

Ethical Review Process for PGR, PGT and UGT Projects

1. Introduction

The School is required to have an ethical review process in place which is compatible with the principles for considering ethical issues expressed in the UTLC paper:

<http://wisdom:3797/Committees/University-Committees/University-Teaching-and-Learning-Committee/Year-2008-2009/09JUN09/REGS-TLC-09JUN09-P1A.doc>

2. The University's Principles of Ethical Review

- Research projects should be of a high quality employing an effective research methodology capable of producing meaningful research.
- Inquiry using human subjects should not occur without ethical review.
- Any risk associated with human inquiry should be proportional to its potential benefits, remembering that the interests and rights of individual participants should not be ignored in the name of the public good.
- Participants should be aware of potential risks, and be able to give informed consent.
- The confidentiality of individuals who participate in research should always be respected.
- That ethical review should seek to ensure the safety of subjects and researchers.
- In order to extend the boundaries of knowledge and understanding it is sometimes necessary to investigate topics which may be controversial, illegal or distasteful. Such research has been conducted within the University in the past and should continue to be conducted, but seeking the best available advice on dealing with such topics.

3. Overview of the SCE Ethical Review Process

All projects, PGR, PGT and UGT, must undergo ethical review. The process is as follows:

Completion of the Project Ethical Review Form and Assessment by the Supervisor:

- The student undertaking the project, with advice from the Project Supervisor, must complete a Project Ethical Review Form (attached to this document).
- The Supervisor will assess the form and indicate one of three decisions on the form:
 - The project may proceed in its present form, ie the Supervisor is satisfied that any ethical issues associated with the project have been adequately addressed.
 - The proposal needs further assessment by an Ethical Review Panel (ERP)
 - The project needs to be returned to the student for modification prior to further action.
- If the decision is that the project can proceed, then that ends the process.

Review by the Ethical Review Panel (if necessary):

- If the outcome of the supervisor assessment is that the project is to go to the ERP, then the supervisor will pass the form to the ERP Leader for assessment.
- The ERP Leader will have the proposal assessed by two members of the ERP, who produce a joint recommendation, which will be one of the following:
 - Approved. The ethical issues have been adequately addressed and the project may commence.
 - Approved subject to minor amendments. The project may proceed once the amendments have been accepted by the supervisor.
 - Resubmit. The areas requiring further action are identified. The project may not proceed until the form has been resubmitted and approved.
 - Reject. The reasons why it will not be possible to address the ethical issues adequately are identified.
- The Review Panel Leader then endorses the recommendation and signs off the form, or makes arrangements to resolve any outstanding issues.

Oversight of the ethical review process:

- STLC has oversight of the process for PGT/UGT via an ethics standing agenda item.
- The Research Strategy Group has oversight of the process for PGR via an ethics standing agenda item.

- The associated terms of reference will be:
 - To promote good, informed and consistent practice across the ethical review panels.
 - To maintain an overview of the ethical review process executed by the ethical review panels.
 - To address issues referred to the committee by the ethical review panel leaders.

4. Completion of the Project Ethical Review Form

The form must be completed by the student carrying out the project, with advice as needed from the Supervisor, as follows:

- Use the 'Ethical Review Checklist' to help identify areas where ethical issues arise.
- Consider the project in relation to the principles of ethical review stated in section 2 above, with reference to the areas identified as potentially problematic from the checklist, and state the issues identified in the 'Ethical Issues and Actions' section.
- Note that for a particular project there may be issues in areas not included in the checklist, so it should not be considered as exhaustive.
- Actions to address each of the issues should then be identified and listed in the 'Ethical Issues and Actions' section.
- The form should then be signed by the student to confirm that the information presented is correct.

The Supervisor will then:

- Sign the form to confirm that the information presented is correct and appropriate to allow an informed judgement to be made. If this is not the case, then the form must be returned to the student to make good the deficiencies.
- Finally, the supervisor makes a recommendation on whether the project may progress or should go for further assessment under the ethical review procedure.

5. Ethical Review Panels and Membership

- There is one cross-school ERP for PGR, and one ERP for each subject area.
- Each ERP consists of an ERP Leader and a set of panel members, the number of which is set according to the typical workload.
- The leader and panel members are selected by the Research Strategy Group for the Research ERP and by the Subject Area Committee for each Subject Area ERP.
- All nominated ERP members must undertake training at the earliest opportunity (the University's Research Governance and Ethics course (3 hours) would be a suitable starting point).