

**HEYTHROP COLLEGE
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON**

RESEARCH ETHICS CODE OF PRACTICE

1. Introduction:

Heythrop College believes that all academic research involving live participants undertaken in its name must meet the highest professional standards and sector wide good practice. The development of this Code of Practice has been informed by practice in other HEIs, and by the expectations of academic professional bodies, the Research Councils and others.

2. Principles:

The Research Ethics Code of Practice is underpinned by the general principles that the research must have a benefit to society or to the academic subject areas, and must not harm the participants in any way. Subjects must be treated with respect at all times and will have an opportunity to refuse to participate, or to withdraw at any time. If the research involves other bodies, such as the NHS, charities and schools etc, the ethical requirements of these bodies must be complied with and respected.

While the following list is not exhaustive, researchers should take the following into account when making research proposals to the Ethics Officer and should continually monitor their projects against these principles.

- 2.1 Research should not harm participants and should, if possible, benefit them: the Ethics Officer must approve any procedures before a research project can commence, but especially those which may involve any form of risk. Researchers should be especially aware of and respect any cultural, religious, gender or other sensitivities which may apply to their participants.
- 2.2 Research which is considered potentially harmful may include, but is not limited to, the following activities:
 - The administration of drugs or alcohol;
 - Contact with potentially harmful equipment or materials;
 - Use of hypnosis;
 - Doubt about the participant's ability to give informed consent;
 - Research involving children under the age of sixteen years;
 - Where participants are or might be suffering from physical or mental distress, or anxiety which might be created by the research project;
 - Deception as part of the research project, or as to the real purpose of the study, or the basis on which the participants may have been selected;
 - The involvement of patients under medical or psychiatric care;
 - Questions which involve encroachment on privacy to a degree where the participants might find them offensive or stressful (e.g. questions on religious or political beliefs, sexual preferences, etc).
- 2.3 Participants should be given as much information as possible about the nature and purpose of the research project and the form in which the data will be

used. Wherever possible the outcomes of the research should be made available to participants.

- 2.4 Participants should not be coerced to participate in a project and must be informed that they can withdraw from the project at any time. Particular care must be taken with participants for whom the researcher is in a position of authority e.g. their tutor or employer. Payment should not be used to coerce participants and should normally only be to cover expenses. It should never be used to compensate for risks undertaken as part of the project.
- 2.5 Informed consent **must** be obtained **from participants who are involved in detailed activities** as part of the study. It is not necessary for those being observed in group activities, or where individuals are asked for information but not to express views or to have their personal beliefs questioned. Where participants are asked to undertake detailed activities their informed consent is required. This must be obtained in writing in advance of their involvement in the project. Informed consent can be assumed when participants voluntarily return questionnaires, so extra written confirmation of consent is not required, but participants should have received a clear written explanation of the nature of the research and the purpose of the questionnaire.
- 2.6 Informed consent **must** be obtained from **vulnerable participants** before a research project commences. Researchers must make a judgement about whether participants should be classed as vulnerable. Advice should be sought from the Ethics Officer if required. Vulnerable participants may include, but are not limited to:
 - children under the age of sixteen years;
 - children or adults with mental health difficulties or learning difficulties;
 - participants whose first language is not English and who may not understand the nature of the project.
- 2.7 Clear and detailed information must be given to the participant in an **Information Sheet**, together with the **Research Consent Form (EC2)**, and before Form EC2 is completed and signed by the participant. The Information Sheet must describe the nature of the project, its purpose, the activities that will be undertaken and the ways in which information will be used. A draft Information Sheet should be submitted together with the **Application Form for Ethics Officer approval (EC1)** before the project commences.
- 2.8 Researchers must comply with any regulation or legislation in force to protect vulnerable participants (e.g. a Criminal Records Bureau check if required)
- 2.9 Researchers must comply with any procedures or requirements in place in any organisation involved in the research project
- 2.10 Confidentiality of information gathered from participants and the anonymity of participants should be maintained. If there is the likelihood of identities being made public, participants should be informed of this prior to the commencement of the project and they should have the opportunity to withdraw from the project. Data must be stored and disposed of safely and in accordance with legislative requirements. Guidance can be obtained from the Director of Administration.

- 2.11 Researchers must ensure their own safety e.g. meeting unknown participants in safe places, informing others of their whereabouts if interviews take place in private locations etc
- 2.12 Should the nature of the research change significantly from that approved by the Ethics Officer, the proposal must make another proposal to the Ethics Officer to gain approval for the change in focus
- 2.13 In exceptional circumstances, the Ethics Officer may give approval limited in scope or in time and may ask for a report to be made at significant stages of a project
- 2.14 A short report should be made to the Ethics Officer at the end of the research project, noting any issues which have arisen during the project
- 2.15 A complaints procedure will be in place to enable participants to raise concerns about the conduct of any project. However, it is expected that researchers will minimise the risk of such complaints by providing clear information at all stages of any research project, and by behaving in a professional manner towards participants at all times. Three members of the Research Committee, not including the Head of Department supporting the project, will consider any complaint. Complaints will be considered on the following grounds:
 - The nature or conduct of the project differs significantly from that explained to the participants without any explanation
 - Confidentiality was not maintained
 - Inappropriate behaviour was exhibited by the researcher

A group convened by the Ethics Officer will interview the researcher, will obtain either written evidence from the complainant or meet with the complainant, and consider any written evidence such as research outcomes, information forms, consent forms etc. If the complaint is upheld, a range of actions may be taken, depending on the seriousness of the complaint. These can include, but are not limited to invoking College disciplinary procedures, informing any external funding body of the situation, informing the police if criminal actions appear to have occurred.

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