

Guidelines on Research with Ethical Implications

1 All activities carried out by Birkbeck staff and students that involve one or more of:

- intervention or interaction with human participants;
- the collection and / or study of data derived from human participants;
- a potential impact on animals or the environment;

requires ethical consideration and approval.

2 In planning and conducting specific research, teaching or related activities the teacher or researcher should ensure that the risk of physical or psychological harm to participants is minimised by:

- detailed analysis of specific risks for any given procedure
- careful consideration of a variety of alternative procedures
- provision of appropriate monitoring and support both during and after the activities

3 Before commencing a research project, you should consider a number of ethical issues that should form part of your research and the way in which it is conducted. These issues will include:

(a) justification – that the proposed research will achieve worthwhile objectives, that these objectives could not be achieved without the informed participation of individuals and that there are adequate resources for the successful completion of the research.

(b) access to participant(s) – when considering potential participants it is important to recognise issues of privacy and that individuals have a right to know how their names were selected and why they are being approached. Access may also involve researchers considering the implications of data protection legislation. The fact that an individual has access to potential participants in one role does not automatically imply that they have those same rights of access once they assume the role of a researcher.

(c) informed consent – this is a fundamental aspect of any research programme and all those who have agreed to be part of any research must be able to do so in an informed way. In all cases you should take care to ensure that participants are fully informed about the project and have given informed consent freely. Informed consent is a continuous requirement and participants have the right to ask questions about a project at any time during the duration of the project.

Before commencing any activities the teacher or researcher should consider whose consent it is necessary and appropriate to seek. This is achieved by providing the intended participant with a comprehensible explanation of:

- possible hazards of the activities
- the right to decline participation

- the right to withdraw from the activity at any time or refuse to answer any particular question
- the right to have privacy and confidentiality protected - this will require from time to time discussion and agreement as to how these rights will be maintained and if they cannot be maintained the fact that the participant(s) knows this from the outset and consents to this condition
- the right to turn off a recording device at any time
- the right to ask questions at any time
- the right to discuss the way in which their data may be used
- the right to discuss the question of the ownership of the data and to reach agreement on issues of copyright
- the right to receive information about the outcome of the activity in an appropriate form

Informed Consent is *usually* obtained in writing (see consent form below) from participants after they have been given information about the research and have time to consider the implications of granting consent. In all cases researchers should take care to ensure that participants are fully informed about the research and have given informed consent freely.

(d) potential harm – when considering the nature of the research activity it is important to work through the potential for psychological, physical and environmental harm. At the same time it may be important to consider the type of support that may be necessary to have in place if participants experience harm.

(e) conflicts of interest – when considering the nature of the project it is important to consider the potential for conflicts of interest particularly if the work is to be carried out in the same organization or if it is sponsored in some way. Not only do participants have the right to know if someone or organization is sponsoring the project but also the consequences of any conflicts should be made clear so that potential participants can consent to be part of the project in an informed way. It is necessary to recognise that while an individual may have access to certain information because of their role in an organization that role and their rights change when they adopt the role of a researcher.

(f) Advice may also be needed on Intellectual Property (IP) ownership for sponsored research, or for research using IP owned by a third party. Researchers can consult with Business Relations for further advice on this and highlight any ethical issues that need to be considered.

(g) Data integrity – it is important to consider how the research data will be stored and kept secure and released only as appropriate in compliance with data protection legislation.

(f) equality issues – SECs and DREOs hold the responsibility to ensure adherence of all research proposals to the principles laid out in the College's Equality Strategy.

4 Depending on the nature of the research project many of the issues outlined above can be covered by providing potential participants with an **information sheet**. The

information sheet would include the following:

- the names of the people responsible for the research project and how they can be contacted
- the procedures which they will be asked to agree to participate in
- what the participants will have to do and how much time will be involved
- how the researcher obtained their name to ask them to consider participating in the project
- how the information will be used
- what will happen to the information when it is obtained
- how confidentiality and anonymity will be protected
- what will happen to the data on completion of the project
- the rights that individuals have if they take part in the project

5 At times it may be necessary to ask participants to sign a **consent form**. A typical consent form would contain the following information:

- I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me.
- My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.
- I understand I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and to decline to answer any particular questions.
- I agree to provide information to the researcher(s) on the understanding that my name will not be used without my permission (The information will be used only for this research and publications arising from this research project.)
- I agree/do not agree to the interview being taped.
- I agree/do not agree to the interview being video taped.
- I confirm that I am over 16 years of age.
- I understand that I have the right to ask for the audio/video tape to be turned off at any time during the interview.
- I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signed

Name

Date