Research Ethics for Postgraduate Researchers: Key takeaways

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Summary

- Does your research need to be reviewed by the College Research Ethics Committee?
- Are there any risks with your research, or safeguarding, legal or data protection obligations?
- Review takes three weeks and approval cannot be granted retrospectively.
- Ethics intranet page: contains templates, guidance on how to complete an ethics application, a link to the online ethics system and details about training.

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1. Your research will need to be reviewed by the College Research Ethics Committee if it involves:

- People (be they research participants, records of online activity, recently deceased, or information from a dataset)
- Animals
- An impact upon a location, environment, or society more generally
- Work with cultural artefacts or geological samples
- Risks to you, the researcher

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2. Issues that make research more risky and require particular attention

- 'At risk' people - children, prisoners, individuals who can't provide fully informed consent - safeguarding responsibilities.
- When research collects *or* manages identifiable or special category data (researchers and institutions have legal obligations under GDPR).
- When subject matter is 'sensitive', such that it might make participants uncomfortable.
- There are risks to the researchers themselves, for instance through fieldwork, work with participants, or through exposure to troubling archival material.

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3. What review involves

- Turnaround for reviews is three weeks and involves 1) a review by the College Research Ethics Officer, 2) reviews by two academics, and 3) sign off by the Chair-delegate of the Research Ethics Committee.
- We do not provide retrospective ethical approval (after research has started). Though this does not prohibit you from undertaking research that does not require review (literature reviews, methodology and theoretical development).
- Our feedback can be critical, but it should always be constructive. It should be delivered with a view to making research more ethically robust, and can provide an opportunity to unpack the practicalities of how research is conducted.

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4. Final points

- It is very rare that research is prohibited from taking place. Risky research *can* take place, as long as the right mitigations are put in place (e.g. think of how vaccines are created).
- Applications should have robust mitigation procedures and all the right supplementary documents in place (for example recruitment material, information sheet, consent form, data management plan, data sharing agreement, risk assessment form – templates available)
- Try to think about the research ethics process when at the research design stage.

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Links and Information

Ethics intranet page: contains templates, details about training, guidance about how to complete an ethics application, a link to the online ethics system and details about training).

Training: PGR research ethics sessions (for all Royal Holloway PGRs) planned for 11 October, 29 November, 7 February, and 21 March. Organised via Doctoral School and delivered by R&I (email pgrtraining@rhul.ac.uk).

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