



# **Research Ethics Policy**

**Authors: Head of Academic Practice and Chair of the Research Ethics Committee**

**Approved by: Senate on 27<sup>th</sup> April 2016**

**Version: 1**

## 1. Introduction

The Research Ethics Policy provides the ethical framework within which the ethical review process will operate across the University. Where appropriate, due reference will also be given to relevant professional ethical codes in specific subject areas.

Ethical approval is required prior to commencement of any research involving human participants or their personal data.

In this policy, the term 'researcher' refers to staff and students and to other persons engaged in a University-led research project, to whom this policy applies as a condition of their being granted access to the University's premises or facilities, whether or not the research is conducted on the University's premises or using the University's facilities.

## 2. Aims

To foster a culture within the University that embraces the principles set down in this policy and the obligations contained in relevant legislation to protect the rights, dignity and welfare of those involved in research; providing ethical guidance that communicates regulatory requirements and best practice, and offering ongoing support and training to staff and students to maintain high ethical standards in their research; maintaining a review process that subjects research to a level of scrutiny in proportion to the risk of harm or adverse effect.

## 3. Objectives:

- To ensure that all research activity involving human participants undertaken at Regent's University London is scrutinized by more than one person to ensure that it complies with agreed ethical standards.
- To provide academic staff with the experience of the ethical scrutiny of research, thereby disseminating knowledge and good practice about ethical issues.
- To facilitate the efficient and prompt consideration of research proposals without sacrificing the rigour of the scrutiny process.

## 4. Principles and Commitments

### Rigour:

Regent's University London is committed to ensuring that its research activities involving human participants and personal data are conducted in a way which; respects the dignity, rights, and welfare of all participants in research; minimizes risk to participants, researchers and third parties; appropriately manages personal data; and maximizes the public benefit of research.

*The University meets this commitment by:*

- requiring that research is designed and undertaken (and where appropriate, under qualified supervision) in a manner that evinces a commitment to accountability and quality;
- setting appropriate standards for the conduct of research involving human participants and personal data that are in line with current legislation and best practice;
- identifying and reviewing all research involving human participants and personal data in proportion to the level of risk, irrespective of whether the ethical standards of that research are additionally secured by another recognized approval procedure, for example that of the National Health Service;
- ensuring that research complies with current legislative requirements such as those on data protection;
- ensuring that the dissemination of research is accurate and appropriate.

**Respect:**

The University is committed to ensuring that all research involving human participants and personal data contributes to the public good, and that the dignity, rights and welfare of researchers, research subjects and third parties (which may include family members, carers, colleagues or the wider community) are respected.

*The University meets this commitment by:*

- avoiding harm to people involved in or affected by the research through the early identification and considered assessment of risk;
- requiring that people are fully informed about the purpose and intended possible uses of the research, what their participation involves and details of any risks ensuring that consent to participate in research is informed, valid and freely given prior to the commencement of the research; this will normally be through a participant information sheet and signed consent form;
- respecting the participant's right to withdraw from research at any time without adverse consequences; observing the confidentiality of information provided by participants and, where appropriate, respecting their anonymity;
- Following correct procedures of disclosure to the relevant authorities when working with vulnerable groups such as children or vulnerable adults.

**Responsibility:**

The University is committed to providing leadership in the area of ethical conduct of research and to participating openly in discussions on the direction of research and improvements to practice in this area.

*The University meets this commitment by:*

- contributing, listening and responding to the debate on issues that research involving human participants and personal data may raise for society;
- working closely with relevant peer groups and government agencies to remain abreast of developments and inform UK policy;
- maintaining open and transparent procedures relating to the conduct and review of research.

**Education, training and personal development:**

The University is committed to sustaining and encouraging ethical research conduct among researchers by the provision of training to equip them with the skills to recognise potential risks and by raising awareness of the University's policy and procedures and the responsibilities of researchers in helping the University to meet its obligations under the relevant legislation.

*The University meets this commitment by:*

- communicating the University's policy effectively to researchers and staff in research-related roles;
- promoting awareness of best practice through education and training;
- providing appropriate training for those undertaking research involving human participants and personal data, and for those responsible for ethical review of such research, so that knowledge and skills are up-to-date;
- fostering an environment of openness and integrity that encourages collaboration and early communication of potential risks.

**5. Ethical review and approval process:**

The formal procedure for application for ethical approval is set out on the University's Website. This requires the applicant to read the Research Ethics Policy and then submit electronically:

- the Application form
- The Ethical Review Checklist
- A copy of the research proposal

The proposal will then be forwarded to a Research Ethics Review Panel comprising three members from a pool of academic staff with the appropriate knowledge and experience to review the proposal, either confirming approval, requesting further information or – where the panel has serious concerns about the ethics of the proposal – withholding approval. Decisions made by the panel are recorded and logged for monitoring purposes.

For academic staff:

- All research proposals will be submitted as above by the individual researcher or the academic leading on any joint research project.

For doctoral research students:

- All research proposals will be submitted as above by the doctoral student with confirmation from the supervisor that consideration of ethical issues has been given and that any additional requirements of validating bodies or collaborative partners have also been met.

For Masters' student dissertations:

- All research proposals will be submitted as above by the doctoral student with confirmation from the supervisor that consideration of ethical issues has been given.

For postgraduate (non-dissertation) assignments and all undergraduate assignments/dissertations:

- All assignment briefs involving interaction with human participants or their personal data (e.g. in interviews) should be considered by a Research Ethics Review Panel before they are given to students. For assignment briefs set in module specifications, ethical approval can be sought for the entire period granted at validation. For those which vary year-to-year, ethical approval will need to be sought each time by the module leader.
- Where a Masters or undergraduate student elects, with the approval of their module tutor, to undertake an individual project involving interaction with human participants or with their personal data, prior ethical approval must be sought through a Research Ethics Review Panel by the student with the support of the module leader.

## **6. Criteria covered by Research Ethics Review Panels**

Following the principles and commitments in section 4, panels will be scrutinising research proposals in respect of:

- Aims of project/benefits to participants/society
- Research design and method
- Participant selection
- Informed consent
- Participation of vulnerable groups (if any)
- Data collection
- Data analysis
- Risk analysis undertaken (to researcher, participants or any third parties)
- Data protection and secure storage
- Dissemination

## **7. Appeals**

Researchers may appeal the decision of a Research Ethics Review Panel to withhold, suspend or withdraw ethical approval of research involving human participants or personal data by contacting the Chair of the Senate Research Committee, who will then arrange an appeal panel formed of three members of the pool of ethics reviewers who have not been involved in the decision that is being appealed. The researcher (proposer) will also be invited to the appeal but it will go ahead whether or not s/he attends. Appeals must be lodged within ten working days of communication of the outcome.

## **8. Review of the Policy**

The Senate Research Committee will keep under regular review, all policies and procedures relating to the ethical conduct of research involving human participants and personal data. Data with the outcomes of all panels will be provided to the last Senate Research Committee of each academic year.