

School of Computing, Engineering & Physical Sciences

Ethical Approval Processes

Named Contact

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Introduction

Ethical consideration is a prerequisite for all research conducted by staff and students at UWS, at all levels from modules in taught programmes to doctoral and externally or internally funded research projects, of any scale. The principles applied by the university are included in the [Guidelines for Ethical Practice in Research and Scholarship](#) which can be viewed and downloaded from the *Research* section of our *Policies, Procedures and Guidance* webpage: <https://www.uws.ac.uk/about-uws/policies-procedures-guidance/#research>. This document should be referred to for principles, definitions and specification of the remit of the school ethics committees. The university also has a [Code of Ethics](#) (which can also be viewed and downloaded from the *Research* section of our *Policies, Procedures and Guidance* webpage: <https://www.uws.ac.uk/about-uws/policies-procedures-guidance/#research>) that further outlines the UWS's principles and its approach to raising awareness and the process of ethical approval for research projects.

Research Requiring Ethical Scrutiny

Ethical considerations, though applicable to all research activity, are obligatory where projects involve the use of animals, human subjects or participants, or/and the collection and manipulation of normally confidential data (including *personal data*), that is not freely available in the public domain, and any perceived risk to the investigator. All projects that fall into these categories, from low to high risk require ethical review. Research projects should be designed to manage or mitigate potential harm in these categories, and always to ensure participation is on the basis of informed consent.

The process outlined in this document is applicable to all research projects in the School of Computing, Engineering and Physical Sciences.

Oversight of ethics within the School

Ethical issues in research are overseen within the School by the Academic Integrity and Ethics Committee (SAIEC), the membership of which is listed at the end of this document. This committee reports to both the School Board, and to the University's Academic Integrity and Ethics Committee (UAIEC), where the Chair(s) is/are members. Both of these committees directly report to Senate. This emphasises the integral role of ethical governance and practice within the University. The SAIEC can approve all projects within the School, including those deemed as high risk, but may also refer to the UAIEC for advice on approval of requests.

However, responsibility for ethical research lies with all staff and students in the school. All academic staff may be called upon to peer-review applications for ethical approval.

Process for Project Approval

All staff and students embarking on a research project should first be aware of the University's guidelines and the principles contained therein, as mentioned above, and approach the evaluation of their research activity also bearing in mind the following:

- The need for research integrity in terms of methodological approach; e.g. is the method sufficiently rigorous, are sample sizes sufficient, will the methods meet the aims?
- Are participants required to achieve the research aims? What type of participants are they, and are any from vulnerable or protected groups that need special consideration in research methodologies? Is there a risk of causing harm, and could the sample selection bias the results?
- The need for safeguarding of data collection and use. Particularly for data that are not in the public domain. Will all applicable regulation be adhered to (e.g. GDPR)?

Applications for approval where needed should be developed carefully in advance of application and involve where appropriate students and supervisors and research teams. The process for approval is the same for all projects, making use of the online Ethical Review Manager System (see the *How is approval sought?* Section below).

Applications for approval should, depending on the research design and the adopted methodology, include details of (not a comprehensive list):

- how participants or data are to be selected,
- how informed consent is to be sought (project information sheets relevant to participation in the project and itemised consent forms for signing by participants),
- proposed survey and/or interview questionnaires and questions,
- procedures, experiments, and/or participatory activities (e.g. testing software, VR environments) that participants will experience,
- arrangements for maintaining anonymity of participants in project output
- arrangements for storing data used or derived from the research securely

What needs to be approved?

All research projects and other scholarly activity (including module-level activities) that involve the use of humans, animals, data and/or risk to the investigator. This *may* include School-based research projects where staff and student experience and attitudes (e.g. use of technology, equality) are gathered to inform best practice and policy development within the School and University, if the intention is to present or publish the results. If the intention is only for quality improvement then it is not a requirement. However, to encourage good practice the SAICE welcomes approaches from researchers for informal discussion on the need or otherwise for approval for work within the school. If an application is made for such an exercise, it will be considered in the normal way. If in doubt researchers are encouraged to ask.

How is approval sought?

Approvals of applications for ethical approval must be made using the online Ethical Review Manager system:

<https://uws.forms.ethicalreviewmanager.com>.

Gaining access only requires users to log in using their normal UWS system details. On the first attempt this will prompt the system to register the user. There may be a delay whilst full access is allowed- please be prepared for this and to log in a second time to start your application.

Training and documentation on the use of the system is at the time of writing unavailable online. Please contact the Chair(s) of the SAIEC for advice. However, the applicant's user guide is available to download (pdf) from this link:

<https://www.uws.ac.uk/about-uws/a-21st-century-university/university-ethics/>

During the process of completing an application using the forms on the Ethical Review Manager system, copies of supporting documents (consent forms, information sheets, questionnaires, letters of support from participating organisations etc) should be uploaded.

For **student** projects a countersignature from a staff member, *usually* the project supervisor, is required.

Once an application is submitted the SAIEC Chair(s) assess the application's readiness for review and then can assign it to one or more members of academic staff for review. The Chair can also return the application to an applicant if they deem it to be insufficiently well developed for review. Reviewers comment on the proposal and make a recommendation which the Chair(s) communicate to the applicant.

Decisions include approval (project can go ahead), conditional approval (can go ahead as long as suggested changes are implemented), do not approve (project does not fulfil ethical requirements), resubmission (proposal requires changes to be made before approval) or the submission can be withdrawn.

Appeals to decisions.

Appeals against the decision of the SAIEC can be made in accordance with the University Appeals Procedure, and on the grounds specified therein. Please check current AIEC processes. An appeal can be made via the ERM system.

What are the consequences of not seeking approval?

Retrospective ethical scrutiny and approval of research is itself inconsistent with ethical principles. If a project goes ahead without prior ethical approval, that would normally require approval, this is a serious issue, notwithstanding the potential for harm to participants or the misuse of data and the potential for damage to the University's reputation. In the context of student work the consequence will be the exclusion of the part of the work that should have received ethical approval in consideration for assessment (i.e. the work will be assessed disregarding the results that required but did not have ethical approval) and depending on circumstances and the outcome (e.g. reputational damage), could result in disciplinary procedures. This includes dissertation work up to Doctoral level. For staff research projects,

depending on the specific circumstances, similar consequences apply, up to the possibility of disciplinary action. Decisions on courses of action will normally be referred to the Chair of the UAIEC and the Dean of School.

School of Computing, Engineering & Physical Sciences
Membership of Academic Integrity and Ethics Committee
(August 2023)

Committee Leadership

Dr John Hughes, Chair
Dr Daune West, Vice-Chair
Professor John Smith, School Research Lead

Divisional representatives:

Computing

Dr Santiago Matalonga

Engineering & Physical Sciences

Dr Nara Singh Bondili
Professor Andrew Hursthouse
Dr Bassam Rakhshani
Dr Wenzhong Zhu

Other

Safeguarding:	<i>tbc</i>
Other Schools or Services (x2):	Dr Gary Boyd, <i>tbc</i>
Student taught programmes:	<i>tbc</i>
Student PGR:	<i>tbc</i>
Lay member:	<i>tbc</i>
Co-opted member(s):	Professor Naeem Ramzan
Administrative Support:	Ms Ally Adamson