KLS Research Ethics Policy

Introduction: Research integrity

The University of Kent expects all those engaged in research, and supporting research within the University, to conduct their activities with integrity. This will ensure that all research supported by the University is of the highest quality.

Research Integrity can be viewed as the **attitudes and habits** of researchers to conduct their research according to the appropriate ethical, legal and professional frameworks, obligations and standards.

To support the University's drive to maintain the highest standards of research integrity, it is compliant with the Concordat to Support Research Integrity, a national framework for good research conduct and its governance, whose signatories include UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) and Universities UK.

University of Kent policies

All research proposals that involve any human participants must be subjected to an ethical review **prior to their commencement**.

At the University of Kent, **Research Ethics Advisory Groups** (REAGs) exist at School- and/or Faculty-level, dependent on the volume of applications. There is no hierarchy and researchers should apply to their local REAG, whether that is at Faculty- or School- level.

A University-level **Research Ethics and Governance Committee** sets policy and regulates and monitors the activities of the REAGs. Although this Committee does not review individual projects, it provides a forum in which the REAGs can share best practice, and can provide guidance to REAGs and reviewers where necessary.

Further information:

See the University web pages and links on Research Ethics & Governance; the University Research Integrity: Code of Ethical Practice for Research.

The KLS Research Ethics Coordinator is Dr Gavin Sullivan, g.sullivan@kent.ac.uk to whom research ethics review applications should be sent.

The University Research Ethics & Governance Officer is Nicole Palmer, who can help with the legal and ethical obligations of undertaking research involving humans and animals, and what is needed to comply with them and safeguard those taking part in the research.

Ethical Review Process

Special regulations apply for research within the NHS or involving prisoners and prison staff, and for any project funded by the ESRC (see below).

An ethical review form should be completed and submitted electronically to the chair of the departmental Research Ethics Advisory Group (REAG), Dr Gavin Sullivan, g.sullivan@kent.ac.uk. This requires a short description of the research; a brief description of the methodology /techniques used when dealing with human participants (e.g. details of any questionnaires, focus groups, interviews); and the completion of a research ethics check-list.

Students should discuss their application with their supervisor at an early stage of their project and determine together whether more than minimal risk is involved. **All student projects need to be signed off by the student's supervisor prior to submitting the proposal.** This can be done by providing an electronic signature from the supervisor or by a supervisor's e-mail explicitly supporting the application.

Projects that involve more than minimal risk will need to provide more detailed information about the research background and how participants will be recruited, informed and debriefed. The following projects would normally be considered as involving more than minimal risk:

- Research involving vulnerable groups – for example children and young people, clinical populations, or vulnerable adults in a dependent or unequal relationships (e.g. adults with mental health problems, adults with learning disabilities, prisoners, young offenders, patients in care homes).

- Research involving sensitive topics – for example participants' sexual behaviour or attitudes, their illegal or political behaviour, their experience with violence, their mental health, their sexuality, or their gender or ethnic identity.

- Research involving deception or which is conducted without participants' full and informed consent

- Research involving procedures that may upset or offend participants – for example presentation of unpleasant stimuli; tasks that may induce stress, anxiety, or humiliation.

Ethical guidelines from academic and professional bodies

- British Society of Criminology: Statement of Ethics 2015;

- British Sociological Association: Guidelines on Ethical Research; Statement of Ethical Practice 2017;

- Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Framework for research ethics, Updated Jan 2015; Guidance on research ethics;

- Socio Legal Studies Association (SLSA): Statement of Principles of Ethical Research Practice;

- Social Research Association (SRA): Research ethics guidance;

Consent and confidentiality

Participants must be fully informed about the research or study they are invited to participate in and their consent to take part must be made voluntarily, freely and without any coercion.

This information should explain efforts taken to ensure confidentiality (for instance, anonymisation of names or creation of pseudonyms); that taking part in the research is completely voluntary and (as appropriate) that participants are free to stop the interview at any time, without needing to give a reason, and free to withdraw their data after the interview.

It is therefore advised to provide participants in advance with a short outline of the planned research project. This can be contained in a Participant Information Sheet; such information can be combined with, or separate from, a Consent Form:

- *Participant Information Sheet*: The purpose of the Participant information sheet is to help prospective participants make an informed choice regarding whether or not to participate in the research project. The sheet should be provided to prospective participants allowing them sufficient time to make a decision and ask any questions they may have. The University/Faculty of Social Sciences has provided a template which can be adapted as required, downloadable here;
- *Consent Form*: This should outline all the details of what it means to be a participant of the research to allow participant to agree. The University/Faculty of Social Sciences has provided a template which can be adapted as required, downloadable here.

Data management

In some areas of academic research, researchers process the **personal data** (e.g. names) of living individuals and are therefore subject to data protection law, currently the General Data Protection Regulation and the UK Data Protection Act 2018.

- There is a University-level statement on the GDPR and the lawful basis for the processing of personal information for the purposes of research. A link to this GDPR statement must be included in participant information: GDPR Privacy notice for research – University-level.
- The University has produced guidance for researchers, on how to ensure the project is compliant with the GDPR: GDPR – Information for researchers.
- Guidance for Research Ethics Advisory Groups and Reviewers: how to assess whether a project is GDPR compliant: GDPR and research ethics review procedures.

Ethical review may not be required for anonymised records and datasets that already are in the public domain (for example through the Office for National Statistics, the ESRC Data Archive). However, data providers' policies on restrictions on the access to and use of their data must be complied with.

Reviewing Process

Once submitted the application form will be reviewed by the school's Research Ethics Advisory Group. When reviewer is satisfied with the application, the project receives approval via e-mail. If no agreement is reached or when further advice is required, further members of the Advisory Group will be involved in the decision process. **Outcomes** of this review could be Approval (with suggestions for improvement), Approval subject to modifications that do/do not require resubmission or Resubmission of application form and all materials. A project will be rejected only in exceptional circumstances as it is the REAG's aim to advise all applicants on the best possible way to pursue the research as planned.

Normally the applicant will be informed about the outcome of the review process within 10 working days of application.

Research within the NHS

If research falls within the area of health and social care – e.g. patients and users of the NHS or social care, human tissue, human fertilisation – additional requirements apply. Such research must be registered with the University's research governance team: if you are planning research in the NHS please contact Nicole Palmer at the earliest opportunity for help with navigating the approvals processes.

Research in the NHS must comply with the UK Policy Framework for Health and Social Care Research and will need review and approval by the Health Research Authority before it can go ahead.

Research involving prisoners and prison staff

All researchers wanting to conduct research with staff and/or offenders in prison establishments, National Probation Service (NPS)/Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRC) regions or within Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) Headquarters are required to formally apply for research approval to the HMPPS National Research Committee (NRC).

Further information about the application and approval process is available here: Her Majesty's Prison & Probation Service, Research at HMPPS.

Research funded by the ESRC

Some research funders require projects to have been subject to a greater level of independence in their review, i.e. the ESRC; a number of US funding bodies require the institution and the PI to demonstrate Federal Wide Assurance (FWA) compliance.

Until 1 November 2020: All ESRC-funded projects that involve human participants should be considered by the Faculty of Social Sciences Research Ethics Advisory Group (REAG)

After 1 November 2020: a central Research Ethics Committee replaces the three Faculty committees; the central REC will take over reviewing responsibilities from 1 November.

Even though the ESRC does not request that ethical approval should be secured prior to submission of a research proposal, any proposal submitted to the ESRC must state what the applicant considers to be the ethical approval that will be required for their proposed research. Once funding has been awarded researchers are expected to complete the Faculty's checklists and forms and submit to KLS' REAG who will forward it to the Faculty/University. All research conducted with ESRC funding must comply with the minimum standard set within the ESRC Framework for research ethics.

REVISED: AUGUST 2020