

SOCIAL SCIENCES, ARTS AND HUMANITIES

PROCEDURES FOR STAFF APPLICATIONS FOR ETHICAL APPROVAL OF RESEARCH

This document is intended as a brief guide to Research Ethics Review for staff in the Social Science, Arts and Humanities. It complements full, University-wide guidelines available at <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/res/1-6-12.html>.

Ethical review now takes place online. To access the ethical review application form, please go to your Sussex Direct page and click on the 'Research' tab, where you will find a link to 'Ethical Reviews'. You will need to start a new application form by clicking on 'New'.

In 2010, the University established a revised research governance structure in order: to ensure that ethical review procedures take into account: best practice with regard to ethical considerations in research; to meet all legislative, regulatory, and funder requirements; and to safeguard the reputation of the University. There are now two Cross-School Research Ethics Committees (C-RECs), one for Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities and one for Sciences and Technology, alongside a third Ethics Committee for the Brighton and Sussex Medical School.

The Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities C-REC, covers the following Schools:

- Education and Social Work
- Global Studies
- Law, Politics and Sociology
- Business, Management and Economics (including SPRU)
- History, Art History and Philosophy
- English
- Media, Film and Music

Standard Operating Procedures for Research Ethical Review now operate across the University. They cover **all research that involves human and non-human animal subjects**, which is planned and undertaken by staff or by students at doctoral, masters or undergraduate levels.¹ Research which does not involve humans or animals (for example literature based research) will not normally require any form of ethical review. The procedures are designed to maximise safeguards for those involved in research, while minimizing bureaucratic burdens.

A single online ethical review application system also operates across the University (with the exception of the Brighton Sussex Medical School which uses a form appropriate to more clinically based research). The ethical review application will normally be completed by the principal investigator (here referred to as staff member/researcher). Researchers are encouraged to treat the online ethical review application system as a live tool, to be used at the research planning stage, and at later stages, since circumstances often change.

All submissions to the Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities C-REC must be made through the University's online ethical review application system. This can be found by logging into

¹ Note: Research requiring approval by the NHS or Social Care Research Ethics Committee need not be submitted additionally to C-REC.

Sussex Direct, selecting the 'Research' tab at the top of the page, then selecting 'Ethical reviews' on the menu.

Guidelines, Standards and Procedures and Forms

Full research ethics guidelines, procedures and link to the online ethical review application form can be found on the University Research Governance website:

<http://www.sussex.ac.uk/res/1-6-12-5.html>. Please consult these carefully.

The School of Education and Social Work research ethics website

<http://www.sussex.ac.uk/esw/research/ethics> also provides links to these documents. In addition, it provides helpful information and resources in relation to designing research and considering relevant ethical aspects of research projects.

Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities C-REC

Membership of the **Social Science, Arts and Humanities C-REC** is:

Dr Stephen Shute (Chair; Law) s.c.shute@sussex.ac.uk

Dr Janet Boddy (Education and Social Work) j.m.boddy@sussex.ac.uk

Dr Odul Bozkurt (Business, Management and Economics) a.ventouri@sussex.ac.uk

Professor Andrew Chitty (Arts and Humanities) a.e.chitty@sussex.ac.uk

Ms Judi Dettmar (Lay member; member of University Research Governance Committee)

Professor James Fairhead (Global Studies) j.r.fairhead@sussex.ac.uk

Dr Debi Roker (Lay member; former Director, Young People in Focus)

Dr Susie Scott (Law, Politics and Sociology) s.scott@sussex.ac.uk

Researchers who are preparing applications for ethical review and who have queries not answered by the guidelines, standards and procedures available on the above websites, should consult the C-REC member representing their own School in the first instance.

1. OVERVIEW OF APPROVAL OF STAFF RESEARCH

All Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities staff planning to undertake research should complete the initial brief Self Assessment Checklist to determine whether or not their project requires ethical review at all.

This checklist is provided at <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/res/1-6-12.html>.

1.1 No Ethical Review Required

If completion of the Self Assessment Checklist confirms that there is no ethical risk, no submission for ethical review is required. *Typically this will apply to literature based research and research review.*

1.2 Ethical Review Required

Ethical review now takes place online. To access the ethical review application form, please go to your Sussex Direct page and click on the 'Research' tab, where you will find a link to 'Ethical Reviews'. You will need to start a new application form by clicking on 'New'.

Postgraduate research students must submit the online form to their supervisor for approval before submitting it to CREC for review.

If completion of the Self Assessment Checklist confirms that some form of ethical review is required, it must be sought. **No research project that requires ethical review may proceed without ethical approval.**

For externally funded projects, application for C-REC approval should be made when the offer of funding is received. In many cases, funders require full ethical review before an award may be confirmed. The University Research Ethical Review Standards provide guidance for cases where ethical approval by external research governance bodies is required, including procedures for governance of research in health and social care. In these cases, projects should wherever possible be subject to one review process only. For example, those submitting for NHS REC review should follow associated guidance on the University Research Governance website, and need not additionally seek C-REC approval (although Sponsorship approval will need to be sought from a C-REC).

All guidance below applies to staff research projects which do require C-REC review. All staff applying to C-REC for ethical review should begin by completing the first section of the University's online Application Form for Ethical Review. This includes a checklist that will determine whether the project is low risk or higher risk, and whether there may be an exceptional case for low risk review:

- **Low Risk Projects:** If the researcher is able to answer 'no' to all eight questions in the checklist, then the project is assumed to be low risk. The online system will present the researcher with SECTION B for low risk review.

- **Higher Risk Projects:** Those projects where the researcher has answered 'yes' to any question in the checklist are normally regarded as higher risk projects. In these cases, the online system will present the researcher with SECTION C for higher risk review by C-REC.

- **Exceptional Cases for Low Risk Review:** Question 9, Risk Assessment, of SECTION A, provides a section where a researcher can make an exceptional case for their project to be considered for low risk review, **even if they have answered 'yes' to one or more questions** in SECTION A. In such cases, if applicants put any text in the Q.9 box, the system will present PART B, for a low risk project.

*PLEASE NOTE: Exceptional grounds for low risk review apply to **the research project, not to the researcher.***

*These grounds **may apply**, for example, to research about non-sensitive topics and routine experience of children who are not in any particular way vulnerable.*

*They **do not apply** by virtue alone of the researcher's experience, familiarity and care taken to address higher risk ethical challenges (though these qualities should contribute to the success of a Higher Risk Ethics Application).*

PLEASE NOTE: If the C-REC considers that a project is still higher risk, it will be returned to the applicant and they will be asked to complete SECTION C of the online application form.

2. LOW RISK PROJECTS - C-REC LOW RISK REVIEW PROCESS

(including Exceptional Cases for Low Risk Review)

- Researchers should complete SECTION A of the online application form. If they have answered 'true' to all the statements in the checklist, they will be presented with SECTION B of the application form.
- Once researchers have completed SECTIONS A and B of the application form, and uploaded supporting documents, they will be able to submit their application by selecting the 'Social Sciences C-REC' from the drop-down box at the end of the form and clicking 'Submit for review'.
- Low risk applications from staff in all Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities member Schools will normally be made to the Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities C-REC. However, in some cases, the topic or context of the research may merit review of the application by the alternative Sciences & Technology C-REC. In this instance, researchers should select the Sciences & Technology C-REC from the drop-down box before submitting for review.
- Once an application form has been submitted, it will be checked by the C-REC's administrator to ensure that all documentation is complete, and forwarded to the Chair.
- For low risk review, the project will be reviewed by at least one C-REC member appointed by the Chair.
- The C-REC may make recommendations for amendment to the proposal/research plan accordingly. Amendments can be made using the online Application Form for Ethical Review. Approval if applicable will be notified to the researcher first by email and then with a Certificate of Approval Certificate.
- The Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities C-REC works on a monthly cycle. All submissions must be made by the 20th of the month during which they are to be reviewed; a response can be expected by the 20th of the following month. If for any reason the review is going to take longer than normal, the researcher will be notified by the latter date.
- Once the approval process has been completed, one pdf copy of the online Application Form for Ethical Review, along with the Certificate of Approval, will be lodged with the C-REC administrator. Copies should also be retained by the researcher.
- Exceptional cases for low risk review: Where researchers make an exceptional case for their project to be considered for low risk review (**even if they have answered 'yes' to a question** in SECTION A), and where C-REC accepts that case, procedures will be as for Low Risk Projects.

*PLEASE NOTE: Exceptional grounds for low risk review apply to **the research project, not to the researcher.***

*These grounds **may** occur, for example, where research is on non-sensitive topics with children who are not in any particular way vulnerable, and/or*

where the research focuses on the applicant's normal day to day, non-sensitive professional practice and setting.

*Exceptional case for low risk review **may not** be made on grounds alone of researcher's experience/familiarity/due care taken to address higher risk research ethical issues. These are qualities of the researcher not the project, and they contribute to the success of Higher Risk Ethics Applications.*

Where C-REC does not accept the case for low risk review, applicants will be invited to re-submit, completing SECTION C of the on-line Application Form for Ethical Review, and procedures will be as for full review of Higher Risk Projects.

- In exceptional cases only, applicants may request C-REC review of their proposal outside of the normal monthly review cycle. (Examples might be where research funding depends on immediate start, or due to unforeseen circumstances the window of opportunity for conducting research is exceptionally tight). Requests of this sort must be made in writing to the Chair (at the same time as the application is submitted for review), giving full justification for speedy review.

3. HIGHER RISK PROJECTS – C-REC FULL REVIEW PROCESS

- All staff proposing higher risk projects must complete SECTIONS A and C of the online application form for ethical review, and submit the form to C-REC for higher risk review. Once researchers have completed SECTIONS A and C of the application form, and uploaded supporting documents, they will be able to submit their application by selecting the 'Social Sciences C-REC' from the drop-down box at the end of the form and clicking 'Submit for review'.
- Higher risk applications from staff in all Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities member Schools will normally be made to the Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities C-REC. However, in some cases, the topic or context of the research may merit review of the application by the alternative Sciences & Technology C-REC. In this instance, applicants should select the Sciences & Technology C-REC from the drop-down box before submitting for review.
- Once an application form has been submitted, it will be checked by the C-REC's administrator to ensure that all documentation is complete, and forwarded to the Chair. The Chair will then determine whether the project will be circulated to all members of the committee, or to a quorum. This decision will depend on the complexity of the specific case, the workload of the committee, and current projects under review.
- The Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities C-REC works on a monthly cycle. All submissions must be made by the 20th of the month during which they are to be reviewed; a response can be expected by the 20th of the following month. If for any reason the review is going to take longer than normal, the researcher will be notified by the latter date.
- The C-REC may make recommendations for amendment to the proposal/research plan accordingly. Amendments can be made using the online Application Form for Ethical Review. Approval if applicable will be

notified to the researcher first by email and then with a Certificate of Approval Certificate.

- Once the approval process has been signed off appropriately, one pdf copy of the online Application Form for Ethical Review, along with the Certificate of Approval, will be lodged with the C-REC administrator. Copies should also be retained by the researcher.
- In exceptional cases only, applicants may request C-REC review of their proposal outside of the normal monthly review cycle. (Examples might be where research funding depends on immediate start, or due to unforeseen circumstances the window of opportunity for conducting research is exceptionally tight). Requests of this sort must be made in writing to the Chair (at the same time as the application is submitted for review), giving full justification for speedy review.

4. C-REC DECISIONS

- A C-REC can make three main kinds of decision:
 - (i) approve the application as it stands; or
 - (ii) require re-submission of the application with amendments and / or request missing supporting documents; or
 - (iii) reject the application.
- If the C-REC decision is (i) above, approval will initially be confirmed by an automated email followed by a Certificate of Approval signed by the Chair of the C-REC.
- If the C-REC decision is (ii) above:
 - feedback will state clearly whether minor or major revisions are required;
 - full details will be communicated to the applicant of specific revisions required for approval to be granted, and in what form they will need to submit these revisions;
 - where other changes are recommended or suggested as a matter of good practice, but are not required for ethical approval, this will be made clear;
 - amendments should be submitted through the online application system;
 - minor revisions many normally be submitted at any time and reviewed within 2 weeks of submission; major revisions must be submitted for review according to the normal monthly reviewing cycle;
 - the applicant will be notified by email once the approval has been signed off, and a Certificate of Approval signed by the Chair of the C-REC will follow.
- If the C-REC decision is (iii) above, full details will be communicated to the applicant of the major changes that need to be made if the project is to be resubmitted.
- In the unusual event that a project is rejected due to serious ethical and fundamental concerns about the project, full reasons for this decision will be provided to the applicant.

5. ALL STAFF APPLICANTS: IMPORTANT POINTS TO CONSIDER

- As a matter of good practice, ALL staff are expected to submit their proposals to colleagues within their own School for peer review (arrangements will vary according to School). This should include informal consideration of ethical issues. Where ethical challenges are present, these should be discussed and resolved as far as possible when drafting the proposal/research plan.
- As part of the process of completing the application form, staff should as a matter of good practice read at least one code of research ethical conduct from a professional association, research council or other body relevant to the proposed research project.
- Some research undertaken by Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities staff may require ethical review by external bodies, such as the Social Care Research Ethics Committee (SCREC), the NHS Research Ethics Committee (NRES), or other agencies. Staff should consult the guidance included within the Standards and Procedures on the University Research Governance website, and consult their School C-REC member as appropriate. Guidance and links for external research ethics applications is provided on the School and University research ethics websites.

6. INITIAL SELF ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST: To be completed by all researchers

***Does my research require ethical review?
A 5-question self-assessment checklist***

1.
 - a. Will the research project involve human participants, with or without their knowledge or consent at the time? (Note: 'Human participants' includes yourself if you are the main subject of the research.)
 - b. Will the research project involve non-human animal subjects?
2. Is the research project likely to expose any person, whether or not a participant, to physical or psychological harm?
3. Will you have access to personal information that allows you to identify individuals or to confidential corporate or company information?
4. Does the research project present a significant risk to the environment or society?
5. Are there any ethical issues raised by this research project that in the opinion of the Principal Investigator (PI) require further ethical review?

If you answered 'no' to all questions, you may proceed without ethical review.

If you answered 'yes' to any of the above questions, then some form of ethical review will be necessary. NOTE: RESEARCH MUST NOT COMMENCE BEFORE ETHICAL APPROVAL HAS BEEN GRANTED.

If you are uncertain please discuss with the School representative on C-REC.