**UNIVERSITY OF STIRLING**

**UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE**

# **Research Ethics Policy**

**Contents**

[**Research Ethics Policy** 1](#_Toc43117682)

[**Introduction** 2](#_Toc43117683)

[**Definitions** 2](#_Toc43117684)

[**Research** 2](#_Toc43117685)

[**Ethics** 2](#_Toc43117686)

[**Requirement for Ethics Review** 2](#_Toc43117687)

[**Core Principles of Research Ethics** 3](#_Toc43117688)

[**Research involving humans** 3](#_Toc43117689)

[**Research involving animals** 3](#_Toc43117690)

[**Scope** 4](#_Toc43117691)

[**Panel Structure** 4](#_Toc43117692)

[**Remit** 5](#_Toc43117693)

[**University Research Ethics Committee** 5](#_Toc43117694)

[**Outside of remit** 6](#_Toc43117695)

[**Appeals** 6](#_Toc43117696)

[**GUEP Appeal Process for Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught Students** 6](#_Toc43117697)

[**Training** 7](#_Toc43117698)

[**Ethical Funding** 7](#_Toc43117699)

[**Retrospective Review** 7](#_Toc43117700)

[**Ethical Guidelines for carrying out Collaborative Research** 7](#_Toc43117701)

[**Guidance for external researchers** 7](#_Toc43117702)

[**Research conducted overseas** 7](#_Toc43117703)

[**Established Protocols or Programmes of Work** 8](#_Toc43117704)

[**Research Misconduct** 8](#_Toc43117705)

## **Introduction**

1. The University of Stirling is committed to ensuring that all research conducted under our auspices is in accordance with the appropriate ethical, legal and professional frameworks, obligations and standards. The University’s ethical review process exists to ensure that our activities continue to fulfil high ethical standards as well as legal obligations and safety standards.

## **Definitions**

### **Research**

1. The University of Stirling applies the Frascati[[1]](#footnote-1) definition of research.

*Research and experimental development comprise creative and systematic work undertaken in order to increase the stock of knowledge – including the knowledge of humankind, culture and society – and to devise new applications of available knowledge.*

### **Ethics**

1. Ethics are a personal code of conduct based on respect for one's self, others and surroundings and is governed by the principles or assumptions underpinning the way individuals or organisations ought to conduct themselves. Research ethics involves the application of fundamental ethical principles to research activities which include the design and implementation of research, respect towards society and others, the use of resources and research outputs, scientific misconduct and the regulation of research.

## **Requirement for Ethics Review**

1. For the purposes of ethics review the University adopts a deliberately broad understanding of the definition of ‘research’ which is inclusive not only of formal research but also other activities which involve common features of research, such as the involvement of human participants, the collection of personal data (especially sensitive personal data), the involvement of animals, work in protected environments or with protected materials or flora/fauna, etc.
2. Examples of such activities may include consultancy, practice reviews, service evaluations, market research etc. All staff engaged in such activities on behalf of the University are required to seek ethical approval (or to establish positively that such approval is not necessary).

## **Core Principles of Research Ethics**

### **Research involving humans**

1. The University of Stirling adheres to the six key principles of ethical research as established by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) in their [Framework for Research Ethics](http://www.esrc.ac.uk/files/funding/guidance-for-applicants/esrc-framework-for-research-ethics-2015/):

* *Research participants should take part voluntarily, free from any coercion or undue influence, and their rights, dignity and (when possible) autonomy should be respected and appropriately protected.*
* *Research should be worthwhile and provide value that outweighs any risk or harm. Researchers should aim to maximise the benefit of the research and minimise potential risk of harm to participants and researchers. All potential risk and harm should be mitigated by robust precautions.*
* *Research staff and participants should be given appropriate information about the purpose, methods and intended uses of the research, what their participation in the research entails and what risks and benefits, if any, are involved.*
* *Individual research participant and group preferences regarding anonymity should be respected and participant requirements concerning the confidential nature of information and personal data should be respected.*
* *Research should be designed, reviewed and undertaken to ensure recognised standards of integrity are met, and quality and transparency are assured.*
* *The independence of research should be clear, and any conflicts of interest or partiality should be explicit.*

### **Research involving animals**

1. For research involving animals the University adheres to the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 (ASPA), the University also applies the ASPA standards to animal research conducted outside the remit of the Home Office, for example animal research conducted under the auspices of the University that is carried out overseas. All research involving animals under the auspices of the University must adhere to the principles of replacement, reduction and refinement:

* *The principle of replacement is that, wherever possible, a scientifically satisfactory method or testing strategy not entailing the use of protected animals must be used instead of a regulated procedure;*
* *The principle of reduction is that whenever a programme of work involving the use of protected animals is carried out the number of protected animals used must be reduced to a minimum without compromising the objectives of the programme;*
* *The principle of refinement is that the breeding, accommodation and care of protected animals and the methods used in regulated procedures applied to such animals must be refined so as to eliminate or reduce to the minimum any possible pain, suffering, distress or lasting harm to those animals.*

## **Scope**

1. This Policy applies to all researchers, supervisors and students conducting research under the auspices of the University. Researchers, supervisors and students must familiarise themselves with this Policy before commencing research. Researchers should also familiarise themselves with the [University’s Ethical Code](https://www.stir.ac.uk/media/stirling/services/internal/is/documents/EthicalCode.pdf).

## **Panel Structure**

1. The Panel structure for ethical review consists of the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC), which reports to the University Court, and three cross-faculty Research Ethics Panels (REPs) which report directly to UREC (Figure 1). The three REPs and their areas of responsibility are:

* Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Body (AWERB) - for research activities that involve animals in any way.
* NHS, Invasive or Clinical Research (NICR) - for health research requiring approval by the NHS Research Ethics Committee and/or taking place with NHS staff, patients or on NHS premises; and health/patient research taking place in health service settings in other countries; and all research involving physically invasive procedures or intrusive intervention on human participants.
* General University Ethics Panel (GUEP) - for all other research (health, social, digital, environmental etc.).

**Figure 1: Research Ethics Panel Structure**

A figure showing the Research Ethics Panel structure. Three boxes on the bottom row; General University Ethics Panel (GUEP), Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Body (AWERB) and NHS, Invasive or Clinical Research (NICR) have arrows pointing to University Research Ethics Committee (UREC). This then has an arrow pointing to University Court.

1. Each Panel maintains a handbook or operating manual which will be reviewed by the Panel at least once a year. These documents provide details of:

* The Panel remit
* Dates of meeting and deadlines for submissions
* Details of procedures for review
* Membership of the Panel

## **Remit**

### **University Research Ethics Committee**

1. The remit of the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) is to:
2. To keep the University Court informed of issues and legislative requirements relating to research ethics
3. To develop, implement and keep under review arrangements to quality assure the University ethical review process;
4. To report to the University Court on a regular basis on the operation of the ethical review process;
5. To provide guidance as to the activities to be undertaken by the Research Ethics Panels;
6. To monitor the functioning of Research Ethics Panels and share good practice;
7. To provide oversight of activities intended to promote research ethics and research integrity throughout the University;
8. To consider any contentious project proposals which emerge from Research Ethics Panels;
9. To consider appeals that are made against the decisions of the Research Ethics Panels;
10. To submit an annual report of its business to University Court.

### **Outside of remit**

1. The remit of the individual Panels are available in their individual operating manuals.
2. It is not the responsibility of the REPs to review in any detail the methodology or the merits of the work presented, except insofar as it is unethical to conduct research or other project work that is fundamentally flawed. Where the REPs feel that the methodology is fundamentally flawed and therefore unethical it should refer these projects back to the management of the responsible Faculty. It is expected, however, that such issues will have been examined during peer review at Faculty level before the application is submitted.

## **Appeals**

1. Researchers wishing to appeal against the decision of one of the Research Ethics Panels (REP) should, in the first instance, appeal against the decision with the Chair of the REP. The Chair will review the reasoning for the decision and allow the applicant to present further arguments in favour of the proposal. With agreement from the Deputy Chair the initial decision may be altered. If the issue cannot be satisfactorily resolved at REP level, the appellant should appeal in writing to the Committee Manager of the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC [ethics@stir.ac.uk](mailto:ethics@stir.ac.uk)) within 10 working days of receiving the REP decision. Details of the UREC appeals process are described in the [Research Ethics Review Appeals Procedure](https://stir.sharepoint.com/:b:/r/sites/ResearchIntegrityandGovernance/Shared%20Documents/General/Web%20Documents/Research%20Ethics%20Appeals%20Process%20Nov%202019.pdf?csf=1&web=1&e=09LhaX).

### **GUEP Appeal Process for Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught Students**

1. An undergraduate or postgraduate taught student wishing to appeal against the decision of the General University Ethics Panel should follow the appropriate route:
   1. Students wishing to make an appeal against the decision of their supervisor or the second reviewer should appeal in writing to the Faculty/Division Delegated Authority ([guep@stir.ac.uk](mailto:guep@stir.ac.uk)) within 10 working days of receiving the initial decision for further review. Once this route of appeal has been exhausted, the appellant may appeal in writing to the Chair of the General University Ethics Panel ([guep@stir.ac.uk](mailto:guep@stir.ac.uk)).
   2. Students wishing to make an appeal against the decision of the Faculty/Division Delegated Authority should appeal in writing to the Chair of the General University Ethics Panel ([guep@stir.ac.uk](mailto:guep@stir.ac.uk)) within 10 working days of receiving the initial decision for further review.
2. Details of the GUEP appeal process for undergraduate and postgraduate taught students are described in the [Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught Student Ethics Review Appeals Procedure](https://stir.sharepoint.com/:b:/r/sites/ResearchIntegrityandGovernance/Shared%20Documents/General/Web%20Documents/GUEP/GUEP%20Review%20of%20UG%20and%20PGT%20Applications%20(1).pdf?csf=1&web=1&e=j1gjw8).

## **Training**

1. Training on research ethics/research integrity is available to all research staff and postgraduate research students at the University through the Institute for Advanced Studies. The University has [training on research integrity](https://canvas.stir.ac.uk/enroll/CJ43KW) available via Canvas.
2. REPs should also actively promote discussion of ethical issues through seminars and other activities, arranged on either an intra- or cross-faculty basis.

## **Ethical Funding**

1. The University will not to accept funding that are judged to have been illegally obtained or to adversely affect the University’s reputation or compromise its academic freedom or integrity. The University will not accept funding from tobacco companies.

## **Retrospective Review**

1. The University Research Ethics Panels will not give retrospective ethical reviews on research activity.

## **Ethical Guidelines for carrying out Collaborative Research**

1. University research will not seek to duplicate ethical review from another body. The University has established [guidelines for carrying out collaborative research](https://stir.sharepoint.com/:b:/s/ResearchIntegrityandGovernance/EefHrY0DMhVFti_xOfyfYBABTTZuDvis7l7fJfeQSODhfQ?e=2ByvPj).

## **Guidance for external researchers**

1. The University has established guidance for [external researchers wishing to carry out research at the University of Stirling on our students and staff](https://stir.sharepoint.com/:b:/s/ResearchIntegrityandGovernance/ER7KRLExZjZPiMLtmRdjPdsBg-gHa7gFPGPA_O-MquirIg?e=UP51jv).

## **Research conducted overseas**

1. The University expects that research activities conducted overseas under the auspices of the University should meet, at a minimum, the ethics standard required within the University. Researchers should familiarise themselves with the University’s [guidelines for carrying out collaborative research](https://stir.sharepoint.com/:b:/s/ResearchIntegrityandGovernance/EefHrY0DMhVFti_xOfyfYBABTTZuDvis7l7fJfeQSODhfQ?e=2ByvPj).

## **Established Protocols or Programmes of Work**

1. Where research involves commonly occurring situations, methodologies, data sets, human samples of interventions an applicant may apply for broad approval of a protocol. Review of the activity to be classified as a protocol must be fully justified by the applicant and will be reviewed by the appropriate Research Ethics Panel.

## **Research Misconduct**

1. Research that fails to comply with the University’s principles of good conduct may give rise to a complaint of research misconduct. Although a rare occurrence, research misconduct is handled very seriously by the University, and we are committed to ensuring that any such complaints are investigated with thoroughness and rigour. Research misconduct allegations are handled in accordance with the [University Procedure for Handling Allegations of Research Misconduct](https://www.stir.ac.uk/media/stirling/global-assets/documents/2020-FINAL-Guidelines-for-handling-allegations-of-research-misconduct.pdf).

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1. <https://www.oecd.org/sti/inno/frascati-manual.htm> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)