**School of Social Sciences**

**Student Ethical Guidance**

In carrying out their work researchers inevitably face ethical dilemmas which arise out of competing obligations and conflicts of interest. All research proposals which involve human participants require prior ethical approval to ensure the safety, rights, dignity and well-being of the participant and those of the researcher. This is why you are required to declare whether or not this applies to your thesis/ dissertation / project topic and, if so, how these ethical issues are to be addressed. Ethical approval should not be considered as a bureaucratic obstacle; it is a mechanism for ensuring and demonstrating that the design of your research respects the rights of those who are the participants of the research. The paramount concern of any Ethics Committee is participants’ rights in terms of recruitment, ‘informed’ consent, and participant and data treatment.

**Who does this apply to?**

All undergraduate and postgraduate students (researchers) must secure ethical approval for any research they conduct involving human participants or human data or material before undertaking their research. Examples of activities for which approval is required include questionnaire and interview based research involving sensitive or confidential issues, telephone interviewing or recording by audio or video tape and contact with participants who are children or considered as potentially vulnerable adults.

Where you will be conducting research involving NHS patients or staff, or working on NHS premises approval must be sought via an NHS Research Ethics Committee.

**What happens if I have not applied for or obtained ethical approval?**

Failure to follow the School’s procedure for ethical approval may leave you and the University open to legal action without the protection of an insurance policy and may result in disciplinary action.

**What research does it cover?**

All research involving human participants or human data or material must have ethical approval. Research where the information about human participants is publicly and lawfully available e.g. information published in the census, population statistics published by the government, personal letters and diaries etc held in public libraries do not require ethical approval.

**Ethical Protocol**

The purpose of the protocol is to outline the principles of ethical practice for students in the School of Social Sciences:

**Principle 1: Respect for Human Dignity**

Research and practice will protect and be sensitive to the multiple and independent interests of the persons involved directly or indirectly in research or in receipt of services. Due regard will be given to age, sex, race, religion, sexual orientation, political beliefs and lifestyle) or other significant difference between such person and the researcher or other participants in the research) when planning conducting and reporting on research or practice activities.

**Principle 2: Ensure Integrity and Quality**

Research practice must be designed to be of the highest quality and use appropriate methods.

Researchers will never present others’ work as their own. Nor will they knowingly misrepresent the findings of their research or the work of others.

Where possible, research participants will be provided with a summary of the research findings and an opportunity for debriefing after taking part in the research, (although participants may not be able to be given their individual results).

**Principle 3: Respect for Free and Informed Consent**

In law, individuals are presumed to have the capacity and right to make free and informed decisions. Informed consent entails giving as much information as possible about the proposed research or practice aims and processes, in non-technical language so that prospective research participants and service users, and/or their proxies, can make an informed decision about their involvement.

In research, this information will be supplied in written form (information sheet) and signed off (consent form) by the research participant(s). Wherever possible children under sixteen will be facilitated to give fully informed consent. For those with low literacy skills (younger children/adults with learning disabilities) appropriate alternative means of gaining informed consent will be employed. This will mean producing an ‘accessible’ information sheet that may need to be discussed with support from their parent, caregiver, or other advocate.

The primary objective is to conduct research openly and without deception, and for practice to occur in an environment where the ethos and approach to service provision is transparent.

**Principle 4: Respect for Vulnerable Persons**

Respect for human dignity entails maintaining ethical obligations towards person whose diminished competence and/or decision making capacity make them vulnerable.

Researchers and practitioners must recognise that vulnerable research participants and service users may experience distress or discomfort that non-vulnerable persons are unlikely to experience. They will therefore take extra care to make the nature and aims of the research or practice clear, taking particular account of the vulnerable person’s communication needs and putting them at their ease.

**Principle 5: Respect for Privacy and Confidentiality**

The confidentiality of information provided and anonymity of respondents or service users must be respected. Appropriate measures will be taken to store data in a secure manner and observe requirements under the Data Protection Act. Any form of publication will not directly or indirectly lead to a breach of agreed confidentiality and anonymity.

Research participants and service users will be informed that their data will be treated in the strictest confidence and, in research, will only reported in anonymised form. In both research and practice, the exception for disclosing certain information would be where there are clear and overriding reasons to do otherwise, for example in relation to the abuse of children. Passing on confidential information without the express permission of the research participant or service user should not be undertaken lightly and legal and professional advice will be sought immediately if this is contemplated.

**Principle 6: Participation in a Voluntary Way**

Researchers will inform participants of their right to refuse to participate or withdraw at any time and for whatever reason.

Coercion is strictly prohibited and no pressure will be placed on individuals or organisations to participate. Care will be taken if offering an incentive. It is inappropriate to offer excessive payments which might induce participation in a study against the person’s better judgement. Small payments may be made in order to compensate research participants for their time and inconvenience. Out-of-pocket expenses may also be met.

**Principle 7: Procedures should Avoid Harm**

Research and practice will be conducted in such a way that it minimises harm or risk to research participants or service users, and wider society. Research participants’ interests or well-being will not be damaged as a result of their participation in the research. The health and safety of service users will be paramount in all activities. Any activity will be stopped immediately if the research participant or service user shows any sign of distress, and will not recommence without the agreement of the person concerned (or his/her parent or person acting in loco parentis, caregiver or advocate).

Research will not place an excessive burden on any individual or organisation participating and will be carried out with regard for mutually convenient times and negotiated in a way that seeks to minimise disruption to schedules and participants.

**School of Social Science Guidance**

**Participant Guidance**

Ethical approval covers all participants but particular attention must be given to vulnerable participants.

**Vulnerable participants include:**

* NHS patients
* children under 18
* adults with learning difficulties
* adults who have a terminal illness
* adults with mental illness
* adults with dementia
* adults in care homes
* adults or children in emergency situations
* prisoners or criminals
* young offenders
* users of illegal drugs or illegal substances

**Working with children**

* You must satisfy yourself that the research you propose to undertake is worthwhile and that the techniques proposed are appropriate.
* You must satisfy yourself that there is a need to involve children and be able to justify this.
* You should ensure that you have familiarised yourself with, and comply with the relevant legal position where it is intended to conduct research with children.
* Where your research involves children every effort should be made to gain assent from the child and informed consent from his/ her parents (or legal equivalent).
* If the research involves children you will require Disclosure and Barring Services (DBS) check. The DBS offers a means to check the background of researchers to ensure that they do not have a history that would make them unsuitable for work involving children. (see Appendix 4)

**Working with potentially vulnerable adults**

* You must satisfy yourself that the research you propose to undertake is worthwhile and that the techniques proposed are appropriate.
* You must satisfy yourself that there is a need to involve potentially vulnerable adults, e.g. older persons, or those with severe learning difficulties, and be able to justify this.

* You should ensure that you have familiarised yourself with, and comply with the relevant legal position where it is intended to conduct research with potentially vulnerable adults.
* In cases where your research involves vulnerable adults every effort should be made to secure their informed consent. However, in cases where this seems impossible or where the participants are considered not competent to give their consent to the research the issue of honesty and consent may need to be managed via proxies, who should either be those with a duty of care or who can provide disinterested independent approval.
* In certain cases research that involves vulnerable people may require Disclosure and Barring Services (DBS) check. The DBS offers a means to check the background of researchers to ensure that they do not have a history that would make them unsuitable for work involving vulnerable adults. ( See Appendix 4)

**Recruitment Guidance**

Participants should enter into the research freely and willingly and know and understand what they are agreeing to when they take part.

* No one should be made to participate in a research study against their will.
* Those recruiting participants should ensure that no undue influence is exerted in order to persuade the participant to take part in the research.
* Participants should be made aware that participation is entirely voluntary; that refusal will attract no sanction, and that they will not be required to give reasons for refusal; that if they agree to participate in the study, they are free to leave the study at any time without being required to give reasons for leaving.
* Anonymity and confidentiality should be maintained except in exceptional circumstances, which have to be justified.
* It is inappropriate to offer volunteers excessive payments which might induce them to participate in a study against their better judgement. Small payments may be made in order to compensate participants for their time and inconvenience. Out-of-pocket expenses may also be met.

There are a variety of ways for recruiting participants:

* mail out
* email
* telephone
* advertisement
* recruitment carried out by third party (e.g. employer, doctor)
* recruitment carried out by researchers
* contact details obtained from public documents (e.g. phone book)
* contact details obtained from private sources (e.g. employee list, membership database)
* participants from a previous study
* networks/ recommendations
* snowball (participants suggest other possible participants)
* personal contacts

**Consent Guidance**

**Information Sheet**

Informed consent entails giving as much information as possible about the potential research so that the prospective participants and/or their proxies can make an informed decision about their possible involvement. Normally this information should be supplied in written form (information sheet) and signed off (consent form) by the research participant(s). However for those with low literacy skills (younger children / adults with severe learning disabilities / adults who do not speak English) appropriate alternative means of gaining informed consent should be employed. The School recommends that for research being conducted with minors (under 16) then you gain assent from the minor and consent from their parent/guardian. The primary objective is to conduct research openly and without deception.

* Written information should be supplied to participants making clear that the research is for a student thesis/project. It should be written in terms that an ordinary person rather than a specialist in the field can understand i.e. avoid technical jargon. The information provided should be accurate and concise, specific to the proposed research and appropriate for the social and cultural context in which it is being given.
* You must take time over this as it is essential to explain what you are asking participants to do and the possible implications so that they can make an informed decision whether they wish to take part.
* You should consider whether the participant will be able to read the information you provide and consider how to deal with problems of illiteracy or where the participant is not fluent in the language used.
* Gaining the assent of children or consent from vulnerable adults will involve producing ‘accessible’ information that can be discussed with them and/or their parent, the aim is the same as with any other participant – as outlined above. Even a young child can give assent e.g. a tick or smiley face, and we encourage you to do this as far as is reasonably possible.

The information sheet should include the following:

1. the name of the researcher(s)
2. an explanation of what you, the researcher, is hoping to achieve by the research
3. what is going to be done by you, the researcher
4. an explanation of the risks, pain or discomfort, if any, that the participant may experience
5. a clear explanation of what the participant is expected to do during the study
6. a statement that the participant is not obliged to take part, and may withdraw at any time
7. a clear statement of payment arrangements for compensation for the participants time and inconvenience and any out-of-pocket expenses
8. consent statement (this can be separate to the information sheet)

Other information can also be included such as:

1. duration of the study
2. location of the study
3. anticipated outcomes in respect of publication of findings

Having understood the above the participant gives their consent to take part in the study by signing a consent form and is given a copy of both the information sheet and the consent form to keep. Sufficient time must be provided between the request to take part and the signing of the consent form, in order to ensure that the participant has read the information sheet and had the opportunity to ask questions about the research.

* You should be willing to answer any questions put to you by (potential) participants.
* Participants should understand how far they will be afforded anonymity and confidentiality and should be able to reject the use of data-gathering devices such as tape recorders and video cameras.
* You should inform the participant of their rights under any copyright or data protection laws. Where your research is recorded using audio or video recordings you should obtain the appropriate copyright clearances where necessary.
* You have a responsibility to ensure that the physical, social and psychological well-being of the participant is not adversely affected by the research.
* You should clarify whether, and if so, the extent to which the participants are allowed to see transcripts of interviews and notes and to alter the content, to withdraw statements, to provide additional information or to add glosses on interpretations
* Clarification should also be given to participants regarding the degree to which they will be consulted prior to publication. Where possible, participants should be offered feedback on findings, for example in the form of a summary report.
* It is important that participants should not be offered payments in order to persuade them to take part in any research in which they would not ordinarily take part, although reasonable compensation for time and inconvenience and expenses incurred may be made.
* You should take all reasonable steps to ensure that no harm occurs to participants by virtue of their participation in the study.
* Consent is only valid for procedures set out on the information sheet. Should any of the information included on that sheet change during the course of the study, new consent should be sought; participants are free to refuse consent and withdraw from the study if they wish.
* Under certain survey conditions a signed consent form may not be needed e.g. when adult participants are mailed a questionnaire, return of the questionnaire can be considered to indicate consent. However the researcher must provide proof that the participants will be adequately informed of the purpose of the study, the extent of the participant’s involvement and how the data will be handled with respect to confidentiality. In the case of a postal survey a copy of an abbreviated information sheet or cover letter should be submitted with the application for ethical approval.

**Obligations on researchers**

* It is expected that, in addition to the above, you will abide by any guidelines issued by professional bodies to which you belong or which govern research in your area. Where such guidelines conflict with the above, the advice of your supervisor should be sought.
* Researchers should never present others’ work as their own. Nor should they knowingly misrepresent the findings of their research or the work of others. See also *plagiarism*

(www.campus.manchester.ac.uk/studentnet/policies/)

* The study should be stopped immediately on request or if the participant shows any sign of distress and should not recommence without the agreement of the participant (or his/her parent or person acting in loco parentis)
* Should you need to use participants for your research obtained via an NHS source, ethical approval must be sought from the NHS.

**Confidentiality of information obtained during research**

The confidentiality of information supplied by research participants and the anonymity of respondents must be respected.

* You should not give unrealistic guarantees of confidentiality and anonymity, where given such guarantees must be honoured, unless there are clear and overriding reasons to do otherwise, for example in relation to the abuse of children. You should be aware that legal challenge may preclude the honouring of such a guarantee. Passing on confidential information without the express permission of the participant should not be undertaken lightly and legal and professional advice should be sought immediately if this is contemplated.
* Appropriate measures should be taken to store research data in a secure manner. You should be aware of your obligations under the Data Protection Act. Where appropriate and practicable, methods for preserving anonymity should be used including the removal of identifiers, the use of pseudonyms and other technical means for breaking the link between data and identifiable individuals. Data and results obtained from the research should only be used in the way(s) for which consent has been given. Informed consent is the most important part of the Data Protection rules for researchers.

**What happens if I want to publish the research?**

* You must tell the proposed participant in advance if you have any intention of publishing the results of the study.
* You must explain the extent to which, if at all, any identifying information about the participant will appear in the publication.
* If identifying information about the participant is intended to be published you must obtain and keep specific written agreement from the participant.
* Preferably these issues should be addressed on the initial information sheet that is issued before the participant gives their consent.

**Informing research participants of results of research**

It is appropriate for research participants to be able to receive feedback on research they have been involved in, where this is possible. You should consider the issue of informing the participants of the results of the research or where they may be able to get access to this information (although participants may not be able to be given their individual results).

**Whilst these guidelines are not exhaustive, they indicate a set of obligations to which researchers should normally adhere. Responsibility for both interpretation and compliance rests with the researcher and their supervisor.**

**Appendix 1 Further Guidance**

You should ensure that your project complies with good research practice. The following sources provide further information:

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| --- | --- |
| **Source of information/ act** | **URL** |
| Economic and Research Council (ESRC) | www.esrc.ac.uk |
| Arts, Humanities Research Council (AHRC) | www.ahrb.ac.uk/images/4\_94629.doc |
| British Sociological Association | www.britsoc.co.uk/new\_site/index.php |
| Association of Social Anthropologists | www.theasa.org/ |
| Political Studies Association Political Studies Association | www.psa.ac.uk/ |
| The Human Rights Act (1988) | www.hmso.gov.uk/acts/acts1988/19980042.htm |
| Data Protection Act (1988) | www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts1998/19980029.htm  www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk/ |
| UK Copyright Act (1988) | www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1988/Ukpga\_19880048\_en\_1.htm |
| Race Relations Act (1976) | www.homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/204501/ |
| Race relations (Amendment) Act 2000 | www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2000/20000034.htm |
| Disability Discrimination Act (1995) | www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1995/1995050.htm |
| Freedom of Information Act (2000) | www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk/ |
| Communications Act (2003) | www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2003/20030021.htm |
| University of Manchester  • Code of Practice for Dealing with allegations of Misconduct in  Research  • Disability Discrimination Act Policy  • Equality & Diversity Policy  • Freedom of Information Act Policy  • Health & Safety Policy  • Harassment, Discrimination & Bullying Policy  • Intellectual Property Policy (guidance on) Plagiarism and other  forms of academic malpractice  University of Manchester  • Code of Practice for Dealing with allegations of Misconduct in  Research  • Disability Discrimination Act Policy  • Equality & Diversity Policy  • Freedom of Information Act Policy  • Health & Safety Policy  • Harassment, Discrimination & Bullying Policy  • Intellectual Property Policy (guidance on) Plagiarism and other  forms of academic malpractice | www.campus.manchester.ac.uk/studentnet/policies/ |
| University’s data protection policy | www.campus.manchester.ac.uk/recordsmanagement |

**Appendix 2 Glossary of Definitions:**

**Consent –** the voluntary agreement of a person or group, based on adequate knowledge and understanding of relevant material, to participate in research. Informed consent is one possible result of the informed choice process, the other possible result is refusal.

**Confidentiality –** the obligations of persons to whom private information has been given is not to use the information for any purpose other than that for which it is given.

**Deception** – this occurs when research participants have essential information withheld and / or are initially misled about procedures and purposes. This includes studies where participants are deliberately given misleading info about the purposes of the study.

**Ethics** – the study of morals and values; that is, the study of right and wrong, justice and injustice, virtue and vice, good and bad, and related concepts and principles.

**Ethical / Unethical** – right or morally acceptable / wrong or morally unacceptable.

**Harm** – that which adversely affects the interests or welfare of an individual or a group

**Research –** this involves systematic investigation to establish facts, principles and knowledge.

**Research participant –** living individual (or group of living individuals) from/about whom a researcher obtains data through intervention or interaction with the person, or identifiable private information from other sources such as records or third parties.

**Risk** – the function of the magnitude of a harm and the probability of its occurrence

**Voluntary** – free of coercion, duress or undue inducement.

**Appendix 3 Risk Assessment**

A risk assessment is simply a careful examination of anything that may cause harm to you or others during the course of your study, particularly when studies are carried out outside the University campus. Once you and your supervisor have identified the risks, you will then be able to decide upon the most appropriate action to take to minimise the likelihood of anyone being hurt. The aim is to prevent accident and illness.

In order to gain ethical approval you need to make a risk assessment of your project. The School's generic risk assessment documents are listed below. If your project does not fall within these generic risk assessments you will have to complete a full risk assessment form, with guidance from your supervisor, outlining the specific risks you anticipate and the measures you plan to take to address them.

* [SoSS Generic Risk Assessment A](http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=18792)
* [SoSS Generic Risk Assessment B](http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=18793)
* [SoSS Generic Risk Assessment C](http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=18794)
* [Full Risk Assessment](http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=18801)

Below are links to useful documents:

* University Health and Safety Policy on [Health & Safety in Fieldwor](http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=18796)k
* [Health and Safety Services Guidance on Lone Working](http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=27344). If you are going to work alone, you should think about associated risks to the researcher and sensible safeguards for those risks.
* Ethics approval involves issues of data management (what you will do with your data to secure them and protect them). See [University guidance on data management](http://www.campus.manchester.ac.uk/researchoffice/governance/goodresearchpractice/adviceaboutresearchpractice/recordingstoringandarchivingresearchdata/).

**Appendix 4 Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check**

If you complete an ethical approval form for a project that involves working with under-18s (or adults with learning difficulties), you will need to obtain a satisfactory DBS enhanced check

To do this contact:

Susan Rowe   
Tel: +44 (0) 161 306 1100   
Email: [susan.rowe@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:susan.rowe@manchester.ac.uk)

She will give you a DBS application form and instructions on how to proceed. MAKE SURE SHE KNOWS THAT YOU ARE FROM THE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES.

When completed, she will send the forms off. Both you and she will get a reply from the DBS (this can take about 8 weeks). Susan Rowe will then notify the relevant Administrator in the School that a satisfactory DBS disclosure has been received for you.

Any ethical approval you may have received before this point is conditional on the relevant Office receiving this notification.

[Disclosure and Barring Service website](http://www.gov.uk/dbs)

*Working outside the UK*

Students working with under-18s (or adults with learning difficulties) outside the UK still need a DBS disclosure: the University expects the same standards to apply to the conduct of research within and outside the UK. You should be aware that the country where you are intending to do your research may have additional requirements. It is up to you to find out if this is the case and to comply with these.

*International students*

International students working with under-18s, whether in the UK or outside, also need a DBS check, even if you have only been in the UK a short time. You may find that the organisation where you intend to work will also require some kind of statement from the authorities in your home country confirming that you do not have a criminal record which would disqualify you from working with under-18s (or adults with learning difficulties).