



HE14 - Higher Education (HE) Research Ethics Policy

Policy Author:	Director of Curriculum	Policy Owner:	Vice Principal Curriculum & Quality
Approval Date:	July 2023	Review Date:	July 2025

Purpose of the Policy

This policy has been designed to ensure that proper consideration has been given to any ethics issues raised from primary research undertaken by Higher Education students studying at Weymouth College.



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1. Policy Statement

- 1.1. Research ethics is a set of principles governing the way any research involving interaction between the researcher and other humans or data relating to humans, is designed, managed and conducted.
- 1.2. This policy sets out how the College will ensure that proper consideration has been given to any ethical issues raised from primary research undertaken by Higher Education (HE) students studying at the College.
- 1.3. All research must follow appropriate ethical, legal and professional frameworks, obligations and standards.
- 1.4. This policy should be read in conjunction with the College Data Protection Policy.

2. Reason for the Policy

- 2.1. As part of HE programmes delivered at Weymouth College students may be required to undertake primary research for the completion of their studies.
- 2.2. The foremost consideration of this research is that the dignity, rights, safety and well-being of people who take part is at all times considered, respected and safeguarded and that the interests and safety of the researcher(s) is taken into consideration.

3. Policy Objectives

- 3.1 Enable students to meet ethical standards in conducting research for higher education courses.
- 3.2 Ensure that staff supervising higher education students have sufficient guidance to be able to support students in meeting these standards.
- 3.3 All research supervisors (ie staff delivering research project modules or similar) will be given sufficient guidance and support to identify and manage ethical concerns in research.
- 3.4 Students will need to complete a **Research Project Proposal** form (**see Appendix 1 attached**) which is submitted to staff delivering research project modules or similar for approval.

4. Policy

The College requires that human participation in research, on any level, from on-line surveys, through focus group participation, dissemination or public engagement activities, to clinical trials, is ethical with appropriate consideration of risks.

Historical developments in research ethics with humans have informed the College's requirements of its researchers. In brief, these cover; voluntary and informed participation (Nuremberg 1947), protection from harm, protection of participants' rights and independent review (Helsinki 1964), and beneficence in research and equality for



participants (Belmont 1979). These principles must inform all research with human participants.

This Policy sets out the College's approach and structures for protecting human participants in research by using ethical review and guidance. This document explains how to meet key sector principles in research with humans, promote consistency in quality and demonstrate sector and legal compliance.

4.1 Where a student is carrying out research through evaluation or market research they should complete a signed consent proforma available from the Programme Leader. A formal ethical review **will not normally be required providing the following criteria are met:**

- a) Signed consent from participants has been completed;
- b) The data is completely anonymous with no personal information recorded;

Note: this does not include any personal details recorded as a form of consent.

- c) The data is not considered to be sensitive or confidential in nature;
- d) The issues researched are not likely to upset or disturb participants;
- e) Vulnerable or dependent groups are not included;
- f) There is no risk of any disclosures or reporting obligations;

Research involving audio interviews with participants (items a-e above):

- g) The audio recording is transcribed and fully anonymised **and the recording is then deleted;**
- h) The subject matter is limited to topics that are strictly within the professional competence of the participants.

Audit of data/secondary data analysis:

- i) Students are able to provide explicit consent from the data controller to access the data;
- j) Students are able to prove the data will be used for a purpose which falls within the remit of the original consent provided by data subjects.

When an Ethical Review will be required:

- 4.2 An ethical review panel will be convened where a research proposal involves:
- a) The collection or use of person-identifiable or sensitive personal data which typically relates to race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, political opinions, religious beliefs, physical/mental health or criminal activities.
 - b) The collection or use of data which is classed as sensitive or confidential;
 - c) The use of audio/video recordings or photographs;
 - d) Where the research involves vulnerable groups such as children or adults with special needs and therefore may involve safeguarding issues;
 - e) The ingestion (by whatever means of delivery) of any substance by participants;
 - f) The use of psychological tests or interventions;
 - g) Privileged access to clinical or personal records, or access to potential volunteers on the basis of their being or having been clients or patients, or the invitation to volunteers to divulge facts about themselves which they would not wish the investigator to allow to become known to other persons;

- h) Any form of physical risk, distress, embarrassment, anxiety, stress, fatigue or inconvenience to the participant;
 - i) Any form of adverse effect on the personal, social or economic well-being of the participant;
 - j) Social sensitive topics;
 - k) Uncovering or is likely to uncover illegal or potentially harmful activities;
 - l) Risk of reputational damage to the College;
 - m) Potential for incitement or discrimination;
 - n) Hazards to human or animal welfare;
 - o) Damage to infrastructure or the natural environment;
 - p) Any ambiguity regarding the legal status of the research.
- 4.3 The research supervisor will identify if any research proposed by their students meets the criteria detailed above. The member of staff will then notify the Director of Curriculum in advance of the research proposal submission deadline who will convene to meet with a Research Panel after the research proposal submission deadline.
- 4.4 Research that meets the specified criteria will be reviewed by a Research Panel which is made up of the Director of Curriculum, the relevant Programme Leaders, Unit/Module Leaders and the student(s).
- 4.5 The committee must be satisfied that the risks, burdens and intrusions to participants of the research will be minimised and justified by the expected benefits, prior to any primary research being undertaken.
- 4.6 The students' research proposal will be provided to the Research Panel for consideration, and the student in question or the research supervisor will attend the meeting to respond to questions about methodology if a need is identified.

Outcomes:

- 4.7 The Research Panel will decide one of the following outcomes:
- a) **Approve:** The Committee are satisfied that the research poses no significant ethical concerns, or are satisfied that the methodology addresses any significant ethical concerns.
 - b) **Action:** The Committee approves the proposed research subject to the student to altering their methodology or focus to address an identified risk.
 - c) **Refer:** The Committee believes the research poses significant ethical concerns that cannot be rectified by altering the methodology, and invites the student to submit an alternative research proposal. Research Supervisors will support students in selecting research questions that are unlikely to be referred.

5. Responsibility

5.1. Director of Curriculum

Staff should also contact Roz Osborne, HE Registrar, for additional documentation as appropriate for your programme of study.

These include:

- Consent Form
- Ethics Form(s)
- Participant Information Sheet
- GDPR Privacy Notice for Research Participants

Definitions:	The College defines primary research as “the gathering of new information (including but not limited to data), through methods such as observation, surveys and interviews.”	Who Needs to Know?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • College staff with involvement in Higher Education programmes, particularly those with responsibility for supervising primary research • Higher Education students undertaking primary research • Employers and other organisations involved in or supporting primary research
Related Policies and Procedures:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data Protection Policy • Safeguarding Policy • HE Assessment Policy 	Approval Date:	July 2023
<p>This policy was approved and adopted by:</p> <p><i>Julia Howe</i></p> <p>Julia Howe Principal</p>			



Appendix 1



Research Project Proposal

Prior to submitting your proposal please read the College HE Research Ethics Policy and Data Protection Policy, both available on Moodle.

Proposed Title

Student Name

Course

Programme Leader

Abstract (concise statement of intended research (100 words))

Guidance on how to write your Proposal

Introduction

The first part of your proposal is the initial pitch for your project. Make sure it briefly explains what you want to do and why. It should:

- Introduce the topic
- Give background and context
- Outline your research question(s) and aim(s)

Scholarly Sources

You should aim to demonstrate exactly how your project will contribute to conversations in your field of study and should be a review of scholarly sources.

- Compare and contrast: what are the main theories, methods, debates and controversies?
- Be critical: what are the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches?
- Show how your research fits in: how will you build on, challenge, or synthesize the work of others?

Methodology and Research Design

You should describe the overall approach and practical steps you will take to answer your research questions.

Research Type

- **Quantitative research** –Used to test or confirm theories or assumptions and can be used to establish generalised facts about a topic.
 - *Surveys, experimental research, observational research, content analysis (books, interviews, social media, photographs etc).*
- **Qualitative research** - Used to understand concepts, thoughts or experiences. This type of research enables you to gather in-depth insights on topics that are not well understood.
 - *Interviews, focus groups, case studies*
- Primary sources first hand evidence from interview transcripts, statistical data. Primary sources are generally a more credible source of evidence.
- Secondary sources – second-hand information from journals, reviews, academic books.

Sources

- What or who will you study?
- How will you collect evidence? i.e. random sampling, case studies?
- When and where will you collect the data? (Sample group)

Research Methods

- What tools and procedures will you use (e.g. surveys, interviews, observations, experiments) to collect and analyse data?
- Why are these the best methods to answer your research questions?
- Consider reliability, validity and generalisability.

Practicalities

- How much time will you need to collect the data?
- How will you gain access to participants or sources?
- Do you see any potential obstacles, and how will you address them?

Ethical issues

- How will you ensure that the research carried out is ethical?
- How will informed consent be obtained? (Include an example consent form)
- Procedures for maintaining confidentiality and anonymity.
- Health and safety concerns.

Do not simply write a list of methods. Aim to make an argument for why this is the most appropriate, valid and reliable approach to answering your questions.

Implications & Contribution to Knowledge

Finish your proposal on a strong note. Explore potential implications of your research theory or practice. Emphasise what you aim to contribute to existing knowledge on a topic. Your results might have implications for:

- Improving processes in a specific field
- Informing policy objectives
- Strengthening a theory or model
- Challenging assumptions
- Creating a basis for further research

Reference list or bibliography

Your research proposal must include referencing (as per your programme’s guidelines) for every source you have used, and full publication details should always be included in the reference list.

In some cases, you might be asked to include a bibliography. This is a list of all the sources you consulted in preparing the proposal, even ones you did not cite in the text. The aim is to show the full range of literature that will support your research project.

Proofreading

As in any other piece of academic writing, it is essential to redraft, edit and proofread your research proposal before you submit it. If you have the opportunity, ask your Programme Leader and or Unit/Module Leader for feedback.

Outcome (to be completed by Programme Leader/Research Panel as appropriate)

Approve: The research and/or methodology poses no significant ethical concerns

Action: The proposed research is approved subject to altering methodology or focus to address identified risk.

Refer: The research poses significant ethical concerns that cannot be rectified by altering the methodology, and invites the student to submit an alternative research proposal. Programme Leaders and/or Unit/Module Leaders will support students in selecting research questions that are unlikely to be referred.

This Research Project is (please tick as appropriate):

Approved:	Needs Action:	Referred:
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Comments as appropriate:

Signed:	Date:
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(Programme Leader/Chair of Research Panel)

