
Royal Academy of Music

Ethics Policy Governing Research Involving Human Participants and Personal Data

December 2020

1. Scope of the policy

This policy applies to all research involving human participants and/or personal data conducted by Academy researchers or by researchers using Academy participants as part of a formal research collaboration with the Academy.

The Academy's definition of research is taken from the Research Excellence Framework 2021, which in its shortened form defines research as 'a process of investigation leading to new insights, effectively shared'.

Academy researchers include all those conducting research who are members of staff, both employees and those holding honorary positions, or students.

Research with ethical ramifications that fall outside of the scope of this policy, including but not restricted to research involving animals or human tissue, is not normally permitted at the Academy.

2. Fundamental principles

Participants in research projects have the right to:

- consent to participate in, withdraw from, or refuse to take part in research projects
- confidentiality: personal information or identifiable data should not be disclosed without consent
- security of data: data should be kept secure and should not be kept for longer than is absolutely necessary
- safety: participants should not be exposed to unnecessary risk

Researchers have an obligation to ensure that their research is conducted with: honesty; integrity; minimal risk; respect for other people and cultures.

These principles of research ethics are established in UK and international law. Principles relating to the retention and processing of personal data are established in the General Data Protection

Regulation (2018). Sector-wide expectations and guidance of good research practice are published in the following documents:

- RCUK Policy and Guidelines on Governance of Good Research Conduct (2013, updated 2015 and 2017)
- The British Psychological Society Code of Human Research Ethics (second edition, 2014)
- The British Educational Research Association Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (fourth edition, 2018)

3. Research governance

It is the responsibility of individual researchers to uphold good research practice, and to safeguard the rights of the participants in their research projects.

The Academy's Research Committee is responsible to Academic Board, and ultimately to Governing Body for:

- reviewing institutional policies on good research practice and research ethics
- offering guidance on the interpretation of such policies
- promoting awareness of such policies
- resolving disputed ethics approval decisions
- suspending research activities in the event of arising concerns, pending further investigation
- ensuring institutional compliance with external regulations concerning good research practice and research ethics
- approving research ethics applications, normally as a delegated power to the Research Ethics Committee.

This policy is owned by the Academy's Research Committee. It will be reviewed on a rolling programme every three years.

The Academy's Research Ethics Committee is responsible to Research Committee for considering research ethics approval applications from Academy researchers or researchers using Academy participants as part of a formal research collaboration with the Academy.

4. Research ethics approval procedure

All research involving human participants and/or personal data, conducted by Academy staff or students, or researchers using Academy participants as part of a formal research collaboration with the Academy must be reviewed, and research ethics approval obtained, before data gathering commences.

Individual researchers if working alone, or the lead researcher of a research group, should apply for ethics approval by completing a Research Ethics Approval Form and submitting it to the Academic Quality Officer.

In practice-based or artistic research it is understood that human participants can also have the status of 'co-researcher' or 'co-author' of a project (or similar); in such cases research ethics approval is not required.

The Research Ethics Committee will review all ethics approval applications. In addition to ethical considerations the Research Ethics Committee will also assess the potential disruption of a project to ongoing teaching, events, or administrative activities, or encroachment upon limited institutional time and space resources, or compatibility with permitted usage of student and staff data. The Research Ethics Committee may therefore reject an application on these bases, even if the application meets the expectations of ethical standards. If ethics approval is granted the Research Ethics Committee will issue a Research Ethics Approval Certificate to the applicant, which will be valid for the proposed duration of the project, or until there is a material change to the proposed project, or until there are relevant changes to the Academy's ethics policy.

A Research Ethics Approval Certificate does not provide permission for a research project to go ahead; rather it provides evidence that the project has received institutional ethics approval. Administrative approval may still need to be sought from the relevant Head of Department or senior manager.

The Research Ethics Committee is responsible to Research Committee, and has the following membership:

- Registrar and Director of Student Operations (chair)
- Academic Quality Officer (secretary)
- Head of Postgraduate Programmes
- Head of Undergraduate Programmes

While ethics approval is required before any data collection involving human participants commences, applicants are expected to consider the ethical implications of their research at all stages of the project. If significant changes are made to the project after approval has been obtained, it will be necessary to obtain re-approval.

Where a number of students will be conducting research that is of a similar nature, a single generic ethics application can be submitted using one application form.

Personal data collected as a result of an ethics approval application will be stored and processed by the Royal Academy of Music in accordance with the provisions of the 2018 General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Please see www.ram.ac.uk/privacy for more information.

5. High risk applications

Applications should be flagged as high risk under the following circumstances:

- participants include those whose competence to exercise informed consent is in doubt, including but not restricted to: those under 18 years of age; people with diminished mental capacity; people who suffer from psychiatric or personality disorders; those with a basic knowledge of the language in which the research is conducted
- participants include those who may not be in a position to exercise unfettered informed consent, including but not restricted to: members of the armed forces, prisoners, asylum seekers, family members or close friends of the researcher(s)

- participants include those whose circumstances may unduly influence their decision to consent, including but not restricted to: those with disabilities; those in poor health; the elderly; those in care
- research includes highly sensitive topics, including but not restricted to: ethnicity; political opinion; religious or spiritual beliefs; physical or mental health conditions; sexuality or gender identity; abuse; nudity; criminal activities; political asylum; conflict; personal violence; terrorism or violent extremism.

Applications flagged as high risk will not be disadvantaged in the review procedure. The Research Ethics Committee will be assessing the proposed risk management and mitigation strategies of the project, rather than the perceived level of risk. Research ethics is a matter of being risk aware rather than risk averse.

6. Outcomes of ethical review

The Research Ethics Committee will communicate one of the following outcomes to ethics approval applicants:

- Approval
- Approval with compulsory changes
- No decision with request for further information
- Rejection

The Research Ethics Committee reserves the right to refer applications to the Research Committee for further consideration.

Rejected applications cannot be resubmitted unless substantial changes have been made to the proposed research project.

7. Appeals

Appeals against the decision of the Research Ethics Committee should be made in writing to the chair of the Research Committee.