Higher Education Ethics Approval: Code of Practice

This Code of Practice outlines the processes and procedures that students must adhere to when undertaking any form of *research* which involves *primary research activity*; the completion of which is required for a module of study on a higher education programme at the Heart of Yorkshire Education Group (the "Group").

This document allows the Group to ensure that students are committed to appropriate ethical practice and principles.

Full account has been taken of the UK Quality Code, Advice and Guidance: Enabling Student Achievement, which embeds the guiding principle that the Group will:

> *Enable students to take responsibility for their own learning and become resilient individuals, equipped for a rewarding career.*

This Code of Practice should be read alongside the Higher Education Research Ethics Guidelines. Students are also directed to familiarise themselves with the expectations of their validating university/awarding body.

1.0 Key Terms:

- **Research**: any form of disciplined inquiry that aims to contribute to a body of knowledge or theory[1]

- **The Researcher**: any student enrolled on a higher education programme within the Group carrying out research activity

- **Research Ethics**: refers to the moral principles guiding research, from its inception through to completion and publication of results and beyond

- **Human Participants**: including living human beings, human beings who have recently died, embryos and foetuses, human tissue and bodily fluids, and human data and records[3].

2.0 Principles of Ethical Research[4]:

1. Research participants should take part voluntarily, free from any coercion or undue influence, and their rights, dignity and (when possible) autonomy should be respected and appropriately protected. The use of inducements or incentives to encourage participation should be carefully monitored where it is deemed to be an acceptable practice – *at the Group, this would not be deemed to be an acceptable practice and a clear rationale for their use would have to be provided. Any such application would automatically be referred to the Ethics Panel for approval and would not be deemed suitable for Local Level Approval.*

2. *Research should be worthwhile and provide value that outweighs any risk or harm. Researchers should aim to maximise the benefit of the research and minimise potential risk of harm to participants and researchers. All potential risk and harm should be mitigated by robust precautions. The stance of the College is that harm (physical and psychological) to research participants and researchers must be avoided in all instances.*

3. *Research staff and participants should be given appropriate information about the purpose, methods and intended uses of the research, what their participation in the research entails and what risks and benefits, if any, are involved. Any research proposal which offers variance from this principle may be*

[Research ethics guidance – ESRC – UKRI](#)

approved, but the context in which this would be permitted is very specific and will relate to the value of the proposed research.

4. Individual research participant and group preferences regarding anonymity should be respected and participant requirements concerning the confidential nature of information and personal data should be respected. *The Groups stance is that the collection, processing, storage, and destruction of any data (or other materials) collected from participants must be done in alignment with relevant, current legislative requirements (as a minimum the General Data Protection Regulation).*

5. Research should be designed, reviewed, and undertaken to ensure recognised standards of integrity are met, and quality and transparency are assured.

6. The independence of research should be clear, and any conflicts of interest or partiality should be explicit.

3.0 Procedures under the Ethics Approval Code:

All students undertaking research involving primary data collection will be required to seek ethical approval by completing the Ethics Proposal.

Projects which involve secondary research (i.e., consisting entirely of desk-based research such as literature review) fall outside of this Code of Practice and will not require ethical approval.

Ethical approval can be granted either:

- At local level (by a Group's Higher Education Ethics Co-Ordinator)
- By the Ethics Panel.

3.1 Local Level Approval

A College Higher Education Ethics Co-Ordinator (Ethics Co-Ordinator) is defined as a Level Six Programme Leader from a different curriculum area.

Approvals made for research proposals at this level are deemed to be 'low-risk' and are therefore not required to be fully considered by the Ethics Panel.

Low-risk projects are those research projects in which the issues under investigation are neither complex nor sensitive in nature and which also carry minimum risk of harm to any participants.

A Local Level Approval Form will be completed by the dissertation Supervisor(s) and submitted, along with the completed Ethics Approval Forms to a predetermined Ethics Co-Ordinator for approval.

Following discussion between the Supervisor and Ethics Co-Ordinator, should a candidate's proposal be deemed to not be low risk, at first instance the supervisor will offer the dissertation candidate the opportunity to rework their research design and resubmit locally. If the research cannot be redesigned or the candidate declines the offer, the ethics proposal will be passed to the Ethics Panel for review.

A student receiving local level approval should be aware that deviation from the approved proposal would require a re-submission of the approval document. In such a case, the new submission may result in local level approval being removed and the proposal being forwarded for reconsideration by the Ethics Panel.

3.2 Approval by the Ethics Panel:

Proposals which involve external bodies, medium or high-risk situations, complex or sensitive research investigations or where funding is needed from an external body must always be referred to the Ethics Panel.

The Ethics Panel will consist of:
- Head of Higher Education
- Head of Curriculum from relevant area
- Programme Leader from relevant area

All proposals submitted to the Ethics Panel must also include the following information:
- Consent form
- Participant information sheet
- Proposed data collection tool.

The purpose of these inclusions is for the Panel to satisfy themselves that participant consent will be ethically valid, i.e., informed, voluntary and competent.

Competent consent cannot be provided by the following groups:
- Those who are unconscious
- Those in extreme pain or distress

- Those legally defined as lacking mental capacity.

For this reason, Ethical Approval *will not be granted* for any research proposal involving these groups.

The following decisions may be made:

- Not approved
- Approved subject to amendments and/or conditions
- Approved without amendments/conditions.

In all cases, the student will be fully informed of the decision made and the reasons for that decision. Where amendments and/or conditions are required, these shall be fully detailed within the Panel's response. This will offer the student the opportunity to rework and resubmit their proposals.

4.0 Supervisors:

Each student will have the opportunity to work with a supervisor on their research project. For lower-level research, this may be the module tutor on a group supervision basis. For higher level research (such as a level 6 dissertation or independent project) this is likely to be an individual supervisor working on a 1:1 basis. The supervisor will be responsible for ensuring that the student aligns to their approved proposal and that any deviations are highlighted to the student as needing re-submission for re-consideration.