

RESEARCH ETHICS POLICY 2008

Introduction

1. The aim of this policy is to raise the issues which should be fully considered by researchers and their supervisors at Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln. It is the duty of the researcher to conduct his or her research with due consideration to the ethical concerns raised within this policy.
2. The underlying principle of this policy is that research should be conducted with respect for the person(s) (or institution) involved in the research and should be designed, reviewed and undertaken in a way that ensures its integrity and quality. See the section **Respect for the Integrity of Knowledge**.
3. This Research Ethics Policy should serve as a set of guidelines to be followed by members of both the staff and student body at Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln (BG) when engaging in research. Staff will be made aware of these guidelines by the Head of Research. Students are to be made aware of these guidelines by the supervising tutor in advance of any research being undertaken.
4. The emphasis within these guidelines is on research involving other people (for example, research within a classroom setting). They also apply to any teaching which involves data gathering, for research purposes, by lecturer or students, or requires the consent of any external organisation or encompasses other research settings.

Ethical Principles

The Researcher's Responsibilities

1. In planning a study, researchers and supervisors must carefully evaluate its ethical acceptability. If any aspect suggests that its ethical acceptability is uncertain, independent approval must be obtained from the Research Ethics Committee.
2. The primary ethical concern of all researchers/supervisors lies in considering whether a participant will in any way be at risk as a result of the research.
3. Where research is being undertaken involving children or vulnerable adults, the researcher(s) must have the appropriate CRB clearance. If schools, or other similar institutions, are involved, the school must be given a letter from BG, signed by a supervisor, line manager or the Head of Research, stating that the researcher has CRB clearance. BG students involved in research with children or vulnerable adults should follow the guidelines for CRB clearance laid down by either the School of Teacher Development or the School of Culture, Education and Innovation, as appropriate.
4. The researcher should take care to ensure that participants are, as far as possible, aware of the period during which their actions or words contribute towards the research findings. Particular care should be taken over the use of data obtained from what might normally be construed as private conversations or actions.

5. The researcher must ensure that the participants (or their guardians) have an understanding of the secondary use of data and consent to this possible use; many research funding bodies have the expectation that data collected for a specific research project may be used subsequently by other researchers.
6. The researcher/supervisor always retains the responsibility for ensuring ethical practice in the research and its dissemination. They are also the persons 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 principal researchers.
8. Where research is carried out by students, it is the joint responsibility of the student and the supervisors to ensure its ethical acceptability.
9. Where possible, collaborative decision-making in research partnerships between researchers and those being researched should be developed.
10. When designing a research project that involves overseas collaboration and/or data collection, the researcher must take into account different circumstances in the countries involved, particularly different ethical standards, political and cultural considerations, handling and storage of personal data, the relationship between researcher and participant, access to research resources and the rules that exist within the country with regard to conducting research.
11. In the case of inter-institution collaborative research, those responsible for the research project must ensure some form of compatibility as far as ethical procedures and practices are concerned or reach an agreement as to which institution's ethics policy has precedence. Collaborating institutions should agree that the project be scrutinised by the Research Ethics Committee of the lead researcher's institution and abide by that process and subsequent monitoring. Reporting back to all institutions involved must be done.

Respect for the Person

12. Research and its dissemination should be carried out with the best interests of the individuals, who are the subject of the research, as the primary consideration.
13. Researchers must be aware of any potential conflicts of interest in their work arising from their position within the research context, eg. insider research. In particular, researchers in a position of authority arising from or separate from the research process should beware of placing other participants in a situation where they feel obliged to participate in the research or to produce particular results.
14. All research must be undertaken strictly in accordance with BG's current Diversity and Equality policies. No group should be *unreasonably* excluded from the research. Research should be commissioned, designed and undertaken in such a way as to respect the interests of all social groups whatever their age, disability, race, ethnicity, religion, culture, gender or other characteristics. However, some research will focus on a specific group and it would be

inappropriate to seek wider levels of inclusiveness across social groups in such research.

15. The working conditions and roles of contract research staff should be clear and fair.

Gaining Informed Consent

16. Researchers have a responsibility to seriously and comprehensively consider the question of informing participants in the research of the content of that research. The working principle should be that participants in research should give their informed consent to the research process and its outcomes. In particular, participants should be informed of any negative effects which the research may have on them (for example, emotionally, professionally, in terms of stress). The researcher should also gain the permission of the study participants if personal data is to be transferred overseas, particularly where the data storage mechanisms may be less secure or if the data may be used subsequently for other research projects.
17. The researcher must provide to the participants, prior to their participation, a clear and fair description, in writing, of the research. The researcher must honour all promises and commitments included in that agreement. The researcher must inform all participants, in ways that can be understood by them, about all aspects that might reasonably be expected to influence their willingness to participate, as well as answer honestly all participants' questions.
18. 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 participants. In such cases, this should be backed up by parental/legal guardian agreement.
 - a) Where there appear to be no major ethical problems, a minimum requirement is that parents/legal guardians be informed by letter, and their comments invited. Where replies are not received, researchers should attempt on one more occasion to elicit a response, therefore to proceed.
 - b) Only in exceptional circumstances should agreement be given solely by those in a position of care and authority for such individuals and, where this occurs, the researcher should inform the Chair of the Research Ethics Committee of such proposals.
19. The seeking of consent must be genuine, in the sense that prospective participants must have the opportunity to decide not to participate, without suffering any consequences for so doing. The researcher must respect the individual's freedom to decline to participate in, or withdraw from, the research at any time. The researcher 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.

20. There are two exceptional cases where informed consent need not be obtained for children or from participants who have impairments; however these occurrences must be approved by the Research Ethics Committee or the researcher's supervisor. This is when:
 - i) the research is part of normal professional practice for the researcher;
 - ii) materials to be used in research are already in the public domain, eg school SATS results.
21. The implications of research with participants of a substantially different cultural background to that of the researcher 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 Research Ethics Committee.
22. Consent should be obtained from the institution where the research is to be conducted. As a general principle, the more wide-ranging the research, the higher the level of consent required (for example, Local Authority consent in the case of a survey across all the schools in an area). The researcher should check for any conflicts between relevant policies of the institution in which the research is being done and the intended research. It is the researcher's responsibility to resolve any problems and, if necessary, refer the issue to the Research Ethics Committee.
23. Transparency of purpose is an important principle of research.
 - a) However, in exceptional circumstances, the researcher may require:
 - i) the withholding of full disclosure to participants prior to obtaining informed consent, or
 - ii) the use of concealment or deception. Deception (i.e research without consent) should only be used as a last resort when no other approach is possible. This principle also requires that research staff need to be made fully aware of the proposed research and its potential risks to them.
 - b) Before seeking approval for either course in outlined above, however, the researcher 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;
 - iii) ensure that the participants are provided with sufficient explanation as soon as possible.

Nevertheless, all such proposals should be scrutinised by the Research Ethics Committee automatically.

- c) After the data has been collected, participants should be provided with information about the nature of the study and best efforts should be made such that any misconceptions that may have arisen be removed. Where scientific or humane values justify delaying or withholding this information, the researcher has a special responsibility to monitor the research and to ensure that there are no damaging consequences for the participant.
24. The researcher must protect the participant from any physical and psychological discomfort, harm or danger that may arise from the procedures used. If a risk of such consequences does exist, the proposal should go automatically to the Research Ethics Committee, and the researcher must inform the participant of the risk. The participant should be informed of the procedures for contacting the researcher, within a reasonable time period following participation, in the event of stress, potential harm or related questions/concerns arising.

Respect for the Confidentiality of the Participants

25. When designing a research study/project, where the data collected may relate to identifiable living individuals, the researcher must ensure that the UK Data Protection Act 1998 (and/or any subsequent amendments or successors of the Act) is referred to and taken into account.
26. Procedures to protect confidentiality should be outlined in documentation initially given to the participant when 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. Where 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.
27. Results should normally be reported in such a way that the identity of individuals cannot be determined.

Respect for the Integrity of Knowledge

28. Researchers must not falsify or distort research findings, nor plagiarise the work of others. Particular care should be taken to ensure full and appropriate citation of the work of others. Copyright laws should be adhered to.
29. Ownership of any research material, and its use, should be agreed at the start of the research, and such agreement should obtain after the close of the research. Permission to use the data gained in the research should therefore follow these prior agreements.
30. Researchers must beware of undertaking research in an area where they may be perceived to have a conflict of interest, for example in the form of a commercial or professional benefit accruing from particular results. Such instances should be referred to the Research Ethics Committee.
31. Researchers should show a sympathetic awareness of the research community within which they are working. Where criticism of others' results or methods is deemed necessary, this should always be informed and carefully considered.

32. Due credit should be given to the contribution made by all of the researchers involved in a project. Authorship should be credited to those who had a substantive input into the research output in question, with the appropriate relative weighting being accorded to authors (for example, in terms of the order of authorship) irrespective of professional position or seniority.
33. Researchers should be careful not to engage in research which they know to be beyond their competence. They should have the ability to use the appropriate methodological tools required for the research in question. Considerations of competence need particularly full assessment when entering into contracts with external funding bodies.
34. Researchers need to be aware of, and take into account, 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 that 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.
35. The integrity and security of electronic and paper data storage mechanisms, for data already stored, should be audited periodically by the researcher(s); the procedures for this should be detailed in the research project proposal and design documents.
36. When deciding on how and what data should be stored, who has access to it and how it will be used, the researcher must ensure that the provisions of the UK Data Protection Act 1998 (and/or any subsequent amendments or successors of the Act) are adhered to, and clearly shown in the project proposals and design documents. This should also include decisions on how long the data should be kept, how it should be disposed of and what safeguards would be in place if the data had to be transferred, either within the UK or overseas.