



Birmingham Newman University

GRADUATE SCHOOL

ETHICAL GUIDELINES

1. Introduction

Birmingham Newman University aims to promote academic excellence in research, learning and teaching. The University aspires to the highest ethical and moral principles in its pursuit of excellence and sees the institutional Research Ethics Committee as well as its system for consideration of ethical issues as central to its distinctive mission.

Birmingham Newman University requires that all staff and registered students' research projects undergo an ethical self-assessment and following this, the appropriate request for approval by the University's Research Ethics is made. Students and staff involved in the planning of project and research activities have a responsibility to ensure that ethical norms guide every stage of their work.

Gaining ethical approval does not mean that all relevant permissions necessary to undertake the research have been granted, and, therefore, researchers must ensure that any such permissions are sought from the appropriate person, people or organisation.

2. Terms of Reference and constitution of the Research Ethics Committee

These are reviewed at the start of each academic year.

3. Committee procedure

The Research Ethics Committee will meet no fewer than three and no more than five times during the academic year. An *ad hoc* meeting of the Research Ethics Committee may be convened to resolve an issue at the discretion of the Chair. The Committee also retains the right to resolve urgent matters by correspondence.

4. Submissions to the Committee

Submissions to the Research Ethics Committee for approval, or other matters for consideration, should be made in the first instance to the Committee Secretary. In the case of urgent proposals submitted for approval, the Committee will attempt to deal with these promptly, but those submitting proposals are advised to allow a minimum of ten working days (and not normally longer than four weeks) for a decision. The Committee Secretary will send out reminders to all staff for items for submission to the Committee.

5. Responsibilities

Chair of the Research Ethics Committee

It is the responsibility of the Chair to ensure that the relevant University Committees or Governors are informed of any items of concern. The Chair of the Research Ethics Committee is also expected to remind staff of their specific responsibilities, and that individuals have a duty to ensure that these are being carried out.

Members of the Research Ethics Committee and Link Tutors

It is the responsibility of the members of the Committee and Link Tutors to ensure that all papers and any proposal they are considering adheres to the relevant legislation as well as University guidelines. The requirements of any professional body should also be taken into consideration. It is further expected that the reputation of Birmingham Newman University will be given due consideration and that care will be taken not to bring the University into disrepute.

Module Leaders and Supervisors

It is the responsibility of Module Leaders and Supervisors to ensure that appropriate consideration has been undertaken, that the proposal meets with all the relevant guidelines and legislation, and that, if necessary, it is submitted to the Research Ethics Committee for approval.

Student Applications

It is the student's responsibility to seek approval for the research, together with their Module Leader and Supervisor, and to seek advice on the ethical issues involved. Student researchers undertake their research under the supervision of a member of staff. Therefore, students should discuss and report any concerns with their supervisor throughout the research process.

Staff Applications

It is the staff member's responsibility to seek approval for their independent research or for taught modules with research element. Staff should seek advice from members of the Research Ethics Committee, Link Tutors, or the Registrar/University Secretary if required.

6. Guidelines

A. Research involving human participants

Respect for the human participant must be central to planning research. The Research Ethics Committee will seek to safeguard the full rights of all those participating in projects, research or experimentation with or conducted on behalf of the institution or involving individuals associated with the institution. Full account will be taken of the implications of the Human Rights Act 2018, and other relevant legislation, as well as other University policies and procedures in the work of the Committee.

Researchers are required to observe the current ethical guidelines advocated by their own appropriate society or professional body as laid down from time to time.

As a basic minimum it is expected that:

- Participant information processes must be outlined in the research ethics approval application and any participant information paperwork should be included with the research ethics approval application.
- A signed statement from all volunteers shall be required certifying their informed consent to participation in the research. Potential participants have a right to decline involvement at any stage with impunity and without consequence.
- The volunteer has the right to withdraw from the research at any stage and it is the responsibility of the researcher to make this right understood in advance of the study

- In the case of undergraduate or other volunteers, no individual under the age of 18 shall be allowed to participate without written parental/legal guardian consent. Where potential participants are recruited through organisations, the relevant member of the organisation's management team must be involved
- It is permissible for any member of Birmingham Newman University to display notices calling for volunteers to participate in any form of research or service testing approved by or not subject to Research Ethics Committee guidelines, subject to the normal courtesies and rules governing the use of, for example, notice boards, staff pigeonholes, email, online message boards, newsletters, display screens, and social media and networking sites. The notices should aim to give key details about the research and the commitment involved
- If there are any doubts whether the research involves risks of an abnormal nature, it is the responsibility of the researcher concerned to seek advice from the Chair of the Research Ethics Committee and, if appropriate, to contact the Registrar/University Secretary to confirm or arrange insurance cover for the University
- A new research ethics approval application must be submitted if any significant material change is made to a proposal that has already been approved
- In cases where a proposal involves financial inducements to the research participant, details relating to the amount of financial inducement shall be notified to the Research Ethics Committee at the time of submission.
- An appropriate level of risk assessment has been undertaken
- Any significant event occurring or as a result of a study affecting a research participant or researcher should be communicated promptly to the University's Health and Safety Officer, and be drawn to the attention of the Research Ethics Committee, with a formal accident report made in line with the University policies relating to Health and Safety

Where hazards to health might be occasioned by high risk (established through risk assessment processes) experiments and measurements involving the inducement of more than minimal stress:

- Every instance of such a project shall be presented to the Research Ethics Committee, notwithstanding the fact that it might appear to comply with the foregoing guidelines
- The Research Ethics Committee may require that such experimentation should be supervised by a suitably qualified practitioner.

B. Research not involving human participants

All researchers who are undertaking research with no human participants are required to submit an application for research ethics approval using the appropriate form. If it is deemed that the research poses additional risk or unacceptable risk to the University's reputation, then a full application using the standard form will be required.

C. The use of questionnaires, interviews and testing within and outside the University

The words 'questionnaire', 'interview' and 'testing' are used here to include any systematic technique for eliciting information by and/or from any individual student, member of staff, other member of the University or member of the general public.

- All questions should be compiled so as not to cause offence, or be deeply personal in nature. If this principle is potentially at risk, a copy of the questions must be submitted with the research ethics approval application for consideration
- The purpose of the questionnaire, interview or test should be clearly defined by the tester or researcher, who has a responsibility to explain to the research participant as

fully as possible (i.e. without prejudicing the objectives of the study) what the research is about, who is undertaking and financing it, and why it is being undertaken

- The information from any individual questionnaire or interview shall remain confidential, and the anonymity of respondents shall be preserved. Confidentiality must only be breached on the grounds of safeguarding (see section 6D for further guidance).
- In all cases where there occurs either a deliberate or accidental breach of confidentiality, the individual(s) conducting the research will be held responsible.
- Publishing or divulging information from which individual identity may be deduced to another person, subject area or researcher shall be undertaken only with the written consent of the individuals concerned, prior to publication or submission of work.

D. Research involving children and vulnerable adults

See the separate University documents titled 'Guidelines on Research Ethics for Projects Involving Children, and Adults and Children Considered Vulnerable or at Risk of Harm' and 'Safeguarding of children, young people and vulnerable adults: Policy and Procedures', and reference should be taken of the current ethical guidelines published by learned societies such as the British Psychological Society (BPS) and the British Educational Research Association (BERA). The following should be considered:

- Wherever possible, participants should be informed of the objectives of the investigations
- Gatekeeper (e.g., Head Teacher of participating school, or senior member of staff of the participating organisation or setting) consent must be granted before investigations take place, and parental consent should also be obtained for research involving children (i.e., those under 18 years)
- On no account should the real names of the organisation, setting, or members of staff, child participants or adult participants considered vulnerable or at risk of harm be used. Confidentiality must be respected at all times, within the bounds of the host organisation's and the University's safeguarding policy, with any safeguarding concerns raised with the relevant people in line with these policies.
- Studies must respect the privacy and wellbeing of the individual participants. Photographs may be used with the permission of all concerned. Advice should be taken from the supervisor on the appropriate use and storage of images. Particular care must be taken in relation to photographs and images of children.
- Due consideration must be given to Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) current requirements and protocols relating to the University's safeguarding policy.

E. Research involving animals

It is not expected that there will be research undertaken at or by Birmingham Newman University's researchers that will involve animals, but any such research would require full ethical clearance using the standard university application form (i.e., the application for research involving participants).

F. Insurance

The University's insurers are satisfied that the risks envisaged in these guidelines are covered by the University's Third Party and Officials' Indemnity policies. It is necessary, however, for researchers to advise the Research Ethics Committee, who shall in turn inform the insurers, of any research which might be considered abnormal by our researchers.

The Third Party policy covers the University against accidental bodily injury and damage to property caused by its staff anywhere in the United Kingdom or rest of the World. The Officials' Indemnity policy covers the University and its salaried staff. For insurance purposes, it is essential that students acting as researchers are under the supervision of a member of the University's academic staff.

G. Ethical approval from collaborating organisations

Research proposals which involve access to research participants in collaborating organisations, or under the day-to-day care of a hospital or clinic, will need to produce evidence that the investigator has the agreement of the appropriate Ethics Committee or other body governing ethics approval within the organisation concerned. Similarly, proposals which use premises, other than those which are available within the University, will normally need to produce such evidence, and appropriate risk assessments conducted. When research crosses institutions, the University has processes for the adoption and sponsorship of ethical approval from/by another ethics body/committee.

H. Proposals for ethical approval from partnership institutions

The Committee is prepared to consider and approve proposals from partnership institutions which do not have Ethics Committees of their own, provided that the proposals arise directly or indirectly from undergraduate or postgraduate courses which are validated by Birmingham Newman University, or through other existing official collaborative partnerships. Under these circumstances, the Committee (or representative thereof) would reserve the right to inspect the appropriate premises and facilities within the partnership institution.

I. Researchers from outside the University seeking to use its students and/or staff as research participants

All proposals by an external researcher(s), wishing to use University students and/or staff as volunteers, must be submitted to the Research Ethics Committee for approval. All such proposals shall be accompanied by evidence confirming that the research has already obtained research ethics approval from the external researcher's home institution.

J. Personal payments to researchers, subject areas and institutions

Personal payments received by researchers and their pecuniary relationship with any sponsoring company have ethical implications. Details of specific payments or 'gifts' to researchers, subject areas, or institutions, should be reported to the Research Ethics Committee when submitting a proposal. This information will be kept in confidence in the same way as the research proposals. Researchers who receive payment as part of an annual consultancy fee should advise the Research Ethics Committee of this situation, but details of such payments would not normally be required.

K. Data Protection Act 2018

The Act governs the retention and use of personal data, including manual data and relevant hard copy and digital filing systems, and makes it an offence to store or process personal data except in strict accordance with the terms upon which the data has been collected. Birmingham Newman University is a registered data user. All staff and students are specifically advised:

- That the University does not authorise any of its employees or agents to hold or process by any means personal data on its behalf, except as stated in the University's data protection policies.
- That all researchers are expected to have read and to follow the University's 'Guidelines for the management of research data'
- That all researchers must not hold or process any personal data for use in research unless research ethics approval has been gained.
- That only University approved services (e.g., Office 365) should be used for research (the collection, analysis and storage of research data, and the production of research outputs), including when Artificial Intelligence [AI] is used.

L. Use of Artificial Intelligence

When AI is used to produce any aspect of the research, the researcher must state how the AI tool was used. Researchers are responsible for the content of any research report produced,

including those parts produced by an AI tool. Researchers should refer to relevant University guidance and policy on the acceptable use of AI.

M. Research Overseas

Gaining ethics approval should not be viewed as approval to travel overseas to undertake research. In cases where researchers need to travel overseas to undertake research, additional permissions from the University may need to be sought. Researchers are referred to the University's 'Overseas Travel Policy and Procedure' for more information.

7. Review of ethical guidelines

These ethical guidelines will be reviewed regularly by the Research Ethics Committee, and modified according to working experience and the nature of business raised before the Committee.

Last revised July 2008 / amendment 3 – February 2013 / amendment 4 – February 2017 / amendment 5 – May 2020 / amendment 6 – September 2020 / amendment 7 (change of university name) – September 2023 / amendment 8 – July 2025