Guidelines: Seeking ethical review

Most research projects carried out at the University of Cambridge will involve no ethical issues, whereas some will raise significant ethical questions. All researchers should consider whether their research will raise ethical issues and in cases of doubt should, in the first instance, seek advice at a local level:

- **Where the researcher is an undergraduate or postgraduate student**: the project should be submitted to the student’s supervisor or mentor for advice.
- **Where the researcher is a University employee, or any other person conducting research on University premises**: advice should be sought from the local ethics committee/contact or Head of the Department in which the research will be carried out.

In many cases advice and, where necessary, review will be able to be provided locally. Where this is not possible, local ethics committees/contacts or the Head of Department will be able to advise researchers on how to proceed. The following flowchart, however, provides guidelines on where to seek ethical review, to supplement local expertise.

Does the proposal fall under the Research Governance Framework for Health and Social Care (RGFHSC)?

- Yes
  - Most research under the Research Governance Framework for Health and Social Care will require NRES ethical review. Please contact the Clinical School Governance Officer for advice.

- No
  - Does the proposal involve intrusive procedures with adults who lack capacity to consent for themselves or health-related research involving prisoners?
    - No
      - Does the proposal involve work with human tissues? (for guidance on what classes as human tissue see the University’s HTA FAQs).
        - No
          - Does the proposal involve animals in experimental or other scientific procedures, including field based research?
            - No

    - Yes
      - Human tissues from NHS patients require NRES ethics approval. In all other cases research using human tissues is subject to the Human Tissues Act 2004 and requires ethical review from the University’s Human Biology or Psychology Committees. Some exceptions exist (e.g. anonymised donated samples from the National Blood Service). If you are storing tissue in a facility that is not covered by the University’s Human Tissue licence, you must either seek NRES approval or register the new facilities under the Act. For further guidance, see: [http://www.path.cam.ac.uk/administration/policies-and-procedures/human-tissue-act.html](http://www.path.cam.ac.uk/administration/policies-and-procedures/human-tissue-act.html)

- Yes
  - The Animals Scientific Procedures Act 1986 (As Amended 2012) regulates any experimental, or other scientific procedure applied to any vertebrate other than man. Please contact the Named Animal Care Welfare Officer in the animal unit in which you wish to work. In the case of Clinical Veterinary Research the Veterinary Clinical Research Ethics Committee will consider these applications and will advise the University Establishment Licence Holder.
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<th>Question</th>
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<td>Does the proposal involve human biology, or experimental human psychology, that falls outside the RGFHSC?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Appropriate review will be required. If this is not possible at a local level, such proposals should be referred to the Human Biology Research Ethics Committee or the Psychology Research Ethics Committee. Please see their respective remits for further details.</td>
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<td>No</td>
<td>Such proposals will not normally require ethical review. Advice should be sought in cases of doubt.</td>
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| Does the proposal involve human participants, or personal data in any way? (This includes secondary data e.g. existing survey data, interview transcripts). Be aware that some research involving personal data will come under the RGFHSC. | Yes    | Appropriate review will be required. Proposals should be submitted in the first instance to the Principal Investigator's Departmental review procedure, where available, which may be able to provide appropriate review. Expedited review (e.g. by Head of Department) will usually not be sufficient for proposals which involve any of the criteria below. In all cases please check that NRES review is not required.  
  - vulnerable people (e.g. children, older people)  
  - “gate-keeper” communities (where authority is required to conduct the study – e.g. school, residential care, prison)  
  - “dependent” subjects / people less able to refuse consent (e.g. researcher’s students)  
  - use of drugs, placebos, foods  
  - sensitive topics (e.g. sex, drugs, abuse, sexuality)  
  - subjects involved in illegal acts  
  - potential to cause pain, discomfort, stress, anxiety, or heighten risk of harm to subject  
  - heightened risk of uncovering traumatic memory during study  
  - financial inducements  
  - audio and/or visual recording  
  - study of individuals without their prior knowledge and consent  
  - experiments or other data collection involving deception  
  - research that may expose participants to a risk of legal or disciplinary action.  
|                                                                           | No     | If the proposal involves analysis of secondary data, ethical review may still be required. Examples of such cases include:  
  - Use of data which has not been anonymised (including any record showing date of birth)  
  - Use of anonymised data which could be combined with other data, causing subjects to be identifiable  
  - Research of data whose outcome has implications for an identifiable class of people e.g.  
    - genealogy of war criminals  
    - estimating genetic potential for disease in an identifiable class of living people  
  If the proposal involves NHS data (even if anonymised) it may require NRES review. Contact your Local or School Ethics contact or committee for advice and, if needed, appropriate review. The Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee requires researchers in Departments which use their Committee to refer any project reusing personal data directly to the HSS REC.  
|                                                                           |        | If Departmental procedure cannot provide an appropriate degree of review, proposals may be submitted to the Human Biology REC, Psychology REC or the Humanities and Social Sciences REC. Departments within the School of Technology may also approach the School of Technology Ethics Committee for advice and review. See their respective terms of reference to determine which is most appropriate. If these Committees cannot provide appropriate review, they will refer your proposal to the University Research Ethics Committee.  

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