**Ethics Applications - Guidance for Psychology Staff and Supervisors**

It is expected that all staff submitting to Ethics, or who supervise students, will read this document. The version on ERGO will be updated as necessary and this will be indicated by the version number and date. Please check at least at the start of the Academic Year that you are working from the most up-to-date Version.

Section 1 describes the process of Applying and Resubmitting. Section 2 lists common errors seen in applications.

Please take on board the information in this document - it will save you, your student and the ethics team time and stress! Thank you.

**Section 1.**

Below are a few reminders about your own and your undergraduate and postgraduate students’ ethics applications.

**Applying**

1. Two of the required forms – the **Ethics Form** and the **Risk Assessment Form** – have been revised in the last year. All applications (staff and student) must be written on these new forms. They are available in the “Downloads” section on the ERGO website ([https://www.ergo.soton.ac.uk/downloads.php)](https://www.ergo.soton.ac.uk/downloads.php%29)
2. It might be helpful to direct your students to two guidance files available on the ERGO “Downloads” page: “Advice on applying” and “Reminders for Yr 3 students.”
3. Please remember to **carefully review** your students’ ethics applications and all documents uploaded to ERGO *before* you approve them in ERGO. Ideally supervisors should check through the application before the student submits to ERGO. This can save both the student and the supervisor time. However, whether a supervisor chooses to do this or not, supervisors are required to check ***all*** documents submitted and approve their students’ applications before they are sent to the reviewers.
4. If your student is doing a joint degree (e.g., Psychology and Education), it is a good idea that they note (in the “Submission overview” comments) that they want the application to be reviewed by the Psychology ethics committee.
5. It is a good idea to ask that your student add you as a **“coordinator”** on their application in the ERGO system. If you are a coordinator, you will be able to directly access any comments/requests for revision from the ethics committee; if you are not a coordinator, the student will have to relay the requested changes to you.

**Resubmitting an application**

If the Ethics reviewer requires the applicant to make changes on their submitted ethics application,

1. Only revised files need to be uploaded for an amendment.
2. Revised files should have updated Version number and date.
3. All changes should be highlighted (or include track changes).
4. A list of the changes made should be provided in the “Submission overview” comments box or by uploading a Word file listing the changes.
5. If you are a supervisor, please check carefully that your student has responded to *all* the feedback before re-submitting.

Please note: making the revisions clear for reviewers may speed up the review process.

**Section 2**

Below are some of the most **common errors** seen by reviewers.

1. The IRGA form is completed incorrectly.

The question: “*Will the study only be conducted with one or more of the following approaches*?” needs reading carefully. If *any* methods *other than* those listed here is used, the answer has to be NO.

1. Some documents are missing e.g., adverts, interview questions, questionnaires or parts of some forms are not completed.
2. Older versions of the Risk Assessment Form or the Ethics Form are used.
3. Documents are missing the version number and date. ***All documents***, except the Ethics Form and the Risk Assessment Form, should have a version number and date.
4. There is a lack of clarity with respect to whether the study data are *anonymous* (where even you don’t know the identity of respondents, e.g. in an anonymous online survey) or *anonymised* (you know the identity, but you will aim to conceal it in your findings or in storing the data e.g., use of a ‘key’ that is kept in a separate place).
5. Confidentiality or anonymity are used interchangeably or incorrectly. When participation is *anonymous* it is impossible to know whether or not an individual participated and, therefore, there is no way to determine the connection between individual participants and the results. In the case of confidentiality, participants provide some type of personal information (e.g., name, email, date of birth) but the connection between participants and their data is not shared with anyone outside of the research team and measures are taken to ensure confidentiality e.g., use of participant codes that are kept separate from the data).
6. Unnecessarily including a signed version of the consent form when the study is an online survey. For online surveys all that is needed is a statement at the end of the Participant Information Sheet along the lines of: “*I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet and I agree to participate in this study*” and then a tick box to indicate consent. If using iSurvey, then this sentence is automatically added, so there is no need to add another one unless you want or need to (to get confirmation about age, for example).
7. The Participant Information Sheet does not include the information below:
* Under “What is the research about?”: a statement that the study is being done by a student as part of an undergraduate (or postgraduate) degree.
* Under “Why have I been chosen?”: A clear statement of the inclusion/exclusion criteria for the study.
* Under “What will happen to me if I take part?”: clear information about exactly what the study will involve, including how long it will take, where the study will take place, and what broad topics questionnaires/interviews will cover.
* Under “Are there any benefits in my taking part”: information about the number of credits or other compensation offered. It should be made clear that credits are only available to UofS Psychology students.
* Under “Will my participation be confidential?”: a statement that the researcher will comply with the Data Protection Act/University policy and clear information about how the data will be stored and kept confidential.
* Under “What happens if I change my mind”: whether (and up to what point) the participant can withdraw from the study/withdraw their data. If the study involves an anonymous survey, then participants will be unable to request that their data be withdrawn after completion.
* Under “What happens if something goes wrong”: contact details for the chair of the ethics committee are not included. (NB: text that needs to be included is on the templates in the “Downloads” section on ERGO).
1. The Debriefing Form does not include the name and contact details of the researcher or does not include information about appropriate sources of help if participants are concerned/distressed. If participants include individuals from outside of the UofS, then websites and/or national organisations providing possible information/sources of help must be included in addition to University services/clinic. It must be made clear that University Services are only available to staff and students of the University. It is also good practice to include the information about resources in the Participant Information Sheet as well as the Debriefing Form (as participants may discontinue the study and thus, not see the Debriefing Form).

We trust this has been of help, if you have suggestions for amendment please contact the Chair of the Psychology Ethics Committee, Cynthia Graham: C.A.Graham@soton.ac.uk

Authors

Cynthia Graham, Chair, Psychology Ethics Committee

Anne McBride, Reviewer, Psychology Ethics Committee