Research Ethics at Keele

Keele University is committed to maintaining the highest ethical standards in research conducted by its staff and students.

For research to maximise benefit and minimise the risk of harm all research must be conducted ethically.

What is Research Ethics?

Research ethics involves a set of principles that guide researchers and research organisations on conduct when undertaking research especially when the research involves human participants, their tissues/samples or personal data. Typical ethical considerations include:

- Approaching and recruiting potential participants
- Informed consent
- Safety and risk
- Keeping data secure and confidential
- Ensuring procedures, methods and findings are transparent so that they can be assessed.

Why is research ethics important?

It is important to conduct research in accordance with approved ethical standards for a number of reasons including:-

- To respect and minimise harm to participants and researchers
- Professional/Funding requirements
- Failing to conduct research ethically could result in research (or the researcher) being dismissed or rejected by the research community.

What types of research require ethical review?

- Any research project that involves human participants, their tissues/samples or personal data requires ethical review by an appropriate ethics committee before any potential participants can be approached.

Example of the types of research that do not require ethical review include:-

- Research involving the collection or study of existing data, documents or records that are in the public domain.
- Research involving anonymised records and/or data sets that are in the public domain.
- Commercially obtained cell lines.

Service evaluation and audit

- Service evaluation and audit projects do not generally require ethical approval. However, if you are intending to publish in peer reviewed, research journals then ethical review by an appropriate ethics committee will be required.

- If you are unsure whether a project is research or not the following on-line tools may be helpful:-
  - http://www.nres.nhs.uk/applications/is-your-project-research/
  - http://www.hra-decisiontools.org.uk/research/

Processes for obtaining ethics approval

There are a number of different pathways for obtaining ethical approval:-

NHS Research

All research involving human participants, their tissue(s) or personal data identified from, or because of, their past or present use of NHS services, or research that falls under the Mental Capacity Act 2005 must be approved by an NHS Research Ethics Committee. Information regarding the application and review process can be found via https://www.myresearchproject.org.uk/Signin.aspx

If you are unsure whether a research project requires NHS REC approval or not the following on-line tool may be helpful:- http://www.hra-decisiontools.org.uk/ethics/

Adult and Social Care Research

Research involving the adult social care sector (e.g. in local authority, private and voluntary care settings), as well as studies which cross sector boundaries should be reviewed by the Adult and Social Care Research Ethics Committee.

Social care research does not require review by the Social Care REC if it is reviewed by another committee operating in accordance with the ESRC’s Framework for Research Ethics, except in certain situations (see http://www.screc.org.uk/ for more details about these certain situations).

Information regarding the application and review process can be found via http://www.screc.org.uk/apply.asp
Keele University Ethics Committees

All other research projects involving human participants, their tissue(s) or personal data must be reviewed by the appropriate Keele University Ethics Committee or a recognised other external committee (e.g. other University Committee).

Staff and Postgraduate Research students

Staff and PGR student research must be reviewed by the University’s Ethical Review Panels. Research where the potential for risk to participants and other parties relevant to the research is minimal may be eligible for review via the light touch review process. Information regarding the application and review process can be found via http://www.keele.ac.uk/researchsupport/researchethics/

PGT and Undergraduate students

PGT and Undergraduate student research must be reviewed by the School Student Project Ethics Committee. Contact the relevant School for specific information about the application and review process in place for that particular School.

Good practice

- Ensure sufficient time is factored in for ethics review and approval.
- Remember ethics is not a single event it is a process that continues throughout the duration of the research project.
- Attention to detail is paramount when preparing the ethics application and supporting documentation.
- Be guided by your supervisor at all times.

If you have any queries regarding ethics, would like advice regarding the various ethical review processes or assistance with your ethics application or for more information please contact:-

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Research Ethics Training

Research ethics training sessions are available please contact Nicola Leighton n.leighton@keele.ac.uk or 01782 733306 for more information.