

University of Edinburgh - School of Economics

School Research Ethics Guidelines

All research conducted by University staff and students should be performed in accordance with their College's research ethics framework. For more information please visit: <http://www.ed.ac.uk/arts-humanities-soc-sci/research-ke/support-for-staff/policies/ethics>

The current document aims to provide more concrete guidelines for the types of research conducted at the School of Economics.

The purpose of these ethical standards is not to limit research activities, but to promote and facilitate the conduct of all research in ways that respect the dignity and preserve the well-being of human research participants, and also to protect researchers from legal and ethical complexities.

The School Ethics Guidelines apply to any person who conducts research, including all research, teaching and administrative staff members, postgraduate and undergraduate students, visiting or adjunct scholars, fellows and chairs, paid and unpaid research associates and assistants, whether acting as a principal investigator, a junior collaborator or in some other capacity.

Also the guidelines must be followed

- (i) whether it is funded (e.g., by grant, award, fellowship, contract) or is non-funded;
- (ii) whether funding is internal (i.e., University) or is from an external source (including domestic and foreign public, governmental, and private sources);
- (iii) whether participants are drawn from University sources or from any other sources (e.g., workplaces, other universities, etc.);
- (iv) whether participants are paid or unpaid;
- (v) whether it is conducted inside or outside Scotland;
- (vi) whether it is conducted on University property or at any other location;
- (vii) whether it is conducted in a laboratory or in the field;
- (viii) whether it is conducted in person or by some other means (e.g., mail, telephone, internet);
- (ix) whether information is collected via direct observation, apparatus, questionnaire, interview, or review of records or other materials not normally available to the public;
- (x) whether it is experimental, correlational, qualitative, or descriptive in nature;
- (xi) whether it is conducted to acquire basic or applied knowledge (e.g., product development assessments, personnel selection, consumer preferences, and product evaluation);
- (xii) whether the information collected has as its focus the human participant or some aspect of the environment with which the human participant interacts;
- (xiii) whether the research is a pilot study or a fully developed project;
- (xiv) whether it is primarily for teaching or demonstration purposes or whether the primary purpose is the acquisition of new knowledge;
- (xv) whether or not it is intended for publication or other public presentation.

Ethical Principles

Any person who conducts research at the School Economics

- (i) does not fabricate data or results. Should significant errors be discovered in their published work, he/she promptly corrects such errors in appropriate means.

(ii) does not present any part of another researcher's work or data as his/her own.
(iii) protects the dignity and preserve the well-being of human research participants if there are any. The latter includes:

(a) Respect for Free and Informed Consent, respecting the exercise of individual free and informed consent by the research participant. Free and informed consent must be voluntarily given, without manipulation, undue influence or coercion. Participants have given free and informed consent when they have freely agreed to serve in the study on the basis of well-understood information about the objectives of the research. They must be fully informed of all risks and possible benefits of their participation. Voluntary participation requires that participants are assured that at any time they may withdraw their consent to the research. In the case of behavioural and questionnaire research where full disclosure about the nature and objectives of the research could bias and invalidate results (for example, in communications intended to change attitudes or in studies of incidental learning), the explanation should be given immediately after data collection or as soon as is consistent with the research design and methods. Participants should be fully informed as soon as possible of the purposes and aims of the research, and any uncertainties should be removed. The investigator should remove any misconceptions that may have been fostered and should re-establish any trust in the research community that may have been lost.

(b) Respect for Privacy and Confidentiality, to protect the access, control and dissemination of personal information ensuring privacy, confidentiality and anonymity respected. If anonymity and confidentiality cannot be assured or granted, potential participants must be made aware of the limitations and of the possible consequences before they are asked for their consent to participate.

(c) Respect for Vulnerable Persons, children, institutionalized persons or others who are vulnerable are entitled to protection and special procedures to protect their interests.

Ethics Application Levels

Any research conducted by staff and students at the School of Economics requires ethics approval from the School Ethics Committee. Currently, research projects that are classified as Level 1 in our three-tier system (described below) are approved by default, and thus do not require an application. For any other research at Level 2 or Level 3, the person who conducts the research has to fill in and submit an appropriate application form to the Ethics Committee.

Level 1: applies to research that is either completely theoretical or uses publicly available information and/or datasets only. Publicly available datasets are those that are distributed or sold to any researchers upon agreement to their respective terms and conditions of use. The data must not concern groups which may be construed as terrorist or extremist.

Level 2: applies to research that involves any form of contact (experiment, field/online survey, etc.) with healthy adult human participants who have given explicit consent to participation, or sensitive information, but does **not** entail potential risk of harm or discomfort (physical, psychological, social, legal or economic) to the researchers, participants, or any other individuals. The collected data must not concern groups which may be construed as terrorist or extremist.

Level 3: applies to research that involves potential risk of harm or discomfort (such as threat to personal safety and privacy, upsetting questions/images, or possibility of criminal prosecution) to the participants, researchers and/or any other individuals; a lack of informed consent; or any protocol that is not covered by Level 1 or Level 2. E.g. field experiments; randomized controlled trials; data collection from children and/or vulnerable adults; fieldwork in a developing country; analysis of highly sensitive data (such as criminal or medical records of potentially identifiable individuals); use of information concerning groups which may be construed as terrorist or extremist; data collection through a medical procedure; experiments involving living animals.

Level 2 applications may be dealt with by convener's action. The convener and at least two other members of the Ethics Committee review Level 3 applications, and a dedicated meeting is held if necessary.

The School Ethics Committee is convened by a member of the Research Committee, and overseen by the College Ethics Committee, which has an audit (receiving annual reports), enhancement (conduit for recommendations), and maintenance (ensuring ethics procedure function in Schools) role.