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, the **Ethics and Governance Group** supports Kent researchers to ensure they safeguard those taking part in or affected by their research.

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.

The University of Kent **Central Research Ethics Advisory Group** accepts applications from staff and students at Schools that do not have a local REAG, as well as applications that require a greater level of independence such as: Multi-centre studies; ESRC-funded research, and research carried out by professional services staff. The Central REAG is also registered as the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for research funded by United States federal sources falling under Federal-wide Assurance.

The University-level **Research Ethics & Governance Committee** regulates and monitors the work of Research Ethics Advisory Groups (REAGs) that review applications for ethics review. The Committee provides a forum for the sharing of best practice and will also receive complaints and appeals against REAG decisions, providing a final opinion in these cases.

The University of Kent 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.

Further information:

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

Kent Law School-based REAG

KLS operates a School-based REAG. KLS Research Ethics Coordinator, Dr Pamela White p.white-229@kent.ac.uk conducts KLS Research Ethics Approvals. The KLS Research Ethics Approval form is found at: https://livekentac.sharepoint.com/sites/lssj/SitePages/Div-Hub.aspx.

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).

KLS 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.

Undergraduate and Post-Graduate Taught students planning to undertake surveys, interview or participant observations involving human participants; analyse secondary research collected for another purpose or data containing personal identifiers, should undertake the proposed research only if:

   (a)   they have taken social science research training or have experience in conducting empirical research and know how to analyse numerical and textual data, or

   (b)   they are undertaking the research as part of a module designed to provide such training, experience, and knowledge; or

   (c) their research will be overseen by a supervisor who has such training, experience, and knowledge (which must be certified in the application for ethical approval).

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 minimal risk

An ethical review form should be completed and submitted electronically to the chair of the departmental Research Ethics Advisory Group Co-ordinator (REAG), Dr Pamela White, p.white-229@kent.ac.uk. This form requires a short description of the research, inclusion of a brief summary 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.

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.

- Research using online surveys or interviewing online or using social media, such as Facebook, to recruit survey or interview participants.

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](#);

- British Psychological Society (BPS): Ethics Guidelines for Internet Mediated Research https://www.bps.org.uk/psychologist/internet-mediated-research

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 render the information anonymous (prevent identification of the research subject). The creation of pseudonyms to replace respondent names is a best practice but does not necessarily render the information anonymous. See ICO: https://ico.org.uk/media/about-the-ico/consultations/4019579/chapter-3-anonymisation-guidance.pdf.

In the Participant Information Sheet explain 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. KLS REAG has placed a copy on SharePoint: https://livekentac.sharepoint.com/sites/lssj/SitePages/Div-Hub.aspx

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. KLS REAG has also placed a copy on SharePoint: https://livekentac.sharepoint.com/sites/lssj/SitePages/Div-Hub.aspx

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 statement describing the procedures adopted for ensuring data protection/confidentiality/privacy including duration of storage of personal data. A link to the statement must be included in participant information, but must, of course, be preceded by project-specific research data protection information. https://research.kent.ac.uk/ris-research-policy-support/ethics/   See GDPR Privacy Notice – Research paragraph in the pdf file. GDPR Privacy Notice – Research (pdf

- The University has produced guidance for researchers, on how to ensure the project is compliant with the GDPR: https://research.kent.ac.uk/ris-operations/wp-content/uploads/sites/2308/2018/07/General-Data-Protection-Regulation-guidance-for-researchers.pdf
- Guidance for Research Ethics Advisory Groups and Reviewers: how to assess whether a project is GDPR compliant: https://research.kent.ac.uk/ris-operations/wp-content/uploads/sites/2308/2018/07/GDPR-and-research-ethics-review-procedures.pdf

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.

Ethical recording and storage of online interviews and focus groups.

MS Teams recording of interviews uploaded to the MS Cloud is considered GDPR-compliant. The recordings are password protected from within the researcher's University account. A University of Kent Stream account can be used to upload audio recordings and Zoom recordings. Consult Kent IT.

Online Survey software

GDPR compliant online survey software must be used be used. Kent staff, PGR and PGT students can access approved online survey software at: https://www.kent.ac.uk/software/online-surveys-previously-bos . UG students are advised to use MS Forms.

Managing your research data

Some funders including ESRC and SeNSS funded student projects require researchers to prepare data management plans and to deposit research files in an approved data repository. Regardless of funder requirements, it is nonetheless a best practice to archive

research data, once your research project is completed. A data repository is a specialist facility set up to:

- preserve, manage, and provide access to research data
- curate data to enable search, discovery, and reuse
- provide enough control for the data to be authoritative, reliable, accessible, and usable on a continuing basis

The Kent Data repository (KDR) is the University's institutional data repository. It's there for researchers if a specialist archive is not available. If you chose to deposit your data in another repository, KDR can hold a record and link to the data for internal record keeping and external reporting.

Respondents should be informed in the Participation information Sheet of use of the KDR or other data management repository.

Reviewing Process: KLS REAG

Once submitted the Research Ethics Approval documents including the signed KLS application form, participant information sheet, consent form, survey/interview questionnaires, posters, introductory letters, and promotional materials including social media notices will be reviewed by the school's Research Ethics Advisory Group. When KLS REAG co-ordinator 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.

All ESRC-funded projects, including SnESS funded student research projects involving human participants are reviewed by the University-level [Research Ethics Advisory Group (REAG)](#). Applications must be made on REAG forms.

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. All research conducted with ESRC funding must comply with the minimum standard set within the [ESRC Framework for research ethics](#).

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