



BISHOP GROSSETESTE UNIVERSITY
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RESEARCH ETHICS POLICY 2014

Introduction

The aim of this policy is to provide a clear ethical framework for staff and student research at Bishop Grosseteste University. The policy raises issues which should be fully considered by researchers and their supervisors before undertaking any research activity. It is the duty of the researcher to conduct their research with due consideration to the ethical framework provided by this and any appropriate academic discipline ethical guidance.

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**.

Research, wherever it takes place must be conducted according to the highest standards of rigour and integrity. All those engaged in research have a duty to consider how the work they undertake, host or support impacts on society and the wider research community. This research policy is framed within a commitment to the principles outlined in the Universities UK (2012) Concordat to support research integrity.

Commitment 1: We are committed to maintaining the highest standards of rigour and integrity in all aspects of research;

Commitment 2: We are committed to ensuring that research is conducted according to the appropriate ethical, legal and professional frameworks, obligations and standards, maintaining the highest standards of rigour and integrity in all aspects of research;

Commitment 3: We are committed to supporting a research environment that is underpinned by a culture of integrity and based on good governance, best practice and support for the development of researchers;

Commitment 4: We are committed to using transparent, robust and fair processes to deal with allegations of research misconduct should they arise; and,

Commitment 5: We are committed to working together to strengthen the integrity of research and to reviewing progress regularly and openly.

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 (BGU) when engaging in research. Staff will be made aware of these guidelines by the Head of Educational Development and Research, the Head of Doctoral Studies or any member of the Research Ethics Standing Group. Students will be made aware of these guidelines by their supervising tutor in advance of any research being undertaken.

N.B. Failure to follow the University's Research Ethics Policy will lead to the data being unusable [hence any assessment point linked to the data being graded as a fail] and may lead to serious disciplinary action. Research ethics approval cannot be granted retrospectively.



The emphasis within these guidelines is on research involving other people (for example, research within a classroom setting or within a community setting)¹. They also apply to any teaching which involves data gathering, for research purposes, by an academic 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. Masters student dissertations, doctoral projects and all staff research must be considered by the Research Ethics Standing Group before data collection begins. In the case of undergraduate and taught postgraduate research if any aspect of the research design suggests that its ethical acceptability is uncertain, independent approval must be obtained from the Research Ethics Standing Group. See Appendix 1: Ethical Clearance form (Master's dissertation, doctoral projects and staff research). See Appendix 2: Application of the research ethics policy for taught degrees (excluding Master's dissertation).
2. The primary ethical concern of all researchers/supervisors lies in considering whether by participating in the research an individual, community or organisation will in any way be at risk of harm² as a result of the research. If risk(s) is(are) identified the researchers should make every effort to negate the risk. Where the risk cannot be eliminated from the research design procedures must be justified, explaining why alternative approaches involving less risk cannot be used.
3. Where research is being undertaken involving children or vulnerable adults, the researcher(s) must have the appropriate Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) clearance. If schools, or other similar institutions, are involved, the school must be given a letter from BGU, signed by a supervisor, line manager or the Head of Doctoral Studies, stating that the researcher has DBS clearance. BGU students involved in research with children or vulnerable adults should follow the guidelines for DBS clearance laid down by 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 if the research has not made clear that it is still part of the data collection exercise.

¹ Although the focus of the policy is on research involving human participants it should be noted that it also applies to secondary research data collected through desk based techniques.

² Potential harm includes physical, social or psychological distress to participants and researchers, whether directly or indirectly involved, which might arise in the course of the research.



5. The researcher must ensure that the participants (and/or their guardians/carers) have an understanding of the potential secondary use of data and consent to this possible use in journal articles, conference presentations or similar. Participants should also be aware that some research funding bodies have the expectation that anonymised data collected for a specific research project may be used subsequently by other researchers (e.g. UKRC data sets).
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. Research collaborators, assistants, students and employees still, however, incur similar ethical obligations to those of the Principal Investigator (PI).
8. Where research is carried out by students, it is the joint responsibility of the student and the supervisors to agree its design and ensure its ethical clearance. If circumstances require a significant change to the research design ethical clearance must be reconfirmed.
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. While recognising the contextual setting every effort should be made to ensure data collected overseas meets the ethical guidance contained in this and any appropriate professional ethical guidance (e.g. BERA, BPS and the SRA).
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 Standing Group (or similar) of the lead PI's institution and abide by that process and subsequent monitoring. Documentary evidence confirming ethical clearance has been granted must be lodged with the CEDaR office.

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, e.g. 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 BGU'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 (See Appendix 3 for an information sheet template). The researcher must honour all promises and commitments included in that agreement. (Unless agreements on confidentiality and anonymity are likely to result in the continuation of illegal activity and/or harm to the individual or others.) 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. Where ever possible written consent should be obtain before any data collection takes place (See Appendix 4 for an informed consent template).
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 assume approval has not been granted and therefore should not proceed.

- b) Only in exceptional circumstances (e.g. where the research sample are under two years of age) 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 Standing Group.
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 without prejudice. 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. Informed consent need not always be obtained for data to be used in research that is already in the public domain, e.g. school SATS results, Ofsted reports or other literary texts. In using data the researcher should be committed not to misrepresent data, and to maintain the highest standards of research integrity outlined in the concordat to support research integrity (Universities UK, 2012).
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 in the research design. 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 Standing Group.
22. Where appropriate 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 Standing Group.
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.

In all cases where it is proposed to withhold the true purpose of a research activity (or provide a misleading explanation) the research design must be considered by the Research Ethics Standing Group before any data collection is undertaken

- b) Before seeking approval for either course 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 Standing Group automatically.

- c) After 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 Standing Group, 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 from participation in the research. Contact details will normally be included in the Research Information Sheet (Appendix 3).

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. Researchers who judge that the effect of the agreements they have made with participants, on confidentiality and anonymity, will allow the continuation of illegal behaviour, which has come to light in the course of the research, must carefully consider making disclosure to the appropriate authorities. If the behaviour is likely to be harmful to the participants or to others, the researchers must also consider disclosure. Insofar as it does not undermine or obviate the disclosure, researchers must apprise the participants or their guardians or responsible others of their intentions and reasons for disclosure (BERA, 2011: 8).
28. Results should normally be reported in such a way that the identity of individuals cannot be determined.

Respect for the Integrity of Knowledge

29. 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 using an appropriate reference format. Copyright laws should be adhered to.
30. 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. (Please ensure you have permission to use the data in other scholarly ways – e.g. journal articles – in addition to the primary research dissemination format.)
31. 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 Standing Group.
32. 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.
33. 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. Ideally this should be agreed between those involved in the research before outputs are compiled.

34. 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 attention when entering into contracts with external funding bodies.
35. 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.
36. 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. In general data held electronically as files should be encrypted and password protected.
37. 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.

References and other sources of advice:

British Education Research Association (2011) *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research*
London: BERA

Social Research Association (2003) *Ethical Guidelines*. Available at:

<http://the-sra.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/ethics03.pdf> (Accessed May 2014)

Universities UK (2012) *The concordat to support research integrity*. London; Universities UK



Appendix 1: Research Ethics Clearance Form

(For: Masters student dissertations, doctoral research projects and all staff research)

Section 1. Your details.

Name:		
School:		
Student ID Number:		
Degree for which this research is being conducted and/or staff position at Bishop Grosseteste University.		
Supervisor allocated	Yes:	No:
Supervisor or Project Leader/Principal Investigator.		
Period during which research will be conducted (start* and end date). *start date must be later than the date of the Research Ethic Standing Group meeting		
Any specific external professional codes of practice that pertain to the kind of research proposed.		
Your Signature		

Section 2. Details of proposed research study.

a. Full title:	
b. Aims and objectives:	
c. Brief outline of the research study. Please ensure that you include details of the following: Design (qualitative/quantitative etc). Measures (questionnaire; interview schedule; experimental trial etc.)	
d. Where will the study take place and in what setting?	
e. Give a brief description of your target sample (e.g. age, occupation, gender). Is	



the participation individual or part of a group?	
f. Are any of your participants in vulnerable groups (e.g. children under 16, individuals with learning difficulties or mental illness)? Please specify the nature of the vulnerability and complete section (g).	
g. Vulnerable groups. Have any special arrangements been made to deal with issues of consent (e.g. is parental or guardian agreement to be obtained, and if so in what form)?	
h. How will participants be selected, approached and recruited?	
i. Is written consent to be obtained? If no , please state why. If yes , please complete the standard Consent Form (see p 6) and attach to this documentation.	

Section 3. Risk & Ethical Procedures.

<p>Please note – <u>all</u> studies with human participants have the potential to create a level of risk. You are fully responsible for their protection. Please try to anticipate the context and perspective of your participants when completing this section.</p>	
a. Are there any potential risks to participants? These could be physical and/or psychological. Please specify, and explain any steps you have taken to address them.	
b. How might participation in this research cause discomfort or distress to participants? Please specify, and explain any steps you have taken to address these.	
c. How might participants benefit from taking part in this research?	
d. Does any aspect of your research	



require that participants are naïve? (i.e. They are not given the exact aims of the research) Please explain why and give details of debriefing procedures.

e. Every participant must be given a written INFORMATION SHEET giving details about the research. This is in addition to the consent form. Please add a copy of both to this form before submitting your documentation to the Research Ethics Standing Group.

Section 4. Data - Confidentiality & Anonymity.

a. Where and how do you intend to store any data collected from this research?

b. Under Data Protection regulations (e.g. *data is stored securely and is not accessible or interpretable by individuals outside of the project*), give details of steps you will take to ensure the **security** of any data you collect.

c. What steps have been taken to safeguard the **confidentiality** of personal records?

d. Will this research require the use of any of the following:-
- video recordings Yes/No
- audio recording Yes/No
- observation of participants? Yes/No

e. If you answered YES to any of the above, please state how you will ensure confidentiality and anonymity, and what you intend to do with these records on completion of the research.

Section 5. Comments of Supervisor (where appropriate)

All students MUST have this section completed by their supervisor (where allocated) before submitting to the Research Ethics Standing Group. Incomplete forms will not be considered.

Supervisors: Please enter any comments in this box and return this form to the CEDaR



Administrator

Section 7. Comments of Project Leader/Principal Investigator (where appropriate)

If this research forms a discrete part of a larger project that has a project leader, now pass this form to the person who is leading the project and ask him/her to comment on any ethical considerations that this research may raise.

Project Leaders: Please enter any comments in this box and return the form to the CEDaR Administrator

Please indicate which of these options is to be followed by placing a tick in the appropriate box.

Inform the applicant that ethical clearance is not required.	
Grant ethical clearance.	
Forward the application to the Chair of the Research Ethics Standing Group	

Research Ethics Standing Group Coordinator's Signature:

Date:



Appendix 2: Application of the Research Ethics Policy to research projects

(For: taught degrees (excluding Master's dissertations and EdD module projects))

Across the institution many students registered for taught awards undertake research projects which involve human participants in places of work, in the community, in schools or other settings. Undertaking a substantial project involving human participants at undergraduate or master's level raises certain issues associated with research ethics and 'informed consent' in particular.

The Research Ethics Policy, in common with policies active in many other institutions, is formulated in such a way as to be far reaching and all inclusive in scope and, in the strictest of interpretations, suggests that 'informed consent' should normally be obtained from all human participants, or their parents or guardians in the case of children or vulnerable adults. However, given the large number of such projects which are undertaken each year, this process would be prohibitively time-consuming and would, in practice, be likely to lead to the discontinuation of an activity from which students derive important benefits. In order to ensure that it remains possible to sustain research projects within the curricula of taught programmes, a proportionate response to the provisions of the Research Ethics Policy is needed. The following measures have been developed to meet this requirement, whilst ensuring that the important ethical principles embodied in the Policy are observed.

The Research Ethics Policy indicates that 'informed consent' needs to be obtained even if the research is part of 'normal professional practice for the researcher'. It is, therefore, strongly recommended that all research projects which form part of taught programmes should be formulated in such a way as to ensure the ethical issues arising from the research are minimal. The following procedures must be observed in all cases.

A full copy of the Research Ethics Policy must be included as an appendix in all relevant documentation (e.g. the module handbook of an 'individual study' or other course modules as appropriate). All students must sign a declaration to confirm that they have read the Policy and adhered to the guidance that it contains. The signed declaration must appear at the start of their submitted work.

Ethical considerations must be included in formal teaching in advance of any 'substantial' research project taking place.

When planning their research projects, students and their University supervisor(s) must meet to identify, evaluate and address any ethical implications arising. If any aspect of the project suggests that the work to be undertaken is ethically unsuitable, that study will not be allowed to take place as conceived and designed. In such instances, the student will be informed by their supervisor(s) and directed to revise or reconsider their work as appropriate.

In order to ensure that there is a record that agreement has been reached between student and supervisor, a formal research proposal must be drawn up and the Research Ethics Student Form (shown below) signed by both parties and retained by the project supervisor/course administrator for record.



Where a student or supervisor is uncertain about the ethical suitability of a research project, they should always seek the advice from the Research Ethics Standing Group. In such an event, the project will be delayed until an outcome is determined. This should be considered and taken into account well in advance of any research being proposed and undertaken. Failure to follow the University's Research Ethics Policy will lead to the data being unusable [hence any assessment point linked to the data being graded as a fail] and may lead to serious disciplinary action. Research ethics approval cannot be granted retrospectively.

The research proposal must in all cases also be presented to the manager, supervisor, mentor, head teacher or class teacher in the place of work, school or other educational setting and signed in advance of any research being undertaken. This act acknowledges general approval and confirms that the research proposed is considered entirely appropriate and 'routine'.

Prior to starting any form of research in a place of work, a school or elsewhere, students must in addition adhere to the Research Ethics Policy in its entirety, beginning with providing information about the research project for the human participants who may then decide to withdraw. Where it is considered appropriate by the place of work, school or other setting, a letter should be sent to the parents or guardians of the human participants [if children or vulnerable adult(s)] involved providing information about the research project. While not seeking 'informed consent' *per se*, the parents or guardians may then make further enquiries or withdraw their children as they see fit.

It should be emphasised that the provisions in this annex apply only to taught programmes. They do not apply to PhD students, EdD students entering the thesis stage of their work or Masters students at the dissertation stage all of whom should seek ethical approval using the appropriate ethics approval form [Appendix A of this policy document].

Research Ethics Student Declaration Form

All students conducting research projects (described as within the remit of the Research Annex) must sign this declaration to confirm that they have considered the ethics of conducting their research. It should then be passed to the BGU supervising tutor for approval. It is the responsibility of the tutor to retain a copy of the form as a record. Students must not begin field work until the supervising tutor notifies them that approval has been granted. The research consent form and research information sheet should be completed as appropriate.

Student Name:	
Student Number:	
Subject:	
Course/module code and name:	
Research project title:	



Brief description of project

Research question(s):

-
-

Key literature (formatted accordingly):

-
-
-

Indication of method:

Ethical considerations

Detail any ethical considerations here. If your research sample includes 'young people/ vulnerable adults' please ALSO indicate how your research design accommodates the ethical guidance offered by BERA or other related professional associations.

I confirm that I have considered and understood the ethics of completing the above named research.

Student signature:

Date:

BGU supervisor name and signature:

Approved ; Referred to Module Leader ;
Referred to Research Ethics Standing Group

Date:

Placement supervisor/mentor name and signature:

Date:

N.B. Your BGU supervisor should keep a copy of this form when they have signed it. You should then secure a signature from your placement supervisor/ mentor and submit a copy with your dissertation.



Appendix 3: RESEARCH INFORMATION SHEET

Outline of the research (couple of sentences in non-specialist language)

Who is the researcher?

Name:

Institution:

Contact details (please use your BGU e-mail):

Supervisors contact details (please use BGU e-mail/delete when not appropriate)

What will my participation in the research involve?

Will there be any benefits in taking part?

Will there be any risks in taking part?

What happens if I decide I don't want to take part during the actual research study, or decide I don't want the information I've given to be used?

How will you ensure that my contribution is anonymous?

Please note that your confidentiality and anonymity cannot be assured if, during the research, it comes to light you are involved in illegal or harmful behaviours which I may disclose to the appropriate authorities.



Appendix 4: RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

Title of research project:

Name of researcher:

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above research project and have had the opportunity to ask questions

Yes	No
-----	----

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

Yes	No
-----	----

3. I agree to take part in this research project and for the data to be used as the researcher sees fit, including publication.

Yes	No
-----	----

For parents only (delete where not appropriate to include):

4. I understand that my child will be asked to take part in this research

Yes	No
-----	----

Name of participant/parent

Signature

Date:

Name of researcher

Signature:

Date: