

## **DEMONSTRATING THE IMPACT OF RESEARCH**

The impact of research refers to an 'effect on, change to or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment, or quality of life, beyond academia' (definition taken from the UK Research Excellence Framework 2014). Researchers are increasingly required to demonstrate the impact of their research to funders, and as part of the UK Research Excellence Framework or similar research evaluation exercises. In collecting the evidence required to demonstrate impact, researchers need to consider whether this data collection in itself constitutes a form of research which requires ethics approval according to the University's Ethics Policy Governing Research Involving Human Participants, Personal Data and Human Tissue.

The definition of research set out in the General Principles and Statements section of the Ethics Policy is 'a process of investigation leading to new insights, effectively shared'. Impact can be demonstrated in a variety of ways, and may involve seeking the opinion or recommendation of relevant individuals (e.g. those who have attended public engagement events; employees of organisations who have drawn on the outputs of a research project to enact a change in their organisation).

Where data is collected from human participants specifically and solely for the purposes of evaluating the impact of a research project, and personal data\* will only be used by members of the research team and, if required, a formal evaluation panel for assessment and reporting as part of a research evaluation process (e.g. as part of the UK Research Excellence Framework or similar), ethics approval will NOT be required.

However, in the following cases, ethics approval should be obtained BEFORE the collection of 'demonstration of impact' data commences:

(1) Where 'demonstration of impact' data collected from human participants will also be used for further analysis for the purposes of generating new knowledge and understanding as part of a research project;

AND/OR

(2) Where data from 'demonstration of impact' activities will be made accessible to an audience beyond the research team (other than as part of a formal research evaluation process). This includes publication through informal channels such as blog posts, as well as more formal research outputs such as academic papers and conference presentations.

Even if ethics approval is not required according to the above, care needs to be taken to ensure that people involved in evaluating the impact of a research project are treated ethically, i.e., that potential risks to their dignity, rights, safety and well-being are managed and mitigated. Similar consideration should be given to managing and mitigating any risks to organisations through their involvement in evaluating the impact of a research project.

\*It should be noted that the UK Data Protection Act 1998 (or from 25 May 2018, the General Data Protection Regulation) must be complied with in handling personal data from a living individual. For example, where identifiable quotes or other personal data from named individual(s) is to be included in information that is to be provided to an external party such as a formal evaluation panel (e.g. as part of a REF Impact Case Study, which may also be made publicly available), then explicit informed consent for this must be obtained for the relevant individual beforehand, unless the data is already in the public domain.

