Research Ethics and Integrity

What are research ethics and research integrity and why are they important?

Research ethics and integrity practices make sure that research is conducted according to the highest standards of practice, and with the minimal risk of adverse or harmful outcomes or consequences. The research community and a wider public will have confidence in the outcomes of your research and the quality of your research output will be enhanced.

- ➤ Research is conducted honestly
- ➤ Provides confidence that conclusions drawn from research can be relied upon to be accurate
- ➤ Minimises potential risks to researchers and participants of research, protecting the vulnerable and ensuring their safety and wellbeing
- ➤ Safeguards data collected during the course of research, particularly sensitive data, respecting confidentiality
- ➤ Avoids unfair allegations of misconduct, whilst ensuring that genuine concerns are appropriately investigated
- ➤ Prevents people being drawn into terrorism
- ➤ Ensures conflicts of interest are identified and avoided

What do I need to consider?

If your project involves any of the following, you will need to think about how to address these.

- ➤ Are there potential risks to researchers and participants involved in the research? This could be either the activity to be undertaken or the location the research is to be conducted. For example:
  - Are you investigating illegal behaviours or activities?
  - Could the dissemination of your findings adversely affect participants?
  - Will your research be carried out in a hazardous area or in an area not recommended for travel?
  - Does your research concern groups which are legally construed as terrorist or extremist?
  - Will the research expose either researcher or participants to situations or circumstances they might find distressing?

- ➤ Will any of the participants be classed as vulnerable? For example:
  - Are any of them under 16 years of age?
  - Unable to communicate in the language in which the research is conducted?
  - Members of a stigmatised or marginalised social group?
  - Have a relationship with the researcher (either personally or professionally)?

- ➤ How will you show that any participants have agreed to take part?
  - Will they be able to give informed consent individually?
  - Will consent need to be obtained from parents or guardians?
  - Will the purpose of your research be concealed from participants at the outset?

> ➤ Are you collecting personal data, either face to face or online? If so,
>   - How will you obtain the consent of participants?
>   - How will this be securely stored and maintained?
>   - How will this data be used?
>   - With whom will it be shared?
>   - How and when will it be disposed of?

How do I identify and address any concerns?

The priority in undertaking an ethical assessment is not to decide that certain activities or lines of enquiry are prohibited or should not be undertaken in any circumstances. Instead, the relevant questions to ask are:

> ➤ In what ways might this research involve the risk of harm to either participants or researchers?
> ➤ How can I ensure that any such risks are prevented or minimised?

In undertaking an ethical assessment you might conclude that there is no plausible risk of harm in the proposed research activities. If, however, you conclude that there **ARE** some risks, then the important thing is to think about what you might do to reduce, minimise or prevent them. You will be asked to clarify how you plan to achieve this, and ethical approval will be conditional on those plans being credible.

UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO)

Please also consider the following checklist compiled by the UKRIO. This checklist covers the requirements of research projects both small and large, from single-author dissertations to multi-centre collaborative enterprises. Therefore, some of the items it asks you to consider will probably not be relevant to you.

Recommended checklist for researchers

The Checklist lists the key points of good practice in research for a research project and is applicable to all subject areas. More detailed guidance can be found in section 3. A PDF version is available from www.ukrio.org

Before conducting your research, and bearing in mind that, subject to legal and ethical requirements, roles and contributions may change during the time span of the research:

1   Does the proposed research address pertinent question(s) and is it designed either to add to existing knowledge about the subject in question or to develop methods for research into it?

2   Is your research design appropriate for the question(s) being asked?

3   Will you have access to all necessary skills and resources to conduct the research?

4   Have you conducted a risk assessment to determine:

   a   whether there are any ethical issues and whether ethics review is required;

   b   the potential for risks to the organisation, the research, or the health, safety and well-being of researchers and research participants; and

   c   what legal requirements govern the research?

5   Will your research comply with all legal and ethical requirements and other applicable guidelines, including those from other organisations and/or countries if relevant?

6   Will your research comply with all requirements of legislation and good practice relating to health and safety?

7   Has your research undergone any necessary ethics review (see 4(a) above), especially if it involves animals, human participants, human material or personal data?

8   Will your research comply with any monitoring and audit requirements?

9   Are you in compliance with any contracts and financial guidelines relating to the project?

10   Have you reached an agreement relating to intellectual property, publication and authorship?

11   Have you reached an agreement relating to collaborative working, if applicable?

12   Have you agreed the roles of researchers and responsibilities for management and supervision?

13   Have all conflicts of interest relating to your research been identified, declared and addressed?

14   Are you aware of the guidance from all applicable organisations on misconduct in research?

When conducting your research:

1   Are you following the agreed research design for the project?

2   Have any changes to the agreed research design been reviewed and approved if applicable?

3   Are you following best practice for the collection, storage and management of data?

4   Are agreed roles and responsibilities for management and supervision being fulfilled?

5   Is your research complying with any monitoring and audit requirements?

When finishing your research:

1   Will your research and its findings be reported accurately, honestly and within a reasonable time frame?

2   Will all contributions to the research be acknowledged?

3   Are agreements relating to intellectual property, publication and authorship being complied with?

4   Will research data be retained in a secure and accessible form and for the required duration?

5   Will your research comply with all legal, ethical and contractual requirements?