

University of Bristol Ethics in Teaching

The University is concerned to protect the rights, dignity, health, safety and privacy of staff and students, the welfare of animals and the integrity of the environment. It is also concerned, through its system of research ethics committees, to protect the academic freedom of researchers, and to ensure that staff, students and others involved in research and teaching undertake that work to the highest ethical standards.

1. Current ethical review processes

In maintaining the highest standards of teaching, learning and assessment we endeavour to ensure the academic integrity of our taught and research programmes. At present we have School and Faculty Research Ethics Committees which report to the University Ethics of Research Committee (a Joint Committee of Senate and Council). These committees have highlighted the need to address ethical issues in teaching activities. Given the ever expanding practice of research-led teaching, and its potential for affecting attainment, it seems timely to consider the need for ethics assessment of teaching activities.

2. The promotion of ethics in teaching

The University aims to promote ethical behaviour, attitudes and judgements in students through its teaching by:

- being mindful of the need for protection of the public
- expressing clear ethical principles, values and standards
- promoting such standards by education and consultation
- developing and implementing methods to help students to monitor their professional behaviour and attitudes
- assisting students with ethical decision making, and
- providing opportunities for discourse on these issues.

3. Areas for consideration in relation to teaching methodology and ethics

Some areas of teaching which seem at present not to be regularly submitted for ethical review include:

- (i) exercises with fellow students or class mates
- (ii) experimenting with innovative teaching or assessment methods where control groups or subsets of students are used
- (iii) involving other external groups (particularly children and vulnerable adults);
- (iv) where there may be health and safety implications, particularly putting the student at risk or others
- (v) where the student may become emotionally involved

Similarly, postgraduate research supervisors should ensure research undertaken by students for dissertations and theses should be reviewed for ethical purposes by the relevant Faculty Research Ethics Committee, if identified as having potential ethical issues, in the same way they do for their own research activities. Additionally, in some instances researchers may involve students in a research process and this may have ethical

implications and in which case staff must ensure they meet the University policy and procedures for research ethics. *Annex A provides additional examples.*

In deciding what requires ethical approval, we should be aware that anything that has the potential to advantage or disadvantage participants (eg: students) might need to be discussed in collaboration with the Faculty Research Ethics Officer.

4. Review of ethical issues in relation to teaching

We consider there are two areas of activity that now need to take place. First it is necessary to raise the profile of ethical issues in relation to teaching. Second there is a need to establish a process to review proposals for changes in teaching and assessment which may have ethical implications.

Firstly, the University will take the opportunity to raise and discuss such ideas in the following ways:

- a) in the development of new programmes and units
- b) during Faculty Quality Assurance and Enhancement Team visits
- c) as part of the Annual Programme Review (APR) analysis and reporting

Second, the University's established system of School and Faculty Research Ethics Committees are best placed within schools and faculties to understand the ethical issues in relation to research and it would be helpful to work in collaboration with FRECs in relation to ethics issues in teaching within specific disciplines and subject areas.

It is proposed that for a trial period:

- schools and faculties should ask that all proposal for change in teaching and assessment which are perceived to have potential ethics issues, should be sent to the relevant Faculty Research Ethics Officer so that the extent of the issue can be reviewed;
- faculties identify in their annual report to the University Ethics of Research Committee any specific teaching related ethical issues that have been raised;
- an overview report pulling together faculty teaching ethical issues will be submitted to the University Education Committee at the end of the trial period.

Other resources:

University of Bristol Research Ethics

<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/red/research-governance/ethics/>

Approaches to Ethics in Higher Education Learning and Teaching in Ethics across the Curriculum.

http://www.basr.ac.uk/trs_resources/pubs_and_resources/projects/ethics/ethics_across_curriculum.pdf

ESRC framework for research ethics (updated January 2015)

http://www.esrc.ac.uk/_images/framework-for-research-ethics_tcm8-33470.pdf

Examples of Student related activities that might require ethical consideration

Virtually all research will have ethical implications, however there are some areas of teaching that may also raise ethical issues. In the following example areas, the expectation would be that the supervisor/programme director would assume responsibility and oversee the students' involvement.

Students acting as investigators

The academic supervisor should clearly explain to students the requirements and implications of their investigations and the necessity to treat any results with the strictest confidence

If untoward results are obtained, the investigator should report the matter as soon as possible to their academic supervisor, who will take appropriate action.

Use of questionnaires and testing within and outside the University

A copy of the questionnaire/test should be submitted to the ethical committee if it may be of a personal or intimate nature.

The purpose of the questionnaire/test shall be clearly defined and clearly explained to participants, including clear guidance regarding terminating any commitment with the questioning/test;

When the participant is a student, it must be made clear if this in any way contributes to the content of the programme or assessment for that student;

The information shall remain confidential and anonymous, unless a signed consent form agreeing to wider distribution has been obtained.

Consideration of how to determine what is relevant re student activities related to small scale research projects may also be useful.