Ethical approval for taught units

# Introduction

All research at Manchester Metropolitan University is subject to ethical scrutiny and approval. As part of the University’s research-informed teaching agenda, large numbers of undergraduate or postgraduate-taught students are regularly undertaking a range of research skills exercises that require ethical scrutiny without the need for a full individual ethical review. Where students will be conducting research skills exercises that are of a sufficiently similar nature to be reviewed together, a single ethics application can be submitted for faculty review. This process is designed to increase the efficiency of the University procedure and allows for proportionate ethical scrutiny for research skills exercises.

# Definition

For this policy, research undertaken by UG / PGT students as part of their coursework can be considered as a research skills exercise eligible for generic unit-level approval if:

1. it does not involve high risk activities;
2. it is designed to enhance the students’ knowledge, skills, and practice;
3. its findings are not to be published and are not otherwise intended to contribute to the existing body of “scientific” knowledge and understanding[[1]](#footnote-1);
4. is simultaneously performed by a cohort of students as an individual activity showing similarities in:
	* 1. research topic;
		2. research questions, aims and objectives;
		3. methodology and methods;
		4. relative location;
		5. category of human participant;
		6. nature of human participation;
		7. the type of method chosen to inform participants;
		8. the content of the information sheet, covering letter or written script;
		9. content of the consent form.

# Eligibility

Eligible research exercises could potentially involve:

1. Primary data collection from human participants (including, but not limited to interviews, questionnaires, images, artefacts and digital data)
2. Aspects that participants could find embarrassing or emotionally upsetting.
3. Aspects that students could find embarrassing or emotionally upsetting.
4. Aspects related to culturally or socially sensitive issues in all types of research regardless of human participation
5. Vulnerable individuals (children, adults who lack the capacity to consent or are temporarily vulnerable within the context of the project) but access to them does not require special approval from external bodies (NHS, security clearance, etc.)
6. Recompense other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time
7. Further analysis of identifiable, pre-existing data obtained from human participants (including social media)
8. The design or production of new or substantially improved materials, devices, products or processes
9. The generation of new ideas, images, performances or artefacts
10. Project activity which will take place in a country outside of the UK
11. Other

Some activities inherently involve increased risks or approval by external regulatory bodies, so a proportional ethics review is not recommended and a full ethical review may be required. Research exercises which are normally ineligible for unit approval include:

1. Approval from an external regulatory body (including, but not limited to: NHS (HRA), HMPPS etc.);
2. Misleading participants;
3. Research without the participants' consent;
4. Clinical procedures with participants;
5. The ingestion or administration of any substance to participants by any means of delivery;
6. The use of novel techniques, even where apparently non-invasive, whose safety may be open to question;
7. The use of ionising radiation or exposure to radioactive materials;
8. Engaging in, witnessing, or monitoring criminal activity;
9. Engaging with, or accessing terrorism related materials;
10. A requirement for security clearance to access participants, data or materials;
11. Physical or psychological risk to the participants or researcher;
12. The project activity takes place in a country outside of the UK for which there is currently an active travel warning issued by the authorities;
13. Animals, animal tissue, new or existing human tissue, or biological toxins and agents.

If any of these activities are fundamental to your proposed research skills exercises, please consult with your Faculty Head of Research Ethics and Governance to determine the most appropriate alternate route for your application.

UG / PGT students who, during coursework, choose or are assigned to perform research that goes beyond the limitations imposed by this approval route must individually submit an application for ethical review using one of the other possible application routes in EthOS.

UG / PGT dissertations are not eligible for approval based on this policy. Ethical applications for dissertation projects should be submitted through the UG/PGT student application route in EthOS.

# Application process and conditions for approval

**Applicants.** The Unit Ethical Approval Process is open to unit leaders at Manchester Metropolitan University through a dedicated unit application form in EthOS (the University’s online application system for ethical approval). The completed application should fully demonstrate that the request for unit research ethics review covers research exercises that are consistent with the parameters outlined above. When the application is approved, the unit leader becomes deputised to ensure the ethical review and approval of research exercises performed by students enrolled in the respective unit.

Students participating in a unit that has been granted unit ethical approval will submit proportionate ethical applications to the unit leader.

**Number of applications per unit.** Depending on its structure, content, and delivery, it is possible for one unit to submit several research exercises under one application for ethical approval. Due to technical reasons, one unit application in EthOS can currently support up to five research exercises at a time. If your unit needs to apply for more than five research exercises, please ask the RKE Systems team for support RKE-Systems@mmu.ac.uk

**Period of validity.** A unit ethical approval can be granted for a period up to four academic years. An expired unit ethical approval can be renewed following a review designed to ensure that the research exercise in question has not changed in such a manner as to render the original approval inapplicable. If there has been significant change in the research activity proposed for renewal, a new unit ethics application would have to be submitted.

**Amendments.** Significant changes in the research activity that take place during the validity period of a unit ethical approval can be addressed through an amendment to the original application as long as the changes do not modify the risk estimation of the said application.

**Responsibility.** Following unit ethical approval, it is the responsibility of the unit leader to ensure that all students who undertake the approved research exercise are given the ethics information and training necessary to enable them to abide by the agreed parameters of the approval.

1. The publication of “academic” outputs (i.e. outputs that might be considered in an external research assessment such as journal articles and conference papers) is not usually allowed to result from research exercises. Submitting work for internal marking or reporting findings to staff, fellow students or external partners in a class presentation is accepted.

If you intend to publish, present or exhibit the results of your work to a public audience, outside of an academic context, and the work includes any identifiable participant data or materials, then you should only do this with the express consent of participants. In such cases, the work should be identified as an outcome of taught activity at the University. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)