

S2 ETHICAL APPROVAL FOR RESEARCH AND SCHOLARSHIP

Purpose and scope

- 2.1 This section of the Consolidated Academic Policies and Regulations (CAPR) explains what ethical judgements are; when they arise; how the College and researchers should assess these considerations; and how they should be monitored.
- 2.2 The policy applies to all funded or unfunded research or scholarship by staff or students involving human participants or data about directly identifiable people (whether living or recently dead).

NOTE: This policy applies to ethical guidelines relevant to research and scholarship in the College. The ethics of research, scholarship, learning and teaching in a broader context should be considered alongside the resources and policies listed below but do not need to follow the processes outlined.

Definitions

- 2.3 'Research' means activity that is encompassed by the Frascati definition, Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) definition used for the Research Excellence Framework, or the HMRC's definition used for VAT purposes. (These are explained in more depth earlier in this part of the CAPR).
- 2.4 For the purposes of this policy, 'researcher' includes members of the College's academic, contract staff; the College's postgraduate research and Master's students; and the College's undergraduate students.
- 2.5 'Principal investigator' means the individual who is responsible and accountable for conducting the research project including access to and control over the data; the right to publish the results of the trial; the responsibility for the treatment and evaluation of human subjects; and the integrity of the research data and results.

Introduction

Overview

- 2.6 The policy has been adopted to support the College's commitments to academic freedom, and research and scholarship excellence. Sound ethical standards are essential to these commitments. Equally, disproportionate, over-burdensome and narrowly framed research ethics procedures can impede and create ethical difficulties.
- 2.7 Therefore, the College believes that each member of its community of social science researchers has an individual responsibility:
- (a) to society at large;
 - (b) to those who fund their research;
 - (c) to the institutions that employ them or at which they study;
 - (d) to their colleagues and the wider academic and research community;
 - (e) to the people who take part in their research; and
 - (f) for their own safety and wellbeing.

- 2.8 Reconciling those responsibilities can be difficult and may entail ethical judgment. This policy gives the College a procedural framework that helps staff and students use such judgment.

Principles

- 2.9 The College's procedural framework for ethics in research and scholarship aims to:
- (a) facilitate, not inhibit, research and scholarship;
 - (b) promote a culture in the College whereby researchers conscientiously reflect on the ethical implications of their research; and
 - (c) apply a principle of subsidiarity, meaning that researchers, supervisors, Departments and institutes accept responsibility for research ethics at a level as close as possible to the conduct of the research or scholarship project or programme.

Informed consent

- 2.10 If researchers collect information from or about people, they must first get their informed oral or written consent (except in very particular circumstances) for any use of the information.
- 2.11 If researchers expose people to a risk of harm, they have an ethical duty to consider these risks, even if the people have agreed to participate in the study. It is particularly important to think specifically about the likely impact on vulnerable people; for example, children or people with learning disabilities, or students when participating as subjects in research projects for College staff. Some participants will have diminished capacity to give consent and therefore may be less able to protect themselves.
- 2.12 Research that does not entail the direct participation of living people may nonetheless indirectly but significantly affect living people. Researchers may be assessing information about identifiable individuals, so its publication or analysis may have ethical and legal implications. For example, collecting and using archive, historical, legal, online or visual materials may raise ethical issues (e.g., for families and friends of dead people); and research about social services may affect provision for individuals and groups of service users who did not contribute or consent to – or were not consulted about – the research. Researchers should as far as possible consider these implications.

Multi-funder and multi-performer projects

- 2.13 If there are several project funders, researchers must inform all proposed funders about this policy and any relevant ethics policies of other funders before submitting a funding proposal to them. The College will need agreement from all the funders that the proposed study will comply with the relevant research ethics policies.
- 2.14 If research involves more than one (1) institution, each retains formal responsibility for overseeing the ethical review of research it supports. Wherever possible the College should accept decisions of an ethics committee of the institution where the principal investigator is based, if this is based in the UK.

Research conducted outside the UK

- 2.15 If research is to be done outside the UK, researchers must establish whether the host country requires local ethical review. This review must at least include specific ethical judgement on any cultural and religious consideration, and must be conducted by an individual appropriately informed on these considerations.

- 2.16 A review of research conducted outside the UK must also include how any collaborating institution or academic outside the UK can follow the principles of this policy in developing and doing the research. For College staff, the ethical standards the College expect for UK research apply equally to work outside the UK.

Health and social care research

- 2.17 The Department of Health's Research Governance Framework for Health and Social Care (RGF)¹ applies to funded or unfunded research that relates to the Secretary of State for Health's responsibilities.
- 2.18 Under the RGF, researchers carry defined responsibilities as does the College in its capacity as the principal investigator's employer. The College must keep documents on record demonstrating compliance with the RGF and this policy.
- 2.19 The Director of Research will confirm compliance in writing on the College's behalf, as required by the RGF, seeking advice from the Chair of the Ethics Committee where necessary.

Training

- 2.20 During their studies or career, all students and staff must have taken appropriate training or had significant relevant experience before considering the ethical implications of their research or other aspects under this policy.
- 2.21 They must responsibly consider whether their training or experience properly qualifies them to evaluate the ethical implications of their research. If not, they should first seek advice from within their Department or centre or from colleagues in their discipline with specific expertise on research ethics. Thereafter, if they remain unsure about whether their research complies with this policy, they must submit their research plans to the Ethics Committee.
- 2.22 This policy should be formally included in undergraduate or postgraduate training offered by departments or programmes on research and scholarship.
- 2.23 All degree programmes (undergraduate, Master's and research degrees) must include at least one (1) lecture, seminar or support session that covers research ethics.
- 2.24 All students doing research for a dissertation or thesis should have access through their supervisor to suitable advice and support on research ethics.

Procedures

Outline

- 2.25 In summary, the ethics approval procedure comprises three (3) stages:
- (a) Stage 1: Preliminary review.
 - (b) Stage 2: Considering the application by the Ethics Committee
 - (c) Stage 3: Monitoring.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/research-governance-framework-for-health-and-social-care-second-edition>

Avoiding duplication

- 2.26 Duplication of ethics reviews should be avoided where possible, especially if research falls within the scope of other competent ethics review bodies (e.g. NHS ethics committees).
- 2.27 In these cases, researchers should send the completed first part of the ethics review to the Director of Research for reference and submit their research for ethics approval to the appropriate body. After ethics approval has been granted by the Director of Research, a copy of the approval letter and relevant documents should be sent to the Ethics Committee.
- 2.28 Despite external approval, if appropriate the College will itself request consideration of the ethical implications of the project – if it considers that separate or additional ethical consideration is required for the College to approve the project (for example, because of possible harm to the reputation of College members).

Stage 1: Preliminary review

- 2.29 If the research or scholarship study involves human participants or data about directly identifiable people, principal investigator (or delegate) must complete an ethics review.
- 2.30 This must be conducted prior to the start of the study or project, and must be detailed on the prescribed form at least twenty (20) working days prior to the commencement of the project or submission of the funding application.
- 2.31 The first section of the prescribed form enables investigators to reflect on the potential ethical implications of their research or scholarship project and the risk of harm to participants. Having completed this part, if the researchers (or, for student researchers, their supervisors) judge that:
- (a) no significant ethical issues are raised by their research; or
 - (b) adequate safeguards can and will be put in place,
 - (c) they may self-certify the project by signing the declaration in the second section of the review document and submitting it to the relevant Head of Department or Director of Research Centre.
- 2.32 If self-certification is appropriate, departments, centres and institutes may – in consultation with a member(s) Ethics Committee – devise guidance for researchers in writing the necessary ethical safeguards.
- 2.33 If the researchers cannot self-certify, they should complete the remaining sections of the review document and submit the full document to the Ethics Committee.
- 2.34 They may be unable to self-certify because any of the following people judge it would be unsuitable to do so:
- (a) the principal investigator, or the supervisor in the case of students;
 - (b) the relevant Head of Department or research centre;
 - (c) any departmental lead having responsibility for research ethics; or
 - (d) the Chair of the Ethics Committee if it comes to their attention.

- 2.35 A researcher or investigator will be unable to self-certify if:
- (a) the research raises significant ethical issues, so self-certification of the measures taken to address them would not be appropriate. In summary, this includes research involving deception or risk of harm to participants (one (1) or more of the features set out below in paragraph 2.36);
 - (b) the researcher wants to seek advice from the Ethics Committee;
 - (c) external obligations exist, e.g., funder or data-access requirements;
 - (d) the research will be done by a student or member of staff who has not received appropriate training or expert advice on research ethics.
- 2.36 In addition, the following kinds of research should always be subject to full review by the Ethics Committee:
- (a) Research involving deception of participants, or that is intentionally conducted without their full and informed consent at the time of the study or when the data are gathered.
 - (b) Research that involves or may lead to the publication of confidential information.
 - (c) Research involving more than minimal risk of harm to participants, for instance arising from:
 - involving vulnerable groups;
 - involving sensitive topics;
 - involving groups where a gatekeeper's permission is normally required for initial access to members;
 - causing unacceptable psychological stress, anxiety or humiliation; or
 - causing more than minimal or transient physical or psychological pain or trauma.

Stage 2: Considering the application by the Ethics Committee

- 2.37 After consulting the Director of Research, researchers should include in their planning a suitable lead-time for the approval process. They should submit their research application to the Ethics Committee. The Chair (expedited review) or the committee (full review) will decide on the application as promptly as reasonably possible, having regard to the circumstances and any need for urgent approval.
- 2.38 If a case is submitted for full review, the Ethics Committee will make decisions by majority vote. If the committee declines an application, the Chair will consult the applicant with a view to devising a solution that the committee will accept.
- 2.39 At its discretion, the committee may request advice and guidance from College colleagues with particular expertise. It may also call on outside experts for advice and review as required.
- 2.40 Sometimes, substantial research projects and projects presenting significant ethical difficulties will need ethics advisory panel to oversee their progress. In such cases, it may be wise for an Ethics Committee member to sit on the panel.

- 2.41 The committee's decision will be minuted and given to the relevant researchers. The decision will be kept on file for at least seven (7) years or for the duration of the project (whichever is longer).
- 2.42 If the committee declines a proposal, the researchers have the right to appeal the decision to the Academic Appeals Panel.
- 2.43 The researchers should send their appeal in writing to the Chair of the Academic Appeals Board. They should provide all the documents considered by the Ethics Committee and a covering letter giving enough information to allow the Ethics Appeal Panel to understand clearly the basis of the appeal.
- 2.44 Hearings must give the researchers the opportunity of presenting their case in person. After the researchers withdraw, the panel will make its decision and, whatever they decide, clearly justify it in writing.
- 2.45 A complaint against the Ethics Committee from an external organisation will first be considered by the Dean of Faculty, who will refer it to the Academic Appeals Panel if necessary. It will then go through the same procedures as above.

Stage 3: Monitoring

- 2.46 In the first instance, the researchers will be responsible for monitoring the conduct of research that has received ethical approval (for students, in consultation with supervisors). The researchers, along with any project advisory panel or group where relevant, must ensure there is a suitable continuing review of the research, taking into account any possible changes that may occur during the whole project.
- 2.47 The researchers are responsible for alerting the Chair of the Ethics Committee if further ethical implications arise. They are also responsible for ensuring that data are securely held and preserved.
- 2.48 The Ethics Committee may periodically conduct a selective audit of current research projects.
- 2.49 If significant concerns have been raised about the ethical conduct of research, the Ethics Committee can request a full and detailed account of the research for a further ethical review.
- 2.50 If the Ethics Committee believes research is being conducted in a way that is outwith its approval conditions, it may consider withdrawing approval and requiring that the research be suspended or discontinued. The Ethics Committee must inform the appropriate funding body that it has revoked ethical approval.

Advice and support

- 2.51 The policy is made freely available to potential research funding agencies in the interests of transparency and to avoid possible pre-contractual misunderstandings.
- 2.52 Advice for students on research ethics is available from the Student Hub or the GSM London Students' Union (student.union@gsm london.ac.uk). More complex questions may be referred to appropriate individuals, or to the Office of Student Complaints, Appeals and Regulation (oscar@gsm london.ac.uk).
- 2.53 Advice for staff on research ethics is available from their Head of Department or Academic Regulations and Policy Partner.
- 2.54 Any staff development needs identified may be discussed with members of the Educational Development Unit or Human Resources teams.

Fees

- 2.55 Generally, no additional fees or charges are associated with this policy.
- 2.56 However, a fee may be charged – as set out in the College’s list of charges – where a project requires oversight from an ongoing ethics advisory panel or where the Ethics Committee are required to engage an additional external expert to assist in its decision-making.

Legal and regulatory context

- 2.57 These procedures are expected to conform to the general guidelines issued in 2004 by the Director General of the Research Councils and the Chief Executives of the UK Research Councils.
- 2.58 Researchers must comply with legal requirements. In particular, they must ensure compliance with the UK Data Protection Act 1998 and, where appropriate, submit to a Disclosure and Barring Service check (see Annex A).
- 2.59 Researchers are responsible for ensuring that arrangements are in place to maintain the integrity and security of research data. If more guidance is needed about the security of data, the matter may be referred to the Ethics Committee.

Enforcement, monitoring and review

- 2.60 The College has a ‘Misconduct in research’ procedure. This says that researchers who fail to review the ethical implications of their research or comply with any other aspect of this policy, or fail to use reasonable care in assessing the likely ethical implications of a research project, may face a finding of research misconduct.
- 2.61 If any person or body in the College refuses to comply with a request or decision made to enforce this policy, their refusal must be reported to the Provost, who will take such action to enforce this policy as they think necessary.
- 2.62 Each year, the College must receive a report that enables it to monitor, identify and act on any shortfalls in how this policy is interpreted and applied.
- 2.63 Every three (3) years, the College must review this policy to ensure that:
- (a) it remains up to date and continue to meet the expectations of the UK Quality Code, applicable legislation or guidance;
 - (b) areas of improvement, or any concerns, raised by students, external examiners, or professional bodies have been addressed; and
 - (c) opportunities to reduce unnecessary bureaucracy have been taken.

Schedule (not part of the policies and regulations):

Responsible Officer: Director of Research
Approved by: Board of Directors and Academic Board
Version: 1.0
Date: 01/06/2017
Monitoring and Review Body: Research Committee
Effective From: 01/06/2017
Next Scheduled Review: June 2019