

SCHOOL FOR POLICY STUDIES
RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
ETHICS PROCEDURES
January 2019

1. **The School for Policy Studies has different procedures for the ethical review of research conducted by:**

- **Undergraduates and Masters level students**
- **Doctoral level students**
- **Staff**

(a) Undergraduate//Masters Level Students

- All undergraduate and masters level students, prior to commencing fieldwork, should ensure they get ethical approval. The process for this differs on each programme. However, dissertation convenors or programme directors will provide you with programme specific details of the process, we also recommend you attend any ethics lectures given on your course which will likely include guidance on how to conduct ethical research and what the procedure on your course is.

(b) Doctoral Level Students

- All doctoral students, including those on MPhil/PhD and taught doctorates should apply for research ethical approval **before** starting fieldwork.
- This will either be through NHS research ethics process (NRES), or through the provision provided within the School.
- Applicants should complete the relevant ethics form available on the SPS website.
- Doctoral students should discuss their ethics application with their supervisors and confirm on the form that their supervisors have seen and approved the final version of the ethics application.
- Once completed, the ethics form along with any additional supporting materials should be submitted directly by the applicant, as a **single Word document**, to the Research Ethics Committee by email to spsethics@bristol.ac.uk
- Students should ensure that this material arrives by the deadline for the upcoming meetings. The submitted material is then distributed to members of the committee by email and discussed at the next Research Ethics Committee (REC) meeting.
- Any recommendations or suggestions are communicated with the applicant as soon as possible after that meeting.
- Once any issues have been resolved the applicant will receive an email from the Chair giving ethical approval from the SPS REC. If you require a formal letter of approval, please contact the REC administrator by email.

(c) Staff

- All staff should apply for research ethical approval **before** starting a new project. This will either be through NHS research ethics process, through the provision provided within the School of Faculty, or through the Research Ethics Committee of a partner organisation.
- Applicants should complete the relevant ethics form available on the SPS website.
- Ethical review will normally be conducted at departmental level first. However, all ESRC funded proposals (except PhD scholarships) will require review by the [Faculty of Social Sciences & Law ethics committee](#). Applications can be made using the online process (see <https://dbms.irlt.bris.ac.uk/red/ethics-online-tool/applications>).

- If you are submitting your study for consideration at an NHS or other external Research Ethics Committee, please complete the first section of the application form and forward to the committee administrator. We will need a copy of the letter from the relevant Research Ethics Committee when this is available.
- The form along with any additional supporting materials (for example: participants information sheet; consent forms; researcher safety protocols; or confidentiality protocol) should be submitted directly by the applicant, as a **single Word document**, to the Research Ethics Committee by email to sps-ethics@bristol.ac.uk
- Applications from staff will be considered at the scheduled committee meetings. Application forms and supporting documentation should be submitted 2 weeks prior to the meeting and feedback will be communicated within 7 working days of the meeting. Those requesting ethical approval outside of the meeting dates should email sps-ethics@bristol.ac.uk at the earliest opportunity.
- Once any issues have been resolved the applicant will receive an email from the Chair giving ethical approval from the REC. If you require a formal letter of approval, please contact the REC administrator by email.
- A copy of the approval letter is sent to RED to ensure that their records are up to date. This sometimes results in the applicant being contacted by RED if they haven't already completed the University's governance requirements.
- If you are conducting a large multi-site research project you may be directed to seek Research Ethics approval from the Faculty Research Ethics Committee. If you are unsure, please discuss with the Chair of the School committee before completing the form.

2. Composition of the Research Ethics Committee

The SPS REC consists of representatives from the seven research centres in the School plus representation from postgraduate students. Each member is expected to comment on the REC applications they receive and to attend the REC meetings which take place approximately every 6 weeks. Each member of academic staff sitting on the committee has a term of office of 4 years with the option to extend for a further 2 years if necessary. There would be an expectations that they would play the role of Chair at an appropriate point near to the end of their term of office. Post-graduate student representatives would sit on the committee for two years. The role of Data Protection Officer is an on-going position. The Data Protection Officer can also be their centre representative.

3. Frequently Made Mistakes

- Copying large sections of a research proposal on to the ethics form. A succinct, coherent summary is required. Please keep within the word limit.
- Information sheets that:
 - are not very clear in describing what the project is actually about, what is expected of the participant and what the researcher/s' responsibilities are.
 - include wording/pictures (such as smiley faces) that are overly positive regarding taking part in the research rather than an objective presentation of the details of the research.
 - include personal rather than professional mobile numbers.
 - do not include a final date for the withdrawal of data by participants.
 - do not state that the data may be used in publications.
 - do not state how the data will be protected or managed.
 - do not state approval has been provided by the SPS REC at the University of Bristol.
 - do not have supervisor/PI/colleagues contact details for any complaints about poor research practice.
- Consent forms do not specifically include all of the different aspects of the project that require specific consent, such as digital recording and understanding that the data will be stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act.
- If using photo elicitation, the ethics form often does not consider the impact of the participant using a camera in the proposed research setting and how this may mark them out as different/taking part in the research project.
- If using photo elicitation, pictures should not be taken of people without consent. Pictures should be taken of an object (such as bag/desk where the person sits) to remind the photographer of the person.
- Not including all of the documentation mentioned in the application is submitted.

- Students not discussing their forms with their supervisor prior to submission to the REC.

4. Additional Material

The SPS REC has provided examples of existing materials for staff and students to use in order to assist them in the preparation of their own materials. Whilst these templates might be useful, applicants should ensure that the materials they provide address the ethical issues which are specific to their research.

Material	Information to include
Consent form(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Should be age and ability appropriate ➤ Participants has read/understood the participant information sheet (PIS) ➤ They are happy to take part ➤ Understand the research is confidential and any limits to confidentiality are made clear ➤ Can withdraw from the research (we suggest that you allow a 'cooling' off period during which participants can withdraw their data and make it clear on the consent information when this period ends. If you do not specify a time limit, participants withdraw 2 days before submission of report/thesis, and this would be problematic) ➤ Are happy for interviews to be digitally recorded or notes taken. ➤ That the data will be anonymised (identifying features removed) ➤ How the data will be used? ➤ How data is stored and managed and whether it will be available to other researchers.
Participant Information Sheet (PIS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Should be age and ability appropriate ➤ What is the purpose of the study? ➤ Why have I been chosen? ➤ What will happen if I take part? ➤ What will happen if I don't take part? ➤ How the data will be anonymised. ➤ Limits of confidentiality ➤ What will my information be used for? ➤ Further contact details (this should not be the Chair of the REC)
Adverts for recruitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ It may be necessary to provide information on how you intend to advertise for participants. This should provide enough information for you to target the relevant participants.
Research safety protocol	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Where possible, interviews with individuals should be conducted in a safe place such as a service or within the university. It may be appropriate to speak to people in a public place, such as a café, but this depends on the research questions. Researchers may have to conduct research in participant's homes but this should be avoided if possible. Where this option is appropriate you should consider whether 2 people should attend each interview. It is important for you to consider your own safety as a researcher and it may be necessary to produce a researcher safety protocol. This will include information about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Who knows about your whereabouts – considering issues of confidentiality; ➤ How you will communicate that you are safe or NOT safe to an identified contact? ➤ How you will get to and from an interview? ➤ That you have a mobile phone to call for help if required. ➤ What will happen in an emergency?
Confidentiality Protocol	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ This will be more important for those research topics which might result in participants talking about issues where confidentiality might need to be broken. Whilst you have a responsibility to uphold the confidentiality of your interviews there may be occasions when you also have a duty to warn about harm to the participant or to others. This

Material	Information to include
	<p>should be considered prior to the research and a procedure put in place. In most cases this procedure would involve the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Ensure that participants are aware that there are limits to confidentiality; ➤ That you will discuss any issues which arise with your research supervisor/colleagues as soon as possible after an incident; ➤ That your supervisor or the project PI is in a position to make a decision about whether confidentiality needs to be broken; ➤ That you would then communicate with the participant should you feel it is necessary to break their confidence.
3rd party confidentiality agreement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Confidentiality statement which might be used when using a transcriber or interpreter to ensure that they will adhere to principles of confidentiality. This may be needed if using other co-researchers such as focus group co-facilitator.
Photo Methods PIS and consent forms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ If you are using photo methods then there are additional considerations about consent to use visual images. You should take the University data protection tutorial to ensure that you get appropriate consent and store the data appropriately. We highly recommend that you look at previous examples of PIS and consent forms prior to designing your own.
Support for participants after the researcher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ If may be necessary to give participants information about support available to them at the end of an interview or focus group. ➤ This should be relevant to the topic you are researching. ➤ You should check that services are still running and that you have the right contact details for them.

5. Key Contacts

SPS REC Chair: Beth Tarleton (beth.tarleton@bris.ac.uk)
SPS REC Administrator: Hannah Blackman (sps-ethics@bristol.ac.uk)