

School of Education and Social Sciences Ethics Guidelines

October 2020

Introduction

UWS has a mission to provide distinctive higher education, through inspirational teaching and learning, underpinned by excellent research and knowledge exchange. The UWS Code of Ethics establishes the University's approach to raising the ethical awareness of staff and students and ensuring that all that we do is underpinned by global and future-focussed principles of fairness and opportunity. In each School an Ethics Committee is established to implement this code. It is essential that you familiarise yourself with UWS committees guidelines on ethical research prior to completing an uploading your application to the School Ethics committee (please refer to UWS guidelines:

<https://www.uws.ac.uk/media/5544/guidelines-for-ethical-practice-in-research-and-scholarship-refreshed-september-2019.pdf>

Our responsibility

The ESS Ethics Committee is committed to maintaining the highest ethical standards in research and scholarship. In this context research and scholarship are broadly defined as systematic investigation to add to a body of knowledge or theory and understanding. These guidelines present the ethical framework and procedures for the conduct of all academic activity and identify ethical considerations that should be addressed through the formal ethics application and approval process.

Principles of good practice

The School of ESS engages in a diverse range of scholarship and teaching underpinned by world class research. We pride ourselves on adhering to the ethical principles of respect for human dignity. The guiding principles of the School ESS Ethics committee are ethical values of autonomy, veracity and informed consent underpinned by exceptional research governance of independence, competence, facilitation, and openness.

These guiding moral principles are considered during ethical review of applications for approval, underpinned by a participant-centred approach. These principles apply to all research and scholarship in all disciplines that involves human beings, including use of their data and records. The principle of autonomy acknowledges the right of all individuals to determine their own course of action. It underlies the need for free and informed consent. Consent should be sought

from all participants in a manner appropriate to their age and level of competence. This is particularly important in research involving vulnerable participants.

There are three elements to informed consent:

- 1 The information provided by the researchers to the participant must be sufficiently detailed, relevant, and accurate. The participant information sheet (PIS) should outline clearly and fully all aspects of the research that are relevant to a decision to consent.
- 2 Consent must be fully explained, freely given, including how and in what way it can be withdrawn. There should be no undue influence or coercion e.g. by offering disproportionate reward or disincentives for not consenting.
- 3 It is important to be sure that the potential participant understands the nature of the research and the procedures involved. Potential participants should be given sufficient time to consider the information and to decide if they consent to participate

Failure to obtain informed consent in this way not only infringes the right to autonomy, but it compromises the validity of the research data. This is why consent cannot be retrospectively applied. We provide templates of all documentation on our School Moodle site. Documentation for applicants and reviewers can be found on the School of ESS Moodle site: <https://moodle.uws.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=1968>

Submitting an Ethics Application

All research and scholarship involving animals, human participants, personal data or risk to the investigator, not adequately mitigated by proper application of the University [Health and Safety Policies and Procedures](#), requires independent ethical scrutiny. All undergraduate, postgraduate and staff members of the School of ESS are required to apply to the ESS Ethics committee for approval.

Undergraduate applications

Please note that the Committee is set up to scrutinise all applications, and to assist the work of the committee, please ensure that your application is complete and accurate. Your ethics application not covered by programme approval procedures should be submitted with a supervisor's signature using the on-line Ethics Research Management system (ERM).

You must consider and mitigate keeping participants (if using interviews or focus groups) from harm, while protecting the reputation of UWS in conducting research involving human subjects

to give informed consent. If you have considered these and mitigated against them, then you are ready to apply for ethical approval using the ERM (<https://uws.forms.ethicalreviewmanager.com/Account/Login>)

Please visit the School of ESS Ethics Moodle site for a list of resources to help with your application.

We place a great deal of trust in our colleagues who supervise research and ask students to seek guidance from their supervisor in the first instance prior to uploading their application to the ERM.

Issues for students to consider prior to uploading an application to the ERM:

- You will have completed a PIS, and CS, and, if required, a debrief document.
- If participants are considered vulnerable, does your PIS include sources of help and advice?
- You will have considered how to protect your respondents from harm (if using survey or questionnaires) by protecting anonymity and confidentiality?
- And finally, is your study GDPR compliant? You must adhere to GDPR in relation to storage of and access to participant data.

If you have considered these potential risks and mitigated against them, then you are ready to apply for ethical approval using the ERM (<https://uws.forms.ethicalreviewmanager.com/Account/Login>)

General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

The University is committed to the principles and obligations set out in the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA). As researchers will collect data, some of which may be personal, it is the responsibility of the researcher and their supervisor(s) to adhere to the principles of data privacy. Please ensure that your PIS, and Consent sheet indicate how and in what way you will protect the privacy and anonymity of your respondents and participants. Please take care to store your data in a password protected computer, and do not keep it in a portable computer hard drive or USB or zip drive.

<https://www.uws.ac.uk/media/4343/uws-data-protection-code-of-practice.pdf>

For all student research, the application should be reviewed and signed by the Supervisor prior to submission as an endorsement that it meets the minimum standards for review.

The Ethical Review Manager (ERM)

UWS uses an online system to enable you to submit applications for ethical approval to conduct research called the Ethical Review Manager (ERM) System. Both staff and students sign into the ERM using the same credentials used to access all other UWS systems such as email and the intranet.

Your ethics application can be completed in stages and can be submitted when all the information has been populated in the ERM. Each applicant will receive a Unique Project Identifier (UPI) when an application is made using the ERM. This UPI is to be used on all of your documentation and should be stored securely as annual audits will ask to produce the UPI.

Once completed and signed, the ERM will then send the application to the ESS Chair of the Ethics Review Committee who will assign expert and knowledgeable reviewers to examine the application. Once reviewed, you will receive an email informing you of the outcome.

Classification of risk

The purpose of the School Guideline is to operationalise our functions and remit within the University's Regulatory parameters. Of note for the ESS guidelines is University's definition of risk and how we identify and mitigate the risk through the application and review process (<http://www.uws.ac.uk/about-uws/overview/university-ethics/>). As a School, we have developed a robust set of reviewing processes in which the risk of the project is foregrounded and mitigated so that an informed decision about the appropriateness of further referral and review will be considered.

UWS Ethical Risk categories

Category	Risk Characteristics	Risk response
1	Project exhibits none of the characteristics that indicate the need for independent ethical scrutiny ¹ .	Documented and registered self-assessment, reviewed and approved by supervisor/director of studies for student applications
2	Exhibits one or more characteristics indicating a need for independent ethical scrutiny but none of the risk factors indicating potentially higher risk.	Assessment/approval by the School Ethics Committee.
3a	Exhibits one or more factors considered to be indicators of higher risk. Demonstrates that the risk factors have been adequately addressed through the use of standard protocols and established methodologies for potentially higher risk situations.	Assessment/approval by the relevant School Ethics Committee following scrutiny of the adequacy of the proposed risk mitigation.
3b	Exhibits one or more factors considered to be indicators of higher risk. Proposed risk mitigation and/or research methodology involves novel approaches, heightened residual risk etc.	Assessment by the relevant School Ethics Committee. SEC may seek advice from the University Ethics Committee prior to final decision.

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Application Outcomes and Timeline

The time taken for review will depend on staff availability to act as reviewers, the risk category of the application, and the complexity of the application including relevant supporting materials. The review process should not normally exceed 1) one working week for fast track/approval in principle 2) two weeks for low-risk projects and 3) two-three weeks for high-risk projects. Undergraduate dissertations that are high risk may take longer to review.

The Ethics Committee is obligated to ensuring an efficient review process, while adhering to ethical standards. The School Ethics Committee Chair (or nominated Deputy) will screen and distribute applications to independent peer reviewers. The number of reviewers will depend on the level of risk.

¹ For category 1, ethical scrutiny is required, but NOT necessarily an application through the ERM

Approval in Principle and Fast Track applications for staff members will be reviewed by at least; the Chair and one appropriate peer reviewer. Low-risk staff and student projects (category 2 risk) will be given a “light touch” review by 2 peer reviewers. High-risk projects (category 3a and 3b) will be reviewed by at least the Chair/Depute Chair and two peer reviewers from the School’s Ethics Committee reviewer pool

Retrospective ethics review i.e. requests to approve research that has already taken place is not permitted if the programme has not been given programme pre approval.

The reviewers of ethics applications

All academic staff may be called upon to act as reviewers for the ESS Ethics Committee. Reviews are allocated based on academic discipline or methodological expertise. Reviewers would usually come from the same division but occasionally reviewers from another division will be called on when the subject area is in an area of the reviewer’s expertise. Information on how to review applications in the ERM are available in the ESS Ethics Moodle site.

Ethics committee decisions

Once an application has been reviewed, the Chair will email the applicant. Included in this email is one of the decisions below and may include suggestions from Committee members and Reviewers that are intended to improve the project. The Ethics committee will recommend one of the following outcomes:

- **Approved:** the project can proceed as outlined in the application
 - **Conditional Approval:** the project can proceed provided the outlined changes are made. Agreement to implement the conditions will be either compulsory or requirements met; and recommended. If compulsory, changes are required before approval is finalised.
 - **Not approved:** the project cannot be approved as more information is required. The committee will ask for compulsory changes/update in application information.
- Approval in principle:** Information on how to gain approval in principle which may be necessary for funding applications. Please email the Chair and vice chair of the Committee here jain.mcphee@uws.ac.uk; ross.campbell@uws.ac.uk

Modular or Programmatic Approval

There are a range of UG and PG programmes that are in principle pre-approved, that is these research projects regularly occur as part of a placement, and the student is not engaging in category 3 research (See risk table).

Programme Leader and Module coordinators may apply to the Committee for modular or programme approval for low risk applications.

We require annual modular or programmatic ethical approval to be sought and granted before any student embarks on an embedded education experience. The application should be submitted by the programme leader or assigned supervisor for process 2 or 3a approval by using the on-line Ethics Research Management software (<https://uws.forms.ethicalreviewmanager.com/Account/Login>). The application should be submitted alongside any appropriate supporting documentation (e.g. PIS, Consent sheet, Debrief, Gatekeeper, or services agreement letters etc.). The application will be reviewed by the programme board and the School Ethics Committee Chair or nominated Depute.

These applications from our colleagues for programme or modular approval will be reviewed by the ESS committee, and the onus will be on supervisors to ensure that UWS ethical principles are adhered to prior to completing the application and signing off student applications.

As an example, the ESS taught programme portfolio and the professional qualifying Honours degree for the division of Education, includes educational experiences that require students to act as researchers and to collect data from human participants while acquiring graduate attributes, and may have pre -approval.

Making changes in 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 ethical 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. The proposed changes will be considered, usually by the original team of reviewers, and a recommendation will be made. (See page 23 of the applicant user guide in Moodle)

Complaints

A complaint about an application or applicant will be investigated by the UWS Ethics Committee and the Chair and Vice Chair of the ESS Committee, who will report to the Dean of School.

Ethics Appeals Procedure²

The UWS Code of Ethics establishes the University's approach to raising the ethical awareness of staff and students, and ensuring that all that we do is underpinned by global and future-focussed principles of fairness and opportunity.³ We have responsibilities as a University to maintain the highest ethical standards in research and scholarship: we are committed to ensuring a culture of honesty, rigour, transparency and respect.⁴ As part of this commitment, UWS has established a procedure to allow appeals against the decisions of the School Ethics Committees.

Grounds for Appeal

An applicant may appeal the decision of any School Ethics Committee. Appeal of a decision of Approval with Conditions or Not Approved may be made on the following grounds:

A key component of our Ethics framework is that the review of an application is proportionate to the "risk" the project poses. If an applicant believes this is not the case an appeal of a decision may be made on the grounds that evidence was not fully and properly considered.

Dissatisfaction with the decision of a School Ethics Committee *alone* is not sufficient grounds for appeal.

The applicant would be expected to have discussed the decision with the Chair of the Ethics Committee that reviewed the original application before proceeding with an appeal.

Appeal Procedure

The Appeal should be submitted via the ERM within 10 working days of receiving the Committee's decision. The grounds for the appeal should be clearly stated.

Initial Scrutiny of appeal

The Chair of the University Ethics Committee will nominate two members of the University Ethics Committee, who are not members of the School of the appellant and did not participate as reviewers of the original application, to undertake an initial scrutiny of the appeal (determine if there is a prima facie case). This will normally take place within 5 working days. The outcome of this scrutiny will be communicated to the Chair of the University Ethics Committee in the form of a short report. This report will form part of the evidence for the appeal panel.

If, after initial scrutiny, it is unanimously deemed that there are no valid grounds to appeal, then the appellant will be informed that the appeal has been rejected and the reasons for the rejection.

² Approved at UEC 30th October 2019

³ UWS Code of Ethics

⁴ Guidelines for Ethical Practice in Research and Scholarship

If one opinion is that there is a case for upholding the appeal, the applicant will be informed of the outcome and the outcome will be reported to the Chair of the University Ethics Committee and an Appeal Panel will be convened to consider the application further.

The Chair of UEC will appoint a chair of the Appeal panel supported by the Secretary to UEC, the Appeal Panel will consist of two members of academic staff who have experience in ethics review but were not involved in the original review process or the initial scrutiny. The Chair may request other members of staff, including the Chair of the original initial scrutiny panel to provide context, depending on the circumstances and required expertise. The appellant will be invited to present information to the Appeal Panel.

Appeal Outcome

The outcome of the hearing of the Appeal Panel can include one of the following:

- **Appeal upheld:** the project is referred back to the School Ethics Committee with recommendations for further review and decision; or
- **Appeal not upheld:** the original decision of the School Ethics Committee stands.

The appellant will be informed of the outcome of Appeal Panel by the Chair of the University Ethics Committee within five working days of the hearing.

The outcome will be reported to the ESS School Ethics Committee and the UEC.