**University of Stirling**

**General University Ethics Panel (GUEP)**

**Hierarchy of risk – for the ethical review of research projects**

Types of research that may be low-risk:

* Research that engages healthy adults aged 18 or over (University of Stirling students aged 16 or over that are able to provide informed consent should be considered as low risk participants unless they meet any other risk indicators).
* Research that obtains informed consent from all participants
* Research that does not involve vulnerable or dependent groups.
* Research involving anonymous or self-completion questionnaires
* Research where the topic is not of a sensitive personal nature or potentially distressing.
* Research that does not require participants to take part in activities that pose a significant risk to their personal well-being (e.g. physical or psychological health), social well-being (e.g. social standing, social connectedness) or economic well-being (e.g. employment, employability, professional standing).
* Research that replicates a previous study that has been granted ethical approval.
* Research that uses secondary data without risking the anonymity of the participants.
* Research that does not involve the collection of video/photographs of research participants.
* Research where data collection takes place in a public or semi-public space where the safety of the researchers can be protected and the privacy of the participants can be guaranteed.
* Research where ethical issues do not include the risk of breaking confidentiality due to safeguarding or disclosure requirements.
* Research where ethical issues do not include the risk of possible coercion of participants.

Research that would be considered to be above the threshold of low risk and therefore require further review from the delegated authority is that involving:

* The use of animals in any way, including observational studies.
* Research involving the NHS or conducted in healthcare settings.
* Potentially vulnerable1 individuals
  + Children and young people under the age of 18 (University of Stirling students over the age of 16 are not usually considered to be vulnerable)
  + Those with a learning disability or cognitive impairment
  + Individuals who are vulnerable due to a dependent or unequal relationship
  + Individuals who lack capacity to make decisions or those who during the course of the research may come to lack capacity.
* Potentially sensitive topics/areas of research
  + Sexuality
  + Illegal behaviour
  + Political opinion
  + Religious, spiritual or other beliefs
  + Experience of violence, abuse or exploitation
  + Physical or mental health conditions
  + Race or ethnicity
  + Conflict situations
  + Crossing the boundary between public and private spaces
  + Children considered to be at risk of harm
* Individuals that may not be or may not feel able to freely consent to participation in research
  + Those who depend on the protection of or may be influenced by research gatekeepers – school pupils, members of the armed forces, young offenders, prisoners, asylum seekers, organisational employees.
  + Family members of the researcher
  + Those in hierarchical institutional relationships – e.g. employees recruited through their workplace.
* Deceased persons, body parts or other human elements – carried out under the relevant legislation.
* Deception, concealment or covert observation
* Invasive research methods
* Risk to the safety of the researcher

1 Vulnerability should be considered on a case-by-case basis. While the participants may not appear vulnerable, participating in the research could make them vulnerable.

* Research involving international partners or being undertaken outside of the UK where there may be issues of local practice or political sensitivities
* Internet-mediated research where the understanding of privacy is contentious or where sensitive issues are discussed, or where a participant or other individual may be identifiable in the material used.
* Visual or vocal methods where a participant or other individuals may be identifiable in the material used or generated.
* Linking of personal data which may potentially compromise the anonymity of participants.