

School of Education Ethics Committee

Guidelines for Ethical Practice in Research, Enterprise and Education

Introduction

The School of Education is committed to upholding the [University Code of Ethics](#) and the [UWS Guidelines for Ethical Practice in Research and Scholarship](#) and its aims. The School strives to maintain the “highest ethical standards” in research, scholarship, enterprise and education; we are committed to ensuring a culture of honesty, rigour, transparency and respect. Within this context research and scholarship are broadly defined as *systematic investigation to add to a body of knowledge or theory, and understanding*. Additionally, educational experiences are defined as learning events where students 1) act as “researchers” and interact with members of the public in that role e.g. collect data as a learning event, 2) interacting with the public in a professional role e.g. media installations, performance events, journalistic interviews 3) interact with an enterprise partner in a professional role.

The purpose of these guidelines is to present an ethical framework and procedures for the conduct of all academic activity and to identify ethical considerations that should be addressed through the formal approval process¹.

Remit and Review Process of School of Education Ethics Committee

University and School Ethics Committees

All but a few of the activities of ethical review and accountability within UWS are devolved to the Schools. Each School therefore has a responsibility to make sure that local and University ethical guidelines are available to every member of their staff and students. These are available in the ethics section of the School of Education Staff Moodle site [here](#) and through programme specific modules for students. School Ethics Committees should be formed according to University Regulations and guidelines, including the minimum requirements outlined later in this document. School Ethics Committees are required, for example, to demonstrate to the University Ethics Committee that they are independent and multidisciplinary, and have appropriate operating procedures in place. All applications for ethical scrutiny by staff and students should be submitted to the School Ethics Committees. Applications for research involving human participants that are deemed to be of low or medium risk will be fully scrutinised at School level. All complex or high-risk applications should be submitted to the School Ethics Committee for initial assessment and recommendation, after which it may be forwarded to the University Ethics Committee for further opinion.

Classification of risk Activities that involve potentially vulnerable participants or highly sensitive topics are more likely to be of higher risk and, where the applicants do not satisfactorily demonstrate to the School Ethics Committees that these are mitigated,

these projects should be referred to the University Ethics Committee for an opinion. All research and scholarship should apply the risk framework set out in UEC Guidelines [here](#).

As a School we have aligned our own practises to these risk definitions and have worked to identify examples of all of the Risk categories, and have operationalised ways of dealing with those projects in a timely and efficient manner. Examples of high risk categories can be found within the UEC Guidelines [here](#).

As a School we note and acknowledge the examples in the Guidelines and will work with them to aid and inform our practises. Given that our research, education and teaching areas are with groups deemed to be vulnerable, it is important to note that we have developed a robust set of expert reviewing processes in which the risk of the project is fore fronted and mitigated so that an informed decision about the appropriateness of further referral and review will be taken into account. Moreover, the Chair (or Vice Chair) of the School Ethics Committee will ultimately be responsible for the involvement of the University Ethics Committee.

Scope and Purpose

The School of Education ethics review process is structured to be a supportive critical review of the project, whilst ensuring a minimum standard of competence.

Since each research project/educational experience is seeking to make unique contributions, the ethical principles described in the preceding section will be applied in a holistic manner but each application will be assessed on a case by case basis by suitability qualified peers. Complex projects take time to assess, and applicants should be prepared for this by factoring in lead in time for the project.

The onus of suitability of the project in addressing the educational experience or research question is on the applicant. All of the principles underpinning the UWS Ethics Code should be present within the design, method and conduct of the study/experience. The applicant will be deemed to have entered into an informal social contract where the participants' rights have been explained, assured and protected. All applicants must clearly state a justification for an exception to a core principle(s) that is deemed appropriate within the parameters of the study/experience. Examples of this is where deception may be deemed necessary to the methodology or that anonymity of the participant is not possible. In such cases the dignity and autonomy of participants should always be protected and it is usually important to provide an appropriate debriefing.

Review Structure and Process

Staff Applications

Staff applications for ethical approval should be submitted for approval to the School Ethics Committee by using the UCE1.1 Ethics Application Forms [On line application process when it is live]. The application should be submitted alongside any

appropriate supporting documentation (e.g. PIS, Consent, Debrief Gatekeeper agreement letters, Protocol etc.).

In the case of staff requiring ethics approval for the submission of a funding proposal, the application will be reviewed by the Chair or Vice Chair and **Approval in Principle** will be given, pending a fuller risk assessment and review by peer reviewers should the project be funded.

Postgraduate Applications (MSc, MA, MPhil and PhD)

Applications for ethical approval should be submitted for approval to the School Ethics Committee by using the UEC1.1 form. The application should be submitted alongside any appropriate supporting documentation (e.g. PIS, Consent, Debrief Gatekeeper agreement letters etc.).

Undergraduate Applications

Dissertation students or Research Project applications for ethical approval should be submitted by supervisors using the UEC1.1. The application should be submitted alongside any appropriate supporting documentation (e.g. PIS, Consent, Debrief Gatekeeper agreement letters etc.). The application will be reviewed either by 1) School Ethics Committee or 2) Programmatic subcommittees with the involvement and oversight of the School Ethics Committee Chair (or nominated depute). The School Ethics Committee Chair will need to concur with the review outcome **before** approval can be granted by any of the programmatic subcommittees.

Modular or Programmatic Approval

The School of Education professional qualifying honours degree includes many education experiences that require students to act as researchers, and to collect data from human participants whilst gaining graduate attributes. We require annual programmatic ethical approval to be sought and granted before any student embarks on an education experience. Application should be submitted by the module coordinator to the programme leader for approval by using the UEC1.1. The application should be submitted alongside any appropriate supporting documentation (e.g. template PIS, template Consent, Debrief Gatekeeper agreement letters etc.). The application will be reviewed by the programme board and the School Ethics Committee Chair or nominated depute.

Process of ethics review

All applications should be submitted by the Principal Investigator to the School Ethics Committee. In the case of student research, the application should be reviewed and signed by the Supervisor prior to submission. On point of application, each project will receive a unique project identifier (UCI). This identifier will stay with the project on all project documentation and should be stored by applicant, as annual audits by school ethics committee or UCE will ask to produce the ethics identifier.

The School Ethics Committee Chair (or nominated depute) will screen and then distribute received applications to independent peer reviewers. The number of

reviewers will depend on the level of risk. Low risk applications will be reviewed by one appropriate peer reviewer and moderated by Chair or Vice-Chair of the School of Education Ethics Committee, in the case of educational experiences these could be devolved to programme teams. If the application is low risk and is following a pre-approved protocol the application will be reviewed by one member of the School Ethics Committee. High risk projects (category 3a and 3b) will be reviewed by at least two peer reviewers from the School's Ethics Committee reviewer pool, moderated by the Chair or Vice Chair of the School of Education Ethics Committee and, if deemed advisable, referred to the University Ethics Committee for further review using the criteria set out in UEC Guidance.

The reviewers' pool is recruited across all programmes within the School of Education and updated on a regular basis. All reviewers receive training and briefing updates to ensure equity and quality of reviews.

In cases where the School Ethics review processes cannot reach consensus, or where there is an appeal by the applicant against the decision, the application should be referred to the University Ethics Committee. The decision made by the University Ethics Committee will be deemed the final one.

The time taken for ethical review will depend on the number of reviewers but should not normally exceed four weeks. *Retrospective ethics review i.e. requests to approve research that has already taken place is not permitted.*

Ethics reviewers will recommend one of the following outcomes

- **Approved:** the project can proceed
- **Approved with conditions:** the project can proceed provided the compulsory changes are made or requirements met
- **Not approved:** the project cannot proceed for the reasons clearly specified
- **No decision:** the project requires further clarification or further review

Tracking and Accountability of Approved Projects

Approved projects must be carried out in accordance with the original application and the conditions. If changes are made to the project that are significant and could have an ethics impact e.g. engagement of different groups of participants, different recruiting methods, a different approach to obtaining consent, different experimental procedures, then the School Ethics Committee should be informed immediately. The proposed changes will be considered, usually by the original team of reviewers, and a recommendation will be made.

The Principal Investigator should provide the UPI within reports of their activities through the Research Hubs, Research and Enterprise and Education Fora

Where the School Ethics Committee has concerns about the ethical conduct of the project a full audit should take place, and the University Ethics Committee should be kept informed. That investigation may form part of the University's Complaints process. If there are concerns about an on-going research project, then the research should be halted immediately whilst subject to investigation. Should there be concerns that research is taking place that does not comply with ethical guidelines the Chair of the University Ethics Committee should be informed. The Chair of the

University Ethics Committee should contact the Dean of the School and request that the research is suspended to allow investigation. The investigation should be carried out by the University Ethics Committee and the School, collaboratively.

For the principles that underpin School Ethics Committee Governance: Managing and Accounting for Ethical Practices please see UEC Guidelines available [here](#).

ⁱ The Concordat to Support Research Integrity, Universities UK [here](#).