

Ethical Review – when should it be done? The Ethical Review Checklist

Much of the work we do, through our teaching, research and ‘third mission’ activities, has the potential to raise ethical questions. Whilst researchers who undertake research in fields which routinely consider ethical questions and teachers who teach in ethically sensitive subject domains are aware of these issues and their responsibilities in terms of reporting and approvals as a part of “business as usual”, other areas of work can be equally ethically challenging; for example (and in some cases), public engagement and impact work with external stakeholders, writing for the media, consultancies, and work done by our professional services departments. However, this work is much less likely to be submitted for ethical review.

This document is designed to help individual members of the College to consider and reflect upon the potential ethical components of their work and decide if dedicated ethical review is required – in many cases ethical issues which are not immediately apparent may be brought into focus following a period of reflection about these questions.

It should be noted that the Colleges ethical review processes were established to provide an avenue for ethical review for all activity undertaken by the College and not just to review the ethical components of individual research projects. In addition, pastoral work with students, visitors to the College (especially visitors to the College who are below the age of 18) and vulnerable staff members can also raise significant ethical questions. The College has a safeguarding policy and procedure which provides specific information and ethical guidance in these situations and can be accessed here <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/committees/policies-and-procedures/Safeguarding%20Policy%20and%20Procedure.pdf>

The key principle underpinning the ethical standards which apply to academic activities is the avoidance of harm.

Ethical review should be considered for any activity which includes:

- Human participants (whether participating actively or through observation) – from the perspective of their welfare and interests and duties of care for their personal data
- Where there are legitimate concerns for the welfare and interests of those carrying out the activity
- Animals – from the perspective of their welfare and interests and duties of care
- The potential to damage or change our cultural heritage
- Changes to the natural environment
- The potential for reputation of the individual, the department, the College and academia as a whole to be damaged. The welfare and interests of the wider community should also be considered.

It may be helpful to consider these questions from different perspectives, for example:

- Could you happily justify your activity to your manager or a colleague or friend?
- What would your actions look like if publicised in the media?
- What could go wrong as a result of your activity for you, your colleagues (staff and students), other stakeholders or the wider College/community?
- Is it your decision to make?

Activities where these questions are not relevant do not normally require ethical review; however please note that the list above is not exhaustive and if a member of the College has concerns about any activity then they can request an ethical review through the standard process. Please see <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/committees/research-integrity/> for more information and guidance about the process of ethical review.