

# Research: Ethical Approval Policy

## 1. Purpose

University of Essex Online (UoEO) is aware of its responsibility for ensuring that new researchers (i.e., UoEO students) conducting research, including research involving human participants comply with all legal requirements and understand and follow good ethical practice in relation to the design of their research. This includes maintaining the integrity and quality of the research, safeguarding the rights of the participant, including the right to confidentiality and obtaining voluntary informed consent free from any coercion. Researchers have responsibility in securing data in relation to the research and managing any potential risk factors, particularly in relation to vulnerable participants. The academic team are responsible for the provision of appropriate advice and guidance in relation to undergraduate and postgraduate research practice and for ensuring that principles and practice of obtaining ethical UoEO guidelines and supervisory arrangements for all students are followed. This policy is a statement of the principles and practices that govern the process of gaining ethical approval for research.

## 2. Guidance for Ethical Approval

Each programme area has its own specific guidance regarding ethical research considerations, which can be found on the Learning Platform. This includes guidance from associations governing research in particular subject areas, for example British Psychological Society (BPS) research guidelines and the British Educational Research Association guidelines (BERA). Relevant UK legislation including the Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation 2018 also need to be considered.

In programme areas, for example Criminology, where research could relate to topics that involve material of a sensitive nature, the researcher should be aware that if the topic is not deemed as suitable, safe, or feasible by their tutor, the Head of Department, or the Ethical Approval Panel, then they will be required to select a new topic. The researcher must consult the programme area concerned for specific guidance on the ethical process.

Please note that ethical approval is required before any research can take place. This includes any external ethical approval, which the student has responsibility of obtaining prior to applying for approval from the UoEO. Please be advised that external ethical approval must be granted before you submit your ethical approval application to the UoEO, and this can take a considerable period of time to obtain.

**Any student** planning to undertake a research project as part of a UoEO course must apply for ethical approval by completing an ethical approval form (see 3.1) and any other documents required, details of which can be found in specific course documentation in the departmental pages of the Learning Platform. In the instance of a research proposal changing significantly from the original approved proposal, then the student, in consultation with the supervisor, may need to seek new ethical approval.

No research should be undertaken until all research materials have been reviewed and authorised under the Ethical Approval process. Failure to comply with the ethics approval policy will be grounds for potentially very serious action to be taken under the University's Academic Offences Procedures. This means you cannot undertake your research without obtaining ethical approval.

### 3. Ethical Approval Application

To complete your ethical approval application, you will be required to follow the module guidance on ethics in your programme area to ensure that you have engaged with the relevant module content prior to submitting your application. It is expected that you tailor the information you provide to meet the requirements of your area of study. This includes adapting all research materials, information sheets and consent forms to address any ethical issues that may arise in your project. You should consider the ethical issues that may arise from using different methods of collecting data, for example in recordings of face-to-face interviews, or online research and be able to demonstrate how you have managed any risk related to these. It is advisable that you follow individual module guidance on when to complete your ethical approval application.

Research students in all programme areas will be required, as a minimum to submit details of:

- External approval documents (if required)
- A participant information sheet/letter
- A consent form, if applicable

- Research proposal including any particular ethical issues associated with the research, if applicable
- Any other documents required by the specific programme area, if applicable

## 4. Responsibility for Approval

1. Ethical approval applications will usually be considered by module tutors under delegation from the Head of Department. Ethical approval applications needing further consideration will be considered by Heads of Department. Your Head of Department may determine that due to the nature of your application, it requires consideration by an Ethical Approval Panel as detailed in point 2 below.
2. Any applications that require further discussion will be deliberated by an Ethical Approval Panel, which can be convened at any time and can be virtual or in person. The Ethical Approval Panel would usually consist of the Deputy Academic Director, Head of the Academic Department and two other academic staff to be nominated by the Deputy Academic Director. The student and the module tutor will normally be notified of the decision within 5 working days of the Ethical Approval Panel meeting.
3. Students will be informed of the Ethical Approval Panel decision in reference to one of the following outcomes:

**Approved** - The Panel is satisfied that the proposed study does not raise any ethical issues that cannot be suitably managed.

**Approved with conditions** -The Panel require minor amendments that need approval by the module tutor/Head of Department.

**Resubmission** - (a) The Panel requires major amendments, which need to be resubmitted to the Panel for approval- or (b) the Panel requests that further information is supplied, or that the quality of such information is improved in order for the panel to make a decision.

**Rejected** - The Panel rejects on the grounds of the proposed research posing specific risks or being unsafe, unsuitable or unfeasible. In these circumstances a re-design of the research will be necessary, and a new ethical approval application required.

## 5. Appealing a Decision of the Ethics Approval Panel

Where a student wishes to appeal the decision of an Ethics Approval Panel, they may do so on the following grounds:

1. There was a procedural error in the ethical approval process which would have affected the decision made by the Panel, and have caused doubt as to whether the Panel would have reached the same decision had the irregularities not occurred.
2. There is demonstrable evidence of bias, prejudice or an inadequate review of the information.

The appeal must be submitted in writing to the Chair of the Ethical Approval Panel within 5 working days of receipt of the outcome, clearly stating which of the above grounds apply and providing evidence.

The Chair may take one of the following actions:

1. Uphold the appeal and reconvene the Ethics Approval Panel to reconsider the research application.
2. Uphold the original decision and dismiss the appeal.

The Chair's decision is final and will be communicated to the student within 15 working days of receipt of the appeal.

Responsible Manager	Name	Date approved	Related Policies
Deputy Academic Director	Dr Claire Ketnor	August 2025	<u>Postgraduate Taught</u> <u>Dissertation Extension Policy</u>