

Quality Code for Higher Education

Ethical Principles for Research Activity at RNN Group

Reference Code:	13.1
Version:	3.2
Date:	August 2022
Date of Implementation:	August 2022
Originator:	Higher Education & Skills
Approval by:	Higher Education Learning & Teaching Committee
Date for Review:	July 2023
Description:	Principles for the ethical behaviour of staff and students involved in research activity
Responsibilities:	Academic Heads Module Tutors Higher Education & Skills
Applications for exemptions to:	Higher Education Learning & Teaching Committee
Report Exemptions to:	Higher Education Learning & Teaching Committee
Links to UK Quality Code for HE:	

These ethical principles apply to all research which involves human participants. They also apply to any teaching which involves data gathering by lecturers or students, or which requires the consent of any external organisation

1. Research and teaching should be carried out with the best interests of the individuals who are the subject of the research or of the teaching being the primary consideration.
2. Where research is carried out by students it is the joint responsibility of the student and the supervisors to ensure its ethical acceptability.
3. Where possible, collaborative decision-making in research partnerships between researchers and those being researched should be developed.
4. In planning a study, researchers and lecturers must carefully evaluate its ethical acceptability and obtain independent approval from the College Ethics Committee following the procedures laid out in this document. Approval must also be sought for the re-use and/or dual use of research data.
5. The primary ethical concern of all researchers/lecturers lies in considering whether a participant will in any way be a 'subject at risk'.
6. The researcher/lecturer always retains the responsibility for ensuring ethical practice in the research/teaching. They are also the person/s responsible for the ethical treatment of participants by collaborators, assistants, other students, and employees.
7. These other collaborators, assistants, students, and employees still, however, incur similar ethical obligations to those of the principle researchers/lecturers.
8. The researchers/lecturer must provide for participants, and prior to their participation, a clear and fair description of the research/teaching in writing so that they are fully informed as to what they are consenting to. The researchers/lecturer must honour all promises and commitments included in that agreement. The researchers/lecturer must inform all participants, in ways that can be understood by them, of all aspects that might reasonably be expected to influence their willingness to participate, as well as explain all other aspects about which the participants enquire.
9. Special attention needs to be given to procedures to ensure informed consent is obtained from children or from participants who have impairments that would limit understanding and/or the communication required to safeguard procedures. This should be backed up by parental/legal guardian agreement. **Where there appear to be no major ethical problems, a minimal requirement is that parents/legal guardians be informed by letter, and their comments invited. Only in wholly exceptional circumstances should agreement be given solely by those in a position of care and authority for such individuals, and where this occurs, the researchers/lecturer should inform the chair of the research committee of such proposals.**
10. There are two exceptional cases where informed consent need not be obtained for children or from participants who have impairments. This is when (i) the research is a part of the normal professional practice of the individual, as consent has already been granted as part of their professional role; and (ii) when materials to be used in research are already in the public domain e.g. school SATs results. .
11. Procedures to protect confidentiality should be outlined in documentation initially given to the participant while informed consent is obtained. Information obtained about a participant during the course of an investigation must be treated as confidential unless otherwise agreed upon in

advance. When the possibility exists that others may obtain access to such information, this possibility, together with the plans for protecting confidentiality, should be explained to the participant as part of the procedure for obtaining informed consent.

12. Transparency of purpose is an important principle of educational research/teaching. However, in exceptional circumstances, the researcher/lecturer may require (a) the withholding of full disclosure to participants prior to obtaining informed consent, or (b) the use of concealment or deception. Before doing so, however, the researcher/lecturer must (i) determine whether the use of such techniques is justified by the study's prospective scientific, educational, or applied value; (ii) determine whether alternative procedures are available that do not require such procedures; and (iii) ensure that the participants are provided with sufficient explanation as soon as possible. In any case, any such proposal should be an automatic object of scrutiny by the Ethics Committee.
13. After the data has been collected, participants should be provided with any relevant further information about the nature of the study such that any misconceptions that may have arisen be removed. Where scientific or humane values justify delaying or withholding this information, the researcher/lecturer has a special responsibility to monitor the research and to ensure that there are no damaging consequences for the participant.
14. The implications of research with participants of a different cultural background to that of the researcher/lecturer should be considered at a very early stage. This consideration should include partnership with an informed member of the population from which the research sample is to be drawn, in order to check for foreseeable threats to psychological well-being, health, values and dignity. The proposal should then, after such initial vetting, go to the Ethics Committee.
15. The researcher/lecturer must respect the individual's freedom to decline to participate in, or to withdraw from the research or teaching situation at any time. The researcher/lecturer must take particular account of the fact that they are normally in a position of authority or influence over the participant during the investigation, and that this may prevent the participant from voicing such wishes.
16. The researcher/lecturer must protect the participant from physical and psychological discomfort, harm and danger that may arise from the procedures used. If a risk of such consequences does exist, the proposal should automatically go to the Ethics Committee, and the researcher/lecturer must inform the participant of that fact. The participant should be informed of procedures for contacting the researcher/lecturer within a reasonable time period following participation, if stress, potential harm, or related questions or concerns arise.
17. Where research/lecturing procedures could result in undesirable consequences for the individual participant, the researcher/lecturer has the responsibility to detect and remove or correct these consequences, including long-term effects.
18. Researchers need to be aware, and take account, of the fact that researching the 'powerful' can impose particular constraints, which do not always pertain to other research groups. In particular, researchers need to consider that the account they gain may well be a function of the access to data provided by these powerful individuals and that they therefore need to make this clear in any report.
19. Ownership of any research material, and its use, should be agreed at the start of the research, and such agreement should be obtained after the close of the research. Permission to use the data gained in the research should therefore follow these prior agreements.