ac.uk), if you are still unsure.

2. The ethics review process for research proposals

2.1 General principles for new applications by staff

On the University's [Research Ethics and Integrity](#) website you will find all the information you need to make an ethics application. Most of this can be found by clicking on the links under 'Applying for ethics approval', 'Advice on the ethics process' and 'Policies and Guidance'. These links describe the principles you should build into your research proposal to ensure it passes the ethics review.

If you have decided that your research proposal requires reviewing, you need then to decide on the route for obtaining approval. Please refer to the [Routes for obtaining Ethics Approval](#) webpage for further information.

If your proposal requires approval by the University, you must complete a University's ethics application via the following link:

[Online Ethics Application System](#)

Once your online application has been submitted, a panel of three independent reviewers will be selected and will aim to complete an initial review within 10 working days of receipt of the application. These three reviewers will decide whether the proposal is ethically acceptable and the lead reviewer will give their opinion to the Ethics Administrator, who will then inform the applicant of the result. This will either be an acceptance, an acceptance subject to some amendments or a rejection. The timescale of subsequent reviews will depend on the complexity of any amendments required. Applicants may appeal decisions to the Department's Ethics Review panel by contacting the Ethics Administrator and, if necessary, they can appeal to the University's Research Ethics Committee (UREC) in line with the University procedures.

You must **not** begin any research until you have written confirmation from the Department that your application has been approved. Retrospective ethics review is not permissible.

Amendments to the original research design are common in any research project. You are only required to submit a new ethics application if the proposed amendments raise new ethical issues. Please check the University's guidance on [changes made after approval](#) for further information and advice on required courses of action.

2.2 Research proposals to the ESRC

Special arrangements apply for ethically reviewing proposals being submitted to the ESRC for funding. In your grant application to the ESRC you should explain the main ethical issues that may arise in your research, say whether your project provides a high risk or a low risk ethically, and explain how the project will be ethically reviewed by the university (as described below).

The actual ethics review takes place **after** the ESRC grant is awarded (if successful of course). You should submit your online ethics application to the University as per the standard process described above, but you must inform the Departmental Ethics Administrator that ESRC has agreed to fund the research. In this case, it is the [University Research Ethics Committee](#) (UREC) who will ethically review the project. The review will be undertaken by an ad-hoc sub-committee of the UREC, including two ethics reviewers from the Department of Economics, one lay member from the UREC, and additional members of the UREC as required on a case-by-case basis. You will be informed of the sub-committee's decision by the Ethics Administrator once it has been confirmed by the lead reviewer, as per the standard departmental process.

The ESRC are willing to meet the cost of universities ethically reviewing projects that are awarded grants. The University has calculated that the additional cost incurred with respect to ethically reviewing a single successful ESRC application is £640 (as of June 2010). Therefore, you should include this cost in your URMS record (and subsequently in your ESRC application) when first applying for the grant. In the URMS record you should state, as a note, that this is a 'directly allocated cost'.

2.3 Research proposals involving the NHS and social care

In addition to the standard University's procedures, note that special procedures apply to certain NHS-related and social care research proposals. Please refer to sections 2.2 and 2.3 on the [Routes for obtaining Ethics Approval](#) webpage for further information.

2.4 Ethics review process of student research

Students on the postgraduate and undergraduate programmes in the Department of Economics must also have their research proposals ethically reviewed if they directly involve individuals or indirectly via the use of personal data.

There are further issues pertaining to the ethics of research by students and what members of staff need to do. Please see below and check the University's research ethics guidelines for [UG and PGT student research](#) for details.

(a) Postgraduate Research Students

If you supervise PGRs, you are to make your research student aware of ethical responsibilities in their research, as described with respect to your own research above.

You should help them decide whether their research proposals require ethical reviewing, according to the criteria described above for staff member's own research. If reviewing is required, the student must complete and submit an online application form for ethical reviewing as above, but the supervisor should check the application before submission.

(b) Postgraduate Taught Students

Where a PGT student requires ethics approval for an individual research project that is distinct from any other student research, the supervisor is responsible for classifying the research as either 'low risk' or 'potentially high risk'. Relevant [guidelines on risk assessment](#) have been developed by the University. An online ethics application **must** be submitted in either case. Only one ethics reviewer (who may be the student's supervisor) is required to review 'low risk' research applications from supervised PGT students. A minimum of two reviewers (one of whom must not have any conflict of interest with the application) is required to undertake an ethics review of a 'potentially high risk' research application from supervised PGT students.

Where a number of PGT students will be conducting research that is of a sufficiently similar nature to be reviewed together, a single generic ethics application can be submitted for review, using one online application form. See the University's ethics guidelines for [UG and PGT student research](#) for details.

Students on the taught postgraduate programmes in the Department of Economics (excluding those on the MSc Economics and Health Economics, see below) are required to complete a Dissertation Proposal form which includes a description of the data being used and the question: "Referring to the Ethics Checklist document (on MOLE) consider whether ethics approval is, or is not, required for your research. If ethics approval is not required please explain why. If ethics approval is required please complete the Ethics Approval form on MOLE and submit alongside this proposal." Part of the process of approving the Dissertation Proposal involves the Director of PGT assessing the claim of the student regarding the need for ethics approval against the data and other details about the research provided in the Dissertation Proposal. No Dissertation Proposal will be approved unless the form is complete and ethics-compliant. No dissertation will be accepted for marking unless it has an approved Dissertation Proposal.

Students on the MSc Economics and Health Economics programme, which is shared with SchARR, are required to ensure that they follow the research ethics procedures for SchARR.

(c) Undergraduate Students

Undergraduate students who are undertaking a piece of research as part of their course must also have their proposals ethically reviewed if they directly involve individuals or indirectly via the use of personal data.

If students are undertaking individual projects, they must discuss their research plans with their module leader (coursework) or supervisor (dissertation). If this is an individual research project that is distinct from any other student research, and the ML/supervisor considers that the research requires ethics approval, the ML/supervisor is responsible for classifying the research as either 'low risk' or 'potentially high risk'. Relevant [guidelines on risk assessment](#) have been developed by the University. An online ethics application **must** be submitted in either case. Only one ethics reviewer (who may be the student's ML/supervisor) is required to review 'low risk' research applications from undergraduate students. A minimum of two reviewers (one of whom must not have any conflict of interest with the application) is required to undertake an ethics review of a 'potentially high risk' research application from undergraduate students.

Where a number of undergraduate students will be conducting research that is of a sufficiently similar nature to be reviewed together, a single generic ethics application can be submitted for review (usually by the module leader), using one online application form. See the University's ethics guidelines for [UG and PGT student research](#) for details.

3. Further guidance on the Online Ethics Review System and general procedures

Useful helpsheets for applicants, reviewers and supervisors are available from the [University's Online Ethics Review System - Supporting Information](#) website.

Should you still have any queries after reading all the information provided above, please do not hesitate to contact the Departmental Ethics Administrator, Rodrigo Moreno-Serra (r.a.morenoserra@sheffield.ac.uk).