# Research ethics review guidance for UG and PGT Projects
## Engineering and Informatics
## University of Sussex

This document is aimed at undergraduate (UG) and postgraduate taught (PGT) students who are undertaking research projects within the School of Engineering and Informatics.

If you are a postgraduate research student (PGR), these guidelines do not apply: please see http://www.sussex.ac.uk/staff/research/spg/researchgovernance for more details on the relevant ethical review procedures.

## Why is it important to follow ethics procedures for research projects conducted at the University of Sussex?

- To ensure that research is undertaken with the highest ethical and professional standards (e.g. voluntary participation, informed consent, 'benefit not harm');
- To protect the safety, dignity and rights of participants in research;
- To protect research staff and students;
- To ensure the research has met all of the requirements of any funders and stakeholders;
- To ensure that the research is of value to the public, who are the ultimate beneficiaries of research;
- To meet the requirements of many journals, which will not accept a paper for publication without proof of ethics approval;
- To meet the requirements for University insurance coverage;
- To ensure relevant legislative and regulatory requirements are met;
- To help protect and enhance the University's reputation by demonstrating a commitment to the highest ethical standards in research.

## What ethical procedure must I follow for my project?

Every undergraduate and postgraduate student conducting a project in Engineering and Informatics should have a discussion with their supervisor about the ethical implications of their research. This discussion should take place **early on** in the project.

Although not all projects will involve other people ('participants') in the research and/or conduct of the project, some projects will. For example, a project may involve obtaining comments about a system or design, getting information about how a system could be used, or testing and evaluating a working system. When discussing your proposed project with your supervisor, you should consider whether other people will be involved in the project, to what extent, and in what ways.

There will be three possible outcomes of this discussion: 1. No ethical review or user testing compliance form required; 2. User testing compliance form required; 3. Ethical review required. These are discussed in detail below:

1. **No ethical review or user testing compliance form required**:
   If your project **does not** involve the collection of data from human participants (and/or use of already collected data from human participants), then you will not need ethical review, nor will you and your supervisor need to sign a user testing compliance form.

2. **User test compliance form required**
   If your project **does** involve the collection of data from human participants **and** you and your supervisor can confirm that your project complies with all twelve points of the "User Testing Compliance Form for UG and PGT Projects", then you do not need ethical review. However, both you and your supervisor will need to sign the user testing compliance form and include a copy of the signed form with your project submission.

   Note that the form has been written in past tense, as you are effectively confirming, once your project has been completed, that it was conducted in a way that complied with all of the points. However, when discussing the ethical implications of your project with your supervisor, you should use the form as a checklist so that you can decide whether the research you *intend to conduct* will comply with the points in the form. If not, you are likely to require ethical review (see point 3). Furthermore, if circumstances change at any point in your project such that your research would no longer be covered by the user compliance form, then you must inform your supervisor as soon as possible.

3. **Ethical review required[1]**
   If your project does involve the collection of data from human participants but your project does not satisfy all twelve points of the "User Testing Compliance Form for UG and PGT Projects", then your project will need ethical review, either from the School Research Ethics Officer (SREO) for projects deemed to be low risk, or through the Sciences and Technology Cross-Schools Research Ethics Committee (C-REC) for high risk projects.

## What are some examples of projects that require ethical review?

- Those involving physical interventions, e.g. monitoring heart rate/vital signs or scanning a research participant (note that this type of project will require ethical review by an individual with clinical expertise[2]);
- Those which aim to test a new device and/or technology that has medical applications (note that this type of project will also require ethical review by an individual with clinical expertise[2]);
- Projects in which participants are asked to do anything riskier than their normal everyday activities or beyond their everyday activities;
- Projects involving activities that are intrinsically risky, such as driving or cycling;

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[1] Ethical review is defined as the process of submitting an ethics application to either the School Research Ethics Officer (SREO), in the case of low risk projects, or to a Cross-Schools Research Ethics Committee (C-REC), in the case of high-risk projects.

[2] This may require review by the Medical School Research Governance and Ethics Committee, if this may be the case contact the Research Governance Officer <rgoffice@sussex.ac.uk>

- Projects in which the content of the software is potentially distressing, e.g. a violent game, or sensitive, e.g. drug/alcohol use;
- Projects involving deception or the withholding of information (note that projects for which deception or information withholding are key to the research study and can be justified are subject to the outcome of ethical review);
- Projects involving populations considered to be "vulnerable", for example, children or adults with disabilities;
- Projects in which participants do not give informed consent (for example, data collected through social media such as Twitter, or involving covert observation). Again, projects in which the lack of informed consent is key to the research study and can be justified are subject to the outcome of ethical review.

Note that this list is not exhaustive; if you are unsure please discuss the issue with your supervisor and consult the Research Governance Officer <rgoffice@sussex.ac.uk> or the School Research Ethics Officer.

## Ethical review application procedure

If it has been determined that your project will require ethical review, information about the application procedure and further guidance, including templates for the consent form and information sheet, can be found here:

http://www.sussex.ac.uk/staff/research/spg/researchgovernance/apply

## A note on using/testing software or apps which are "in development" on a research participant's device

It is recommended to use the standard School disclaimer text in the information you give to research participants (whether they are known to you or not) to say that the app/program/software is not fully developed and therefore they are downloading the app/program/software at their own risk. As an alternative you can invite them to test it on University machines.

## Supervisor's checklist for ethical review

If it has been determined that a student project requires ethical review, the following checklist can be used by supervisors during the review preparation and submission process.

Note that UG and PGT ethics applications require the approval of **both** the supervisor and the SREO (low-risk) or C-REC (high-risk). Therefore, it is important that supervisors fully review their students' applications before giving their approval.

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| Is the application completed fully and satisfactorily (no missing information, all relevant questions fully addressed)? |
| Have they demonstrated good data management practice (e.g. anonymisation of data, secure data storage)? |
| If the project involves human participants (including friends/family) have they explained the informed consent process they intend to follow? If they do not intend to |

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| seek informed consent, have they given justifiable reasons as to why? |
| Are all required supporting documents attached, such as consent form; information sheet; copy of questionnaire or interview questions; overseas travel and safety form (this applies to all overseas travel unless they are a distance student conducting research in the country in which they are normally resident)? |
| Are your contact details, in addition to the student's, included on the participant information sheet? |
| Are the student's details included on the consent form? |
| Are you satisfied that all ethical considerations raised by the project have been addressed? |
| Have you reviewed the application and either sent comments back to the student or indicated your approval? |
| Once you have approved the application, have you submitted it to the School Research Ethics Officer (SREO) or relevant C-REC via the online submission system? |