



University Ethics Policy

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UNIVERSITY ETHICS POLICY

1. Introduction

The University of Wolverhampton is committed to carrying out its research, teaching, enterprise, and other activities within a comprehensive ethical framework.

This is reflected in the University's value: *We will behave respectfully and ethically in all that we do. We will be inclusive and fair in our interaction with each other.*

It is the University's expectation that staff, students and visitors should be aware of the ethical principles and considerations, ensure that they act in an ethical manner when engaged on University business and conduct their projects and studies to the highest ethical standards.

2. Purpose

The purpose of this Policy is to:

- Set out the principles applicable to all research, enterprise, consultancy projects and studies conducted at, by or in the name of the University of Wolverhampton.
- Provide members of the University with a clear understanding of the ethical review process.
- Support a culture of academic freedom and excellence by providing a framework for review which subjects research proposals and other studies to a level of scrutiny that is in proportion to the risk of harm or adverse effect to participants, researchers, the University and to society as a whole.

3. Ethical Principles

The University and researchers should adhere to the following principles, which set out the responsibilities and values relevant to research. While some elements may seem self-evident, and there is some overlap, these principles aim to encourage all involved in research to consider the wider consequences of their work and to engage critically with the practical, ethical and intellectual challenges that are inherent in the conduct of high-quality research, rather than treating codes of practice such as this as just another procedure to be followed.

The principles below are based on those of the UK Research Integrity Office and the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity

- Principle 1: Excellence
- Principle 2: Honesty
- Principle 3: Integrity
- Principle 4: Cooperation
- Principle 5: Accountability
- Principle 6: Training and Skills
- Principle 7: Care, Safety and Respect

Researchers should work to ensure that, throughout the lifecycle of their investigations, ethical considerations relating to their research projects are identified and managed. Ethical considerations should be interpreted broadly and may encompass areas where regulation and approval processes exist as well as areas where they do not. All appropriate licences, permissions and approvals must be in place before research starts and be updated as necessary if plans change.

The implementation of this policy is in accordance with the University's core values which are:

- Ethical
- Respectful
- Transparent
- Inclusive and fair
- Challenging
- Confident
- Collaborative
- Professional

4. Scope

This Policy applies to all staff and students of the University engaged in studies or research as well as to visitors, individuals, collaborators, or agents conducting research or other studies in the name of or at the University and/or engaged to conduct research by the University.

It applies to all research undertaken by, or on behalf of, the University, across the full range of academic disciplines, and also encompassing administrative research (undertaken within, or on behalf of, professional services departments or academic faculties/departments), and research undertaken by or within university research centres/institutes, advisory/consultancy services and subsidiary companies.

It is not intended to apply to operational decisions or actions taken by the University e.g. financial, estates and facilities, procurement or human resource matters as these are subject to different review procedures.

5. Research Ethics

The University's definition of research is taken from the Frascati definition of research: 'Research and experimental development (R&D) comprise creative and systematic work undertaken in order to increase the stock of knowledge – including knowledge of humankind, culture and society – and to devise new applications of available knowledge.'

The term 'R&D' covers three types of activity: basic research, applied research and experimental development. To qualify as R&D, an activity must be all of the following:

- Novel
- Creative
- Uncertain

- Systematic
- transferable and/or reproducible

This definition includes:

- work of educational value designed to improve understanding of the research process.
- work of relevance to commerce and industry.
- work of relevance to the public and voluntary sectors.
- scholarship supporting the intellectual infrastructure of subjects and disciplines (such as dictionaries, scholarly editions, catalogues, and contributions to research databases).
- the invention, design and generation of ideas, images, performances, and artefacts, where these lead to new or substantially improved understanding; and
- the experimental use of existing knowledge to develop, design and construct new or substantially improved materials, devices, products, and processes.

This definition of research excludes:

- the routine testing and analysis of materials, components, and processes - e.g. for the maintenance of national standards - as distinct from the development of new analytical techniques.
- routine audit and evaluation, within the established management procedures of organisations; and
- the development of teaching materials that do not embody original research.
- scientific and technical information services
- feasibility and policy-related studies
- specialised health care

6. Ethical Review & Approval Procedures

To ensure that research activities are conducted in line with the ethical principles described above, the University of Wolverhampton is committed to providing a competent, rigorous, and independent process of ethical review for the research and studies undertaken proportionate to the potential risk involved.

Researchers are required to fully participate in the ethical review process. This includes both university procedures and external ethical review processes such as those in the NHS and social care. Researchers must also obtain any other permissions and agreements, as required.

Researchers are responsible for seeking additional insurance for their research if required and complying with professional and other codes of practice and legislation relating to their research.

Research taking place outside the UK must also be cognisant of local expectations and practices and compliant with local laws.

The University has developed a Handbook for Ethical Review & Approval to assist in the application and assessment of ethical approval requests, implementation of good research practice, and in the prevention of misconduct. This is to ensure that researchers conduct research of the highest quality. The handbook is written for all researchers who are planning to carry out a research project, and staff involved in assessing applications for ethical approval. It may be used as a reference in the preparation of bids for grant funding.

7. Ethics Governance & Responsibilities

The University's Governance framework for the consideration of ethical issues comprises:

- a) formal consideration of ethical issues at the discipline level
- b) monitoring at the level of the Faculty Ethics Committee, and
- c) institutional oversight.

The University has introduced a comprehensive ethical scrutiny process to ensure that all research is subject to appropriate ethical review. The University Ethics Sub-Committee (ESC) has overall responsibility for the ethical review process, whilst the task of monitoring ethical review for individual projects and studies falls to the Faculty Ethics Committees (FECs).

Each of the University's 3 Faculties will have its own Ethics Committee and operate one or more Ethics Subject Panels (ESPs). Each Faculty should ensure that their arrangements for ethical review are adequate to cover all relevant aspects of the research and studies undertaken by its staff, visitors or students. These arrangements will be reviewed annually by ESC.

University Research Committee (URC)

The University Research Committee receives reports from the Ethics Sub-Committee (ESC) as a standing item on the agenda. Substantive matters such as changes to Policy and Ethical Principles may also be referred from ESC to URC. The Chair of ESC is also a member of URC.

Ethics Sub-Committee (ESC)

ESC is a sub-committee of URC and is responsible for developing, keeping under review and monitoring the implementation of the University Ethics Policy, Ethical Principles, and Procedures, and for sustaining a University-wide awareness of research governance, ethical and related issues. ESC is also responsible for developing guidance in these areas, and for ensuring that the members of Ethics Committees at the University receive appropriate training in ethical issues.

The University Ethics Sub Committee has institutional oversight of the work of the Faculty Ethics Committees. Its membership includes the Chairs of the Faculty Ethics Committees and/or their nominees. The role of ESC is to ensure that the decisions and recommendations that are made in the Faculties are in line with the University Ethics Policy and Principles. To do this ESC receives reports on serious cases. It also receives Annual Reports from the Faculty Ethics Committees that provide statistics on the number of applications received and a summary of particular issues and

cases of particular concern. It also reports on any breaches of ethical conditions and the outcomes of investigations into such breaches. The scope of this committee is limited to research activity undertaken by students and staff undertaking research. It does not currently consider ethical conduct in other aspects of university work.

Sponsorship Sub-Committee (SSC)

SSC is a sub-committee of ESC and is responsible for reviewing, approving, and monitoring sponsorship of Health and Social Care Research on behalf of the University.

The sub-committee has institutional oversight of sponsored research as stipulated in the UK Policy Framework for Health and Social Care Research (2017). Its membership includes representatives from all relevant Research Centres who conduct health & social care research.

Faculty Ethics Committee (FEC)

Faculty Ethics Committees meet three times a year to monitor, and quality assure the ethical practices of the Faculty. The Chair of this committee is also responsible for the management of the applications for ethical approval received into the Faculty and ensures that decisions are made consistently and timely.

The role of the FECs is to ensure the research and studies undertaken in their Faculty obtain the appropriate ethical review in accordance with the Ethics Policy. Further to ensure through its review process that all such projects adhere to applicable Faculty and University policies, legislation, professional guidelines, and best practice.

FECs must include a minimum of 6 academic staff members and one student representative from the relevant Faculty (with one senior member of the Faculty management committee or appropriate nominee to act as Chair), and one independent or “lay” member from outside the University.

In order to manage workloads and ensure the timely ethical review of studies FECs may also delegate the review of studies to subject panels. Any matter delegated may be elevated for full FEC review should any of the reviewers consider it appropriate.

ESC expects all FECs to report annually on any strategies and processes adopted and to regularly monitor approvals given to ensure the quality of the ethical review undertaken. Issues with/arising from reviews should be discussed at FEC so that training needs can be identified and recommended.

Ethics Subject Panels (ESPs) and Reviewers

Ethics Subject Panels are specialists in the field of ethics within their subject areas and are able to make judgements and offer advice on ethical applications according to the particular requirements of associated learned societies and professional bodies. They will review applications on a monthly basis. They may only convene a panel meeting where there is need for researchers to present their

case or where a case requires more discussion. In most cases they carry out their reviews as independent 'peer reviewers'.

Subject panels are led by a subject Panel Chair who will coordinate responses from reviewers in coming to a final decision or recommendation. They will report to the Faculty Ethics Chair any cases that may be considered high risk or any cases of unethical practice.

Researchers

The University expects all researchers (whether staff, visitors, or students) to take personal responsibility for familiarising themselves with this Ethics Policy, specific policies, and guidance and with the procedures they need to follow for the research or studies they undertake.

Supervisors are expected in addition to assist their students in becoming familiar with this Ethics Policy, and the ethical review process.

It is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator for any research/study to ensure that all their colleagues involved in that research/study are aware of and comply with the policies of the University and with the contents of the approved ethics application for the research/study.

Notwithstanding any ethical approval that may be obtained, researchers are still required to ensure that their research or other studies are conducted in accordance with the ethical requirements of their funding body and/or any professional bodies or associations relevant to their discipline as well as comply with health and safety requirements.

Professional Service Departments

The University expects all Professional Service Departments to make arrangements with an appropriate FEC to ensure any research/study they undertake receives ethical review.

8. Compliance with Ethics Policy and Procedures

Failure to comply with ethics procedures or any breach of this Ethics Policy will be taken extremely seriously, and may be construed as misconduct or gross misconduct and dealt with by the [Student Disciplinary Procedures](#) or [Staff Disciplinary Policy & Procedure](#), as appropriate.

The ['Procedures for Dealing with Allegations of Misconduct in Research'](#) may also be invoked.

Visitors breaching this policy may have their visitor status reviewed or withdrawn.

9. Complaints

Complaints or expressions of concern about the research ethics processes at the University of Wolverhampton can be made via the relevant FEC Chair.

Complaints arising from research activity should be dealt with through the appropriate University procedures. Information on the complaints procedure may be found at:

<https://www.wlv.ac.uk/about-us/governance/legal-information/policies-and-regulations/>

10. Exceptions

There are no exceptions to this policy.

11. Amendments

This Policy was approved by the Academic Board in March 2024. The University may change this Policy at any time, and where appropriate. Where a policy is not due for review, but is found to require updating, it will remain published, unless the reasons for review render it obsolete.

12. Information and resources

Observing recognised research ethics principles is basic to good research practice in general. The University's Ethics Policy should, therefore, be read alongside the:

- [Code of Good Research Practice](#)

This Ethics Policy is supplemented by specific ethics policies and guidance which are set out below:

- Ethics Guidance www.wlv.ac.uk/ethics
- Research Policies, Procedures & Guidance www.wlv.ac.uk/researchpolicies
- [Policy for Use of Human Tissue for Research](#)
- [Policy on the Use of Animals in Scientific Research](#)

13. Contact

For general queries regarding Research Policies, Procedures and guidelines contact Jill Morgan, Research Integrity Manager, by email: J.Morgan4@wlv.ac.uk

For general queries, please contact the University Corporate Compliance Team via email: compliance@wlv.ac.uk.

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