

Bartlett PhD Student Ethics Guidance

Research Ethics

All UCL students and staff undertaking research involving living human participants, or data derived from living human participants, are responsible for ensuring that their research is conducted ethically. There are a number of ethical standards that have been accepted throughout the UK and abroad which all researchers and ethical committees are expected to comply with.

Standards

Informed consent: All participants must be fully informed of the study and what is being asked of them, including the potential risks/benefits and exclusion criteria, in order to make a fully informed decision about whether or not to participate in the research. This must be an active step on behalf of the participant and not due to any inducement, coercion or perceived pressure to participate. This is required of all participants in a research study, except where there is a justification for covert research or deception (such cases will be considered on an individual basis by the relevant ethics committee).

Benefit not harm: Research involving human participants must have a benefit to society and the risks involved to participants must be minimized, balanced against the potential benefit to the overall community, and clearly explained to participants before they give their consent.

Confidentiality: All participants have the right for their participation to remain confidential in that only the researcher will be aware who has participated. Generally all data will also be anonymous in the final report so that nothing can be attributed back to an individual participant. There are exceptions, for instance where participants wish to be identified or they cannot realistically have their identities kept confidential, but written informed consent must be obtained from the individual participant in advance. (Note: the definition of informed consent is contextual, and as a result rules on the form of consent vary, with exceptions arising from that contextuality. For example, it may be appropriate to gain consent orally as a part of a recording).

Procedure

Your PhD supervisor must advise you whether or not your research requires ethical approval. You should check this when you begin your research and also when you apply for study leave and when you apply to upgrade from MPhil to PhD.

UCL is reviewing the research ethics system and new structures, processes and guidelines will be put in place progressively during the 2018/19 academic year. But for now, please consult current guidelines via the UCL Research Ethics [leaflet](#) and [website](#) to see if your research project is [exempt](#) under the six criteria included. If your supervisor considers that your intended research is exempt from ethics approval, you simply need to state on the upgrade form which one of the six exemption criteria applies. If your supervisor advises that you require formal UCL Research Ethics Committee approval, you will need to [follow the procedures for applicants](#).

There are two paths to ethics approval. If your research does not involve vulnerable groups, intrusive interventions, sensitive topics or deception, you will be required to complete a 'low risk' application form which is approved by the Chair of the ethics committee. For studies involving more than minimal risk, you will need to complete a 'high risk' application form which is reviewed by the full ethics committee. In both cases, your research will also require data protection registration (please see below) and you will need to provide your Project ID on the upgrade form.

Data protection

If you are proposing to collect or access personal data i.e. data from which a living individual can be identified, you must comply with the Data Protection Act 2018. Please consult UCL [guidance for researchers](#), register your research project using this [application form](#) and prepare an information sheet (please see below).

If your research is deemed 'high risk', or meets certain criteria classed as 'high risk processing', for example involving large volumes of personal data, combining data sets or monitoring public spaces, you may also be required to complete a [Data Protection Impact Assessment](#). UCL has a [General Data Protection Regulation website](#) and the Information Commissioner's Office has produced an online [guide for understanding data protection](#).

Information sheets and consent forms

Information sheets and consent forms are strongly advised to inform participants about your research in plain language and to receive informed consent for sharing data in verbal or signed form.

The Bartlett ethics website provides example [information sheets and consent forms](#) related to built environment research to edit and use. The UCL research ethics website includes [guidance for writing information sheets](#) and [template forms](#). Please consult your PhD supervisor or departmental ethics adviser for guidance on which specific information sheets and consent forms to use as these vary according to disciplinary protocols.

Research overseas

It is very important that you are aware of the UCL Research Ethics policy in relation to [research conducted overseas](#). It is strongly recommended that you regularly check the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office [website](#) for further details and travel advice for the country you are planning to travel to. You should also note there are new legal requirements with regards to the processing of personal data [outside of the European Union](#).

Method and discipline-specific guidance

The methods, site and subjects of your built environment research each raise their own ethical considerations. For example, taking photographs of people as part of site-surveys or collecting data from apps and sensors may raise issues of anonymity. Collaboration with other researchers or research based in institutions may raise issues of permission, commercial sensitivity and authorship. Combining different data sets may inadvertently disclose personal data of individual citizens. Gaining written consent may not always be

appropriate in certain contexts, for example if participants are illiterate or apprehensive about form-signing because of cultural reasons.

The Research Ethics Guidebook from the Economic and Social Research Council, Researcher Development Initiative and Institute of Education includes guidance on the following research methods and scenarios:

- [literature reviews and systematic reviews](#);
- [asking questions of participants](#);
- [visual methods](#);
- [online research](#);
- [observation](#);
- [international research](#);
- [research with children](#);
- [secondary analysis](#);
- [practitioner research and dual roles](#);
- [research led by service users](#);
- [participatory approaches](#).

For targeted advice, it may also be helpful to consult guidelines produced by disciplinary bodies:

- for interviews, see the Oral History Society's [ethical guide](#);
- for ethnographic and observational research, see the Association of Social Anthropologists' [ethical guidelines for good research practice](#);
- for participatory research, see the Just Space [protocol for research collaboration with community/activist groups](#) and the Centre for Social Justice and Community Action's [community-based participatory research guide to ethical principles and practice](#);
- for research creating or combining large data sets, see the UK Data Archive guidance on [creating and managing data](#) and the Government Statistical Service [guidance on statistical disclosure control](#);
- for research on and about the internet, see the Association of Internet Research's [ethical decision-making recommendations](#).

Further advice: The Research Ethics Guidebook is a helpful [resource for social science researchers](#) for understanding how to make ethical decisions when conducting research. The Concordat to Support Research Integrity by Universities UK issues helpful [guidelines on standards of rigour and integrity](#). If you have any questions please consult your Supervisor, departmental ethics adviser or course director.

Training

UCL offers ethical training courses for doctoral researchers on the following themes; Ethics 1: 'Good Research Practice' [online module](#); Ethics 2: 'Working with Human Subjects' [online module](#); 'Ethics Committee Applications for Research Involving Human Subjects' [workshop](#); and 'Working ethically with children and young people as research participants' [workshop](#).

Codes of Conduct

UCL: The [research integrity website](#) brings together key policy documents. The [code of conduct for research](#) covers five main areas: professional and personal integrity of researchers; process of research design; publication process; leadership responsibilities; and institutional responsibilities. The [statement on research integrity](#) addresses honesty, rigour, transparency and open communication, care and respect. These should be considered alongside relevant codes of conduct within research and professional bodies.

Research bodies: These include the Arts and Humanities Research Council's [code of practice](#); Economic and Social Research Council's [framework for research ethics](#); and Research Councils UK's [policy and guidelines on governance of good research conduct](#).

Professional bodies: These include the Architects Registration Board's [architect's code](#); Chartered Institute of Building's [rules and regulations of professional competence and conduct](#); Royal Institute of British Architects' [code of professional conduct](#); Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors' [rules of conduct for members](#); Royal Town Planning Institute [code of professional conduct](#); and the Social Research Association's [ethical guidelines](#).