

University of Edinburgh,  
School of Social and Political Studies  
**RESEARCH AND RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE**



## Self-Audit Checklist for Level 1 Ethical Review

The audit is to be conducted by the **Principal Investigator**, except in the following cases:

- **Postdoctoral research fellowships** – the applicant in collaboration with the proposed mentor.
- **Postgraduate research (PhD and Masters by Research)** – the student together with the supervisor. Note: All research postgraduates should conduct ethical self-audit of their proposed research as part of the proposal process. The audit should be integrated with the student's Review Board.
- **Taught Masters dissertation work and Undergraduate dissertation/project work** – in many cases this would not require ethical audit, but if it does (for example, if it involves original fieldwork), the student conducts the audit together with the dissertation/project supervisor, who keeps it on file.

### Potential risks to participants and researchers

- 1 Is it likely that the research will induce any psychological stress or discomfort?  
YES  NO
- 2 Does the research require any physically invasive or potentially physically harmful procedures?  
YES  NO
- 3 Does the research involve sensitive topics, such as participants' sexual behaviour or illegal activities, their abuse or exploitation, or their mental health?  
YES  NO
- 4 Is it likely that this research will lead to the disclosure of information about child abuse or neglect, or other information that would require the researchers to breach confidentiality conditions agreed with participants?  
YES  NO
- 5 Is it likely that participation in this research could adversely affect participants?  
YES  NO
- 6 Is it likely that the research findings could be used in a way that would adversely affect participants or particular groups of people?  
YES  NO
- 7 Will the true purpose of the research be concealed from the participants? YES  NO
- 8 Is the research likely to involve any psychological or physical risks to the researcher, and/or research assistants, including those recruited locally?  
YES  NO

### Participants

- 9 Are any of the participants likely to:  
be under 18 years of age? YES  NO   
be physically or mentally ill? YES  NO   
have a disability? YES  NO   
be members of a vulnerable or stigmatized minority? YES  NO   
be in a dependent relationship with the researchers? YES  NO   
have difficulty in reading and/or comprehending any printed material distributed as part of the research process? YES  NO

be vulnerable in other ways? YES  NO

10 Will it be difficult to ascertain whether participants are vulnerable in any of the ways listed above (e.g. where participants are recruited via the internet)? YES  NO

11 Will participants receive any financial or other material benefits because of participation, beyond standard practice for research in your field? YES  NO

**Before completing the next sections, please refer to the University Data Protection Policy to ensure that the relevant conditions relating to the processing of personal data under Schedule 2 and 3 are satisfied. Details are Available at: [www.recordsmanagement.ed.ac.uk](http://www.recordsmanagement.ed.ac.uk)**

### **Confidentiality and handling of data**

12 Will the research require the collection of personal information about individuals (including via other organisations such as schools or employers) without their direct consent? YES  NO

13 Will individual responses be attributed or will participants be identifiable, without the direct consent of participants? YES  NO

14 Will datafiles/audio/video tapes, etc. be retained after the completion of the study (or beyond a reasonable time period for publication of the results of the study)? YES  NO

15 Will the data be made available for secondary use, without obtaining the consent of participants? YES  NO

### **Informed consent**

16 Will it be difficult to obtain direct consent from participants? YES  NO

### **Conflict of interest**

The University has a 'Policy on the Conflict of Interest', which states that a conflict of interest would arise in cases where an employee of the University might be "compromising research objectivity or independence in return for financial or non-financial benefit for him/herself or for a relative or friend." See: [http://www.docs.csg.ed.ac.uk/HumanResources/Policy/Conflict\\_of\\_Interest.pdf](http://www.docs.csg.ed.ac.uk/HumanResources/Policy/Conflict_of_Interest.pdf)

Conflict of interest may also include cases where the source of funding raises ethical issues, either because of concerns about the moral standing or activities of the funder, or concerns about the funder's motivation for commissioning the research and the uses to which the research might be put.

The University policy also states that the responsibility for avoiding a conflict of interest, in the first instance, lies with the individual, but that potential conflicts of interest should always be disclosed, normally to the line manager or Head of Department. Failure to disclose a conflict of interest or to cease involvement until the conflict has been resolved may result in disciplinary action and in serious cases could result in dismissal.

17 Does your research involve a conflict of interest as outlined above? YES  NO

## Overall assessment

If all the answers are NO, the self audit has been conducted and confirms the ABSENCE OF REASONABLY FORESEEABLE ETHICAL RISKS. The following text should be emailed to the relevant person, as set out below:

“I confirm that I have carried out the School Ethics self-audit in relation to [my / name of researcher] proposed research project [name of project and funding body] and that no reasonably foreseeable ethical risks have been identified.”

- Research grants– the Principal Investigator should send this email to the SSPS Research Office (ssps.research@ed.ac.uk) where it will be kept on file with the application.
- Postdoctoral research fellowships – the Mentor should email the SSPS Research Office (ssps.research@ed.ac.uk) where it will be kept on file with the application.
- Postgraduate research (PhD and Masters by Research) – there is no need to send the Level 1 email. The ethical statement should be included in the student’s Review Board report.
- Taught Masters dissertation work and Undergraduate dissertation/project work – there is no need to send the level 1 email. The dissertation supervisor should retain the ethical statement with the student’s dissertation/project papers.

If one or more answers are YES, risks have been identified and level 2 audit is required. See the School Research Ethics Policy and Procedures webpage [http://www.sps.ed.ac.uk/admin/info\\_research/ethics](http://www.sps.ed.ac.uk/admin/info_research/ethics) for full details.