

Undergraduate and taught postgraduate students requiring ethical approval

Background

Wrexham University is committed to upholding the highest standards of rigour and best practice in all its research and applies with equal force to research projects undertaken under the auspices of the University by both staff and students. Our commitment to ethical research is set out in the University Research Ethics Policy and Code of Practice.

The University acknowledges the short time frame students studying at levels 5, 6 & 7 have to collect, analyse and write up their research project for assessment. The implementation of faculty-based committees to ensure the independent review of all research ethics applications has also meant a need for the University to consider the workload and time commitment of supervisory teams, ethics reviewers and administration of this process.

This document sets out further details of the requirement for ethical review of undergraduate and taught postgraduate projects. It is a supporting procedure to the main University Research Ethics Policy.

The procedures which follow for taught students have been designed to improve and streamline the efficiency of ethical approval at the University whilst still prioritising the ethical principles of research.

Principles

1. Taught students conducting small-scale research projects for assessment should understand the ethical principles and responsibilities they have when conducting a study under the auspices of Wrexham University.
2. Supervisors have a responsibility to ensure that a student research project has considered all the possible ethical issues before and during the project and that ethical approval has been obtained before commencement.
3. Students should receive relevant training in both methodology and research ethics before conducting a research project to support their degree.
4. Undergraduate and taught postgraduate students should be advised not to undertake projects of such a high risk that they require review by the University Research Ethics Committee. It should not be assumed that all taught student research will be considered minimal risk, therefore where this may be a possibility the programme leader or supervisor should discuss the research proposal with the Research Office.
5. Supervisors have a responsibility to ensure an application submitted for ethical review is completed to a high standard and includes all relevant documentation.

Application Types

This document outlines three potential application types to support taught student research projects.

- Individual application- An independent student project which is undertaken over a number of weeks or months with the support of the supervisory team with a specific research design and plan.

- Generic application- A research project which falls within a taught module that covers within it more than one sufficiently similar research project. This could be 1) a cohort of students working on a single research project, 2) individual students undertaking slightly different projects but are sufficiently similar in terms of risk, aims and methodology.
- Existing application- Students can be added to the ethical approval of an existing research project being undertaken by a member of staff. In theory, the student would be acting as a 'research assistant' to the bigger project being undertaken to support the data collection for their own assessment.

Process

Individual applications

Students will be required to make an application for ethical review of their project using the online system. The application will ask students to provide a description and the ethical reflections of their research aims, objectives and project design. The application will be created by the student but should be discussed with their supervisor in its early development and work together to address any ethical considerations. The application will be checked and electronically signed by the supervisor before being submitted to the relevant research ethics committee.

It is intended that the completion of an individual application by students in the online system will have a pedagogic role in introducing students to the concept and importance of ethical research.

Generic applications

A generic application can be submitted when a number of taught students will be conducting research that is of a sufficiently similar nature to be reviewed together. It will be the responsibility of the module leader or supervisor to prepare and submit the application for all the research activities to be undertaken under one approval. There are parameters of a generic research application, however, these are not prescribed in detail as a means not to exclude certain types of research projects and encourage academics from all departments to consider this approach. Students can undertake slightly different research projects, which are sufficiently similar in terms of the following set of parameters to allow for a generic research ethics review:

- The research topic and chosen aims and objectives
- Chosen research methods
- The participant population
- Methods of recruitment
- Consent arrangements

The module leader will ensure that the generic application is submitted and approved by the relevant research ethics committee before any data collection commences. The module leader and supervisory team of students will ensure that all projects being conducted fit within the parameters of the approval. The projects under the approval should be considered minimal risk, however, the application will automatically be submitted to the University Research Ethics Committee to ensure the application fits within the scope of and is appropriate for generic approval. The application will then be reviewed by the appropriate research ethics committee. Students need to be listed in the application to conduct a research project under the approval and should all have access to what is

outlined and permitted in the application before data collection commences. Students can be added to the application as an amendment once approval is in place. The maximum permitted time for a generic approval is three years, therefore new cohorts of students can be added each year.

Existing application

Taught students can be added to an existing staff project which already has approval through the amendment process. The amendment should detail what the role of the student will be on the project, what data they will collect or have access to, and if they have received sufficient training to be included in a staff research project.

Contacts

Queries related to this procedure should be directed to the research office-
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