Research: Ethics and Integrity

Prof. Jonathan Finch
Chair, Arts & Humanities Ethics Committee/Deputy Director HRC

Helen Jacobs HRC/AHEC Admin

HUMANITIES RESEARCH CENTRE

UNIVERSITY *of York*

Structure

- What are research ethics and why should I care?
- What type of research does it cover?
- Reflect on Risk and Harm
- Protocols, Rules and Guidance
- Arts and Humanities Ethics Committee
- How do I apply? What do I need to do?

HUMANITIES RESEARCH CENTRE

Why Ethics?

- Research should be a "reflective activity with moral underpinnings", not just technical or instrumental

- *How* we research (**process**) is as important as what we discover (**outcomes**)

- Helps manage the uncertainty, uniqueness and dilemmas that are an inevitable part of research

- Ensure that we **DO NO HARM**.

Unethical Research: Anti/Vax

The Cow-Pock — or — the Wonderful Effects of the New Inoculation! — Vide. the Publications of y Anti-Vaccine Society.
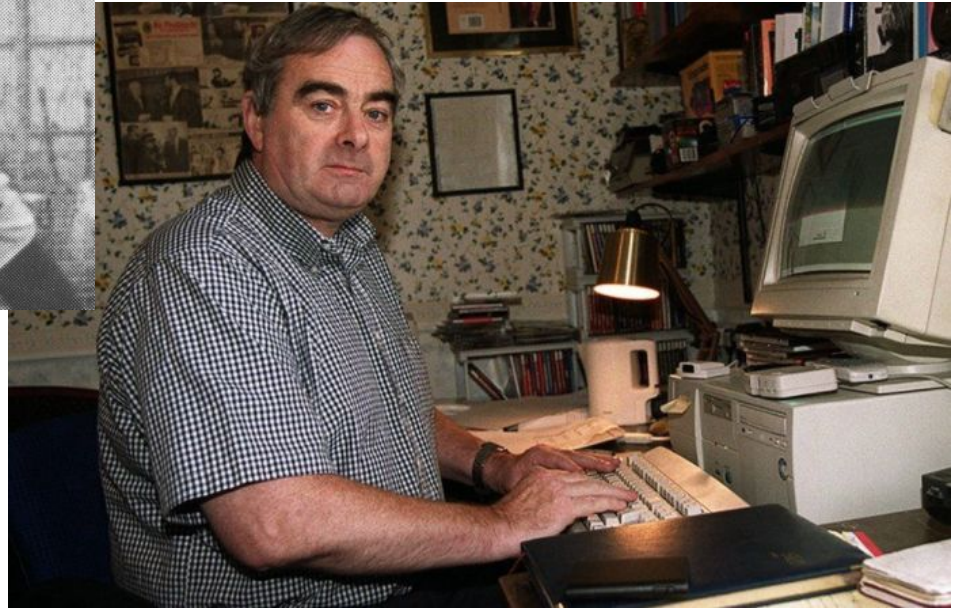
Edward Jenner experimented with his new vaccination against smallpox by injecting an 8 year-old child with cowpox pus and then exposing them to a smallpox carrier.

But examples of a disregard for 'Informed Consent' stretch forward into the 1990s (at least).

But it's not just about medicine….

Boston College Tapes - Belfast Project 2001

Ed Moloney began work on the project shortly after the 1998 peace deal

You see the danger?

So what type of research practice needs ethical consideration?

Surely not mine...

The Most Common:

1. Research or research-related activity involving **humans**, including through **participation**, **observation** and/or the **collection**/use of personal data (e.g. in relation to lifestyle, housing, working environment, attitudes and preferences), including images.

The Most Obvious?

1. **Human tissue** and/or other material
2. **Animals**

Getting tricky…?

1. Potential or actual application of research **findings to cause harm or infringe privacy** (e.g. surveillance, defence)

2. **Sensitive information, materials, techniques or findings**, particularly those which might be subject to misuse in order to cause harm

Tread Lightly...

1. Impact on and/or risk of **damage to the environment** (i.e. beyond that covered by standard laboratory health and safety procedures)

Unseen danger?

1. Involvement of **sponsors/participants/associates** whose connections or interests might impede or be perceived as **impeding the impartiality** of the research process from design through to publication/exploitation
2. Involvement of **sponsors/associates with a controversial ethical record**

No harm (again)

1. **Risk of psychological or physical harm** to the researcher (beyond standard laboratory health and safety procedures)

1. Activities conducted overseas or in collaboration with overseas partners, in particular countries with emerging economies, and **countries/under regimes with a poor human rights record or identified as dangerous** by the Foreign & Commonwealth Office.
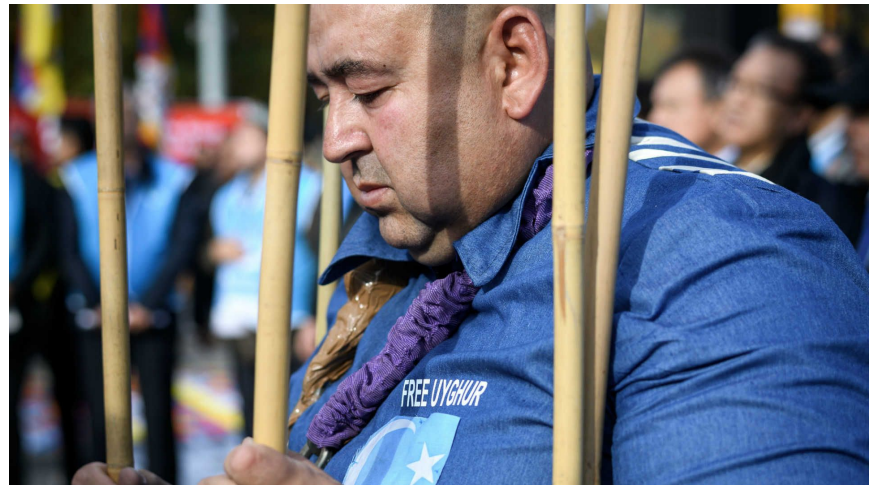
Ethical review is necessary for:

1. **Research or research-related activity involving humans, including through participation, observation and/or the collection/use of personal data (e.g. in relation to lifestyle, housing, working environment, attitudes and preferences), including images**
2. **Human tissue** and/or other material
3. **Animals**
4. Potential or actual application of research **findings to cause harm or infringe privacy** (e.g. surveillance, defence)
5. **Sensitive information, materials, techniques or findings**, particularly those which might be subject to misuse in order to cause harm
6. Impact on and/or risk of **damage to the environment** (i.e. beyond that covered by standard laboratory health and safety procedures)
7. Involvement of **sponsors/participants/associates** whose connections or interests might impede or be perceived as **impeding the impartiality** of the research process from design through to publication/exploitation
8. Involvement of **sponsors/associates with a controversial ethical record**
9. **Risk of psychological or physical harm** to the researcher (beyond standard laboratory health and safety procedures)
10. Activities conducted overseas or in collaboration with overseas partners, in particular countries with emerging economies, and **countries/under regimes with a poor human rights record or identified as dangerous** by the Foreign & Commonwealth Office.

Reflect on Risk

- It is not about what YOU think is dangerous, or what might happen if YOUR research all goes well.

- It is about anticipating potential RISK and HARM in different social/cultural/political contexts.

- It is about MITIGATING those risks and DEMONSTRATING that you anticipated them.

No Harm: to whom/what?

PEOPLE

- Research participants (human)
- Communities researched
- Researchers
  - Physical, mental
  - Reputation
- Other researchers

THINGS/ANIMALS

- Artefacts
- Sites
- Cultural practices
- Animals
- Environment

INSTITUTIONS:

- Department
- University
  - Reputation
  - Legally
- Academic discipline
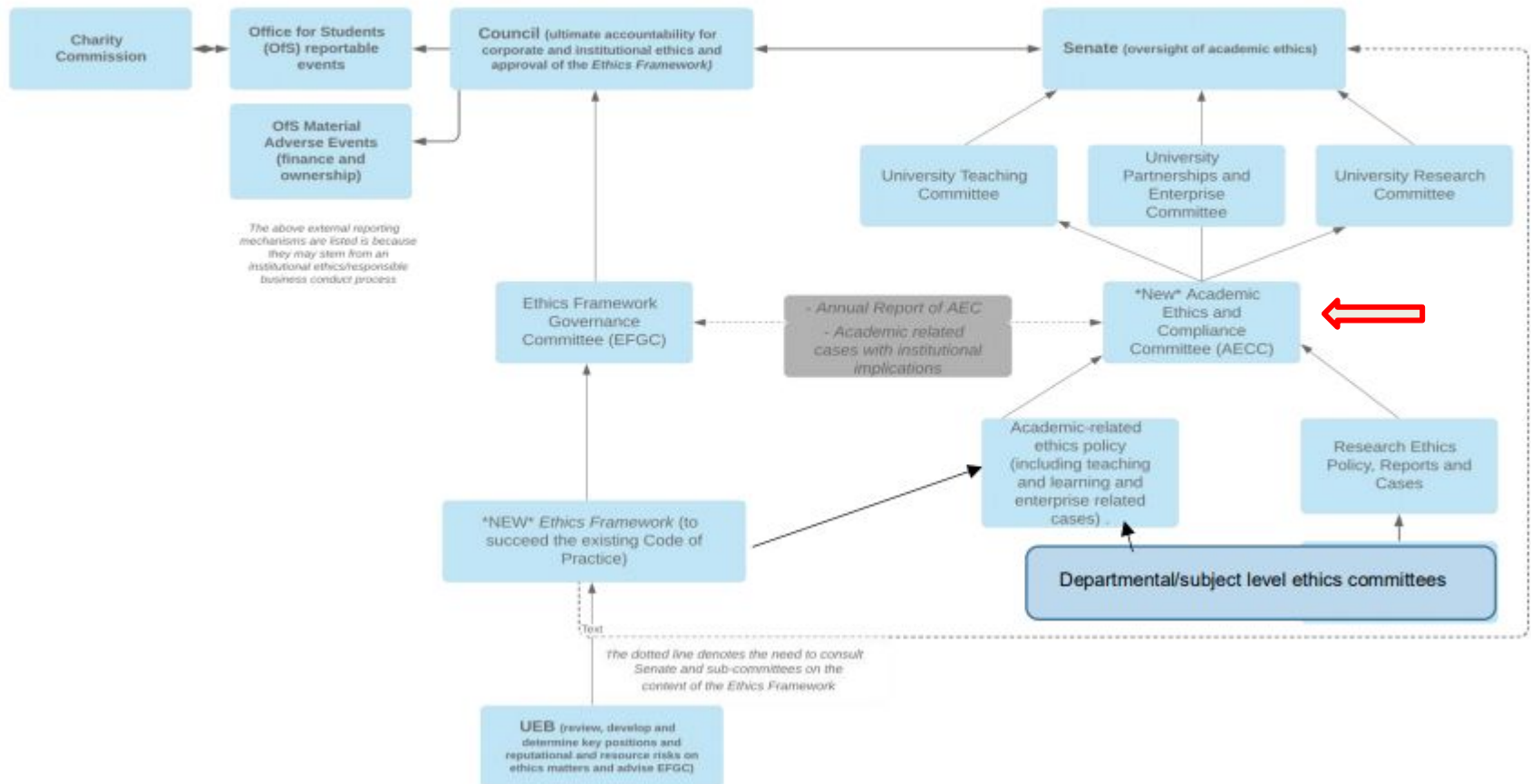- Academia as a whole

Protocols, Rules and Guidance

A number of ethical and legal frameworks:

1. Institutional
2. Legal, inc. General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and PREVENT
3. Disciplinary
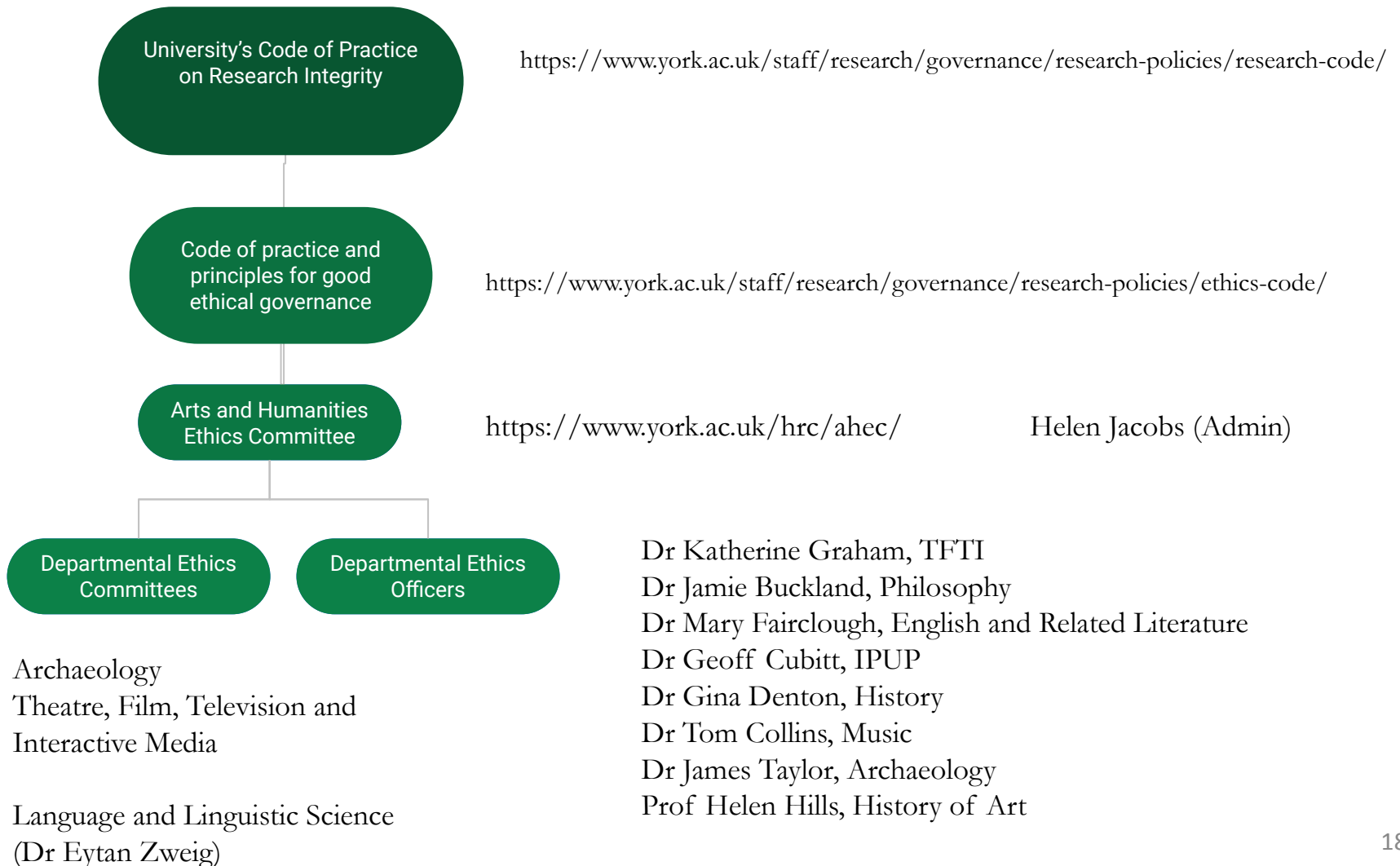4. Trans-disciplinary, e.g. Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR)

1. Institutional: University of York

University of York
Diagram of ethics governance structures

1. Institutional: University of York

University's Code of Practice on Research Integrity

https://www.york.ac.uk/staff/research/governance/research-policies/research-code/

Code of practice and principles for good ethical governance

https://www.york.ac.uk/staff/research/governance/research-policies/ethics-code/

Arts and Humanities Ethics Committee

https://www.york.ac.uk/hrc/ahec/   Helen Jacobs (Admin)

Departmental Ethics Committees

Departmental Ethics Officers

Dr Katherine Graham, TFTI
Dr Jamie Buckland, Philosophy
Dr Mary Fairclough, English and Related Literature
Dr Geoff Cubitt, IPUP
Dr Gina Denton, History
Dr Tom Collins, Music
Dr James Taylor, Archaeology
Prof Helen Hills, History of Art

Archaeology
Theatre, Film, Television and Interactive Media

Language and Linguistic Science
(Dr Eytan Zweig)

1. Institutional: University of York

- Key principle: **avoidance of harm**. (§2.2)
- Applies to the broad range of people and things considered above:
  - The welfare and interests of human participants (whether participating actively or through observation)
  - The welfare and interests of those carrying out the activity, etc.
- Ethical approval should be in place prior to the commencement of the activity to which it applies. **Retrospective ethical approval is fundamentally unethical and is not permitted** (§3.2)

- Code of practice and principles of good ethical governance https://www.york.ac.uk/staff/research/governance/policies/ethics-code/
- Code of practice on research integrityhttps://www.york.ac.uk/staff/research/governance/policies/research-code/

1. Institutional: Health and Safety

- Complementary to/entwined with ethical concerns
- Also Concerned with **avoidance of harm**
  - Lone working
  - Use of equipment
  - Foreign travel. Use University's Travel Log: https://www.york.ac.uk/admin/hsas/safetynet/Insurance/travel_log.htm

2. Legal: GDPR (2018)

- **Personal Data**

"any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person ('data subject'); an identifiable natural person is one who can be identified, directly or indirectly, in particular in reference to an identifier such as name, an identification number, location data, an online identifier or to one or more factors specific to the physical, physiological, genetic, mental, economic, cultural or social identity of that natural person."

2. Legal: GDPR (2018)

- Legislation affecting handling, processing, and storing of data

- Tighter rules and tougher penalties than Data Protection Act (1998)

- Covers **personal** and **special categories of personal data**

- https://www.york.ac.uk/records-management/dp/introduction/#tab-1

2. Legal: GDPR (2018)

Special categories of personal data

i.e. personal data, revealing:
- racial or ethnic origin;
- political opinions;
- religious or philosophical beliefs;
- trade union-membership;
- data concerning health;
- sex life and sexual orientation;
- genetic data;
- biometric data.

2. Legal: PREVENT

- Part of Government's counter-terrorism agenda
  - Aims to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism
- Applies to anyone undertaking work on terrorism or political extremism
  - Accessing sensitive material
  - Disseminating sensitive material
- University Registrar may need to liaise with University's Prevent-lead

3. Disciplinary Ethical Frameworks

American Anthropological Association Statement on Ethics:

1. Do no harm
2. Be open and honest regarding your work
3. Obtain informed consent and necessary permissions
4. Weigh competing ethical obligations due to collaborators and affected parties
5. Make your results accessible
6. Protect and preserve your records
7. Maintain respectful and ethical professional relationships

(http://www.aaanet.org/profdev/ethics/2012)

World Council of Anthropological Associations
http://www.wcaanet.org/members/members_descr.sh

4. Trans-Disciplinary Frameworks

- Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR)
  - https://aoir.org/reports/ethics2.pdf
- For anyone using the internet as a means of collecting data/studying how people use the internet
  - *Not* accessing Jstor
  - Social media, online fora, blogs
- See also Townsend and Wallace, 'Social Media Research: A Guide to Ethics'
  - https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_487729_en.pdf

AoIR: Key Principles

- The greater the vulnerability of the community / author / participant, the greater the obligation of the researcher to protect the community / author / participant.

- **Because 'harm' is defined contextually, ethical principles are more likely to be understood inductively rather than applied universally. That is, rather than one-size fits-all pronouncements, ethical decision -making is best approached through the application of practical judgment attentive to the specific context (what Aristotle identified as phronesis).**

- Because all digital information at some point involves individual persons, consideration of principles related to research on human subjects may be necessary even if it is not immediately apparent how and where persons are involved in the research data.

- When making ethical decisions, researchers must balance the rights of subjects (as authors, as research participants, as people) with the social benefits of research and researchers' rights to conduct research.

- In different contexts the rights of subjects may outweigh the benefits of research.

- Ethical issues may arise and need to be addressed during all steps of the research process, from planning, research conduct, publication, and dissemination.

- Ethical decision-making is a deliberative process, and researchers should consult as many people and resources as possible in this process, including fellow researchers, people participating in or familiar with contexts/sites being studied, research review boards, ethics guidelines, published scholarship (within one's discipline but also in other disciplines), and, where applicable, legal precedent

Internet Research

- Public or private?
  - Twitter: public
  - Invite-only Facebook group: private
  - Special-interest forum?
  - Not just T & C's – is there a 'reasonable expectation' of privacy on behalf of the user?
- Harm
  - Is the material sensitive?
- Informed consent
  - Can you get consent – from individuals or 'gatekeepers'?
- Anonymity
  - Direct quotations are internet-searchable
- Legal considerations
  - Twitter requires that tweets are reproduced in their original form and attributed

Arts and Humanities Ethics Committee

- All A&H (excluding Language and Linguistic Science)
- Considers staff and PGT/PGR applications
- Archaeology and TFTI have own ethics committees – but similar processes
- PhD Rep and Lay Member
- Shares good practice and guidance
- https://www.york.ac.uk/hrc/ahec/

Applying for Ethics Approval

- Standard Form: **not** for research involving
  - Children
  - Those with learning disabilities
  - People with mental impairment due to ill health or lifestyle
  - Terminally ill
  - Recently bereaved
  - Those unable to consent to or understand the research
  - Where research concerns sensitive topics/illegal activities
  - Where deception is involved

- Full Application

- Checklist for Non-Anonymous Interviews
  - For interviews that are low-risk, with members of non-vulnerable groups, and where participants do not require anonymity

Preparing an Application

- Talk to your **supervisor**!

- Clarify data collection methods

- Justify sample size and discuss recruitment of participants: online, face-to-face

- **Anonymity** is normally presumed to be the default position: are there reasons why you cannot offer this?

Preparing an Application

- Think about the **types of data** being handled: paper, audio, digital?

- Form of data storage:

  - filestore or google drive;

  - password protected laptop and backup;

  - locked filing cabinet?

- Short and medium term storage

  – MA: 2 years

  – PhD and staff: 10 years

- See excellent library guidance - and develop a data management strategy:
  https://www.york.ac.uk/library/info-for/researchers/data/management/

Informed Consent

- Default: **informed written consent** is required from participants and/or their representatives
- What is the project, how you intend to use their data, how it will be stored and for how long…
- Information sheet and consent form
- If you are collecting personal or special category personal data, you **must** use AHEC templates: https://www.york.ac.uk/hrc/ahec/apply-for-approval/

Information Sheet

Participants should be able to learn:

- What is the research about?
- Why is the research being carried out?
- Who is carrying it out – the researcher and the institution?
- Has the research been the subject of ethical review (provide details – including a contact for the Chair of the Committee)?
- What will happen to participants – when, for how long, where, and with whom? Do they have to take part?
- What are the possible benefits and risks of taking part?
- Will participants be paid to take part, or will any expenses be covered?
- What will happen to their data? Might it be used for future research? How will their rights to confidentiality be maintained?
- Can they withdraw from the study and what will happen to their data if this happens?
- What happens next and who can they talk to about taking part in the research?

Consent Form

A **consent form** enables researcher and participant to formally document the process of informed consent

- Provides evidence that participant is making an informed and voluntary decision to take part

- Acts as a written protection of the participant's basic rights.

- It also stands as your **AUDITABLE** commitment to informed consent and ethical research.

Consent Form

A consent form should provide evidence that the participant:
- understands what the research is about and what is involved
- has had the chance to ask questions about the research
- understands that they can withdraw from the study at any time
- understands what will happen to their data (including use in future/secondary analysis or research)
- understands that their right to confidentiality will be maintained
- has agreed to take part in the study
- has agreed to be recorded (audio/video) if this is the case
- Signed and dated by the participant and the researcher

(NOTE: informed consent is required for ethical reasons, but consent is **not** the legal basis on which personal or special category personal data is processed for the purposes of research.)

AHEC Web Pages

https://www.york.ac.uk/hrc/ahec/

Covid 19

Field work

Research Contingency Group noted concerns that had been raised in relation to undertaking research offsite for PGR students, in light of the current Covid-19 restrictions, particularly given the need to suspend most fieldwork.

However, in the case of essential field work, some specific approvals are needed:

- All fieldwork activities will ordinarily have a risk assessment and guidance (or standard operating procedure) produced prior to them being undertaken. These are usually developed between PGR and supervisor.
- Approvals now need to be updated taking into account the latest Departmental Covid-19 risk assessments, even where prior permission may have been granted, to take account of revised government guidance. Once completed, these revised documents are shared with the departmental technical manager or Covid-secure Lead who will then apply for institutional sign off.
- If there are further questions, staff and PGR students should talk to the relevant departmental manager, technical manager or Covid-secure Lead.

Face-to-face research (such as interviews, participant observation, ethnography) should move online where possible. Please check whether any changes to the data collection methods require further ethical review before starting.

Further guidance can be found at Update on interim business travel restrictions website where there is an Offsite Work and Study Covid-19 Secure Check Sheet.

AHEC Process

- AHEC form plus information sheet and consent forms

- Draft to supervisor: comments, revise, resubmit

- Supervisor submits to hrc-ethics@york.ac.uk

- AHEC review: 2 x reviews (up to 4 weeks)

- Approved, minor or major changes, not approved

- NO RETROSPECTIVE CONSENT!