UNIVERSITY OF YORK  
University Ethics Committee  

Procedure for monitoring the ethical conduct of ESRC projects

It is a requirement of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) that major research organisations should undertake an annual ethical conduct audit of at least one ESRC project per year, randomly chosen (ESRC Framework for research ethics, 2010, rev. 2012). At the University of York, this is a paper-based exercise overseen by the University Ethics Committee and conducted by the departmental/subject-level ethics sub-committee which signed off the project in question.

The following procedure should be undertaken on an annual basis:

1. The Chair of University Ethics Committee should nominate one ethics subcommittee to undertake the audit, based on the information available in ethics subcommittees’ annual reports to ensure that the nominated subcommittee has had recent sight of ESRC-funded projects. Eligible ethics subcommittees should be nominated on a rolling basis to ensure a fair allocation of workload and a range of research areas reviewed.

2. The nominated ethics subcommittee should select at random a current ESRC-funded project for monitoring. The subcommittee Chair should appoint two reviewers from the subcommittee in line with its protocol for allocating work and avoiding conflicts of interest. Where possible, these should be the members who originally signed off the project. The subcommittee should decide whether or not the review should be conducted anonymously, in the light of its usual practice.

3. The review should be conducted using the report form overleaf, as follows:
   (a) The subcommittee Chair should contact the lead PI for the project based at York to inform him/her that the review is to take place, and enclosing a copy of the report form (for information only at this stage).
   (b) The subcommittee Chair should arrange for a copy of the project details as originally signed off by the committee plus a copy of the report form to be sent to the designated reviewers.
   (c) The review should then be conducted as detailed on the report form, co-ordinated through the subcommittee Chair.

4. The completed report form should be considered formally by the ethics subcommittee, and the reviewee notified of the outcome. Any matters for concern should be referred by the subcommittee Chair to the PVC for Research to pursue further as appropriate, supported by the Research Strategy and Policy Office and Research Grants and Contracts, with reference to ESRC guidelines, and liaising with the ESRC as necessary.

5. A summary of the process and its outcomes should be reported to the University Ethics Committee and the University Research Committee for information.

6. A full record of the process, including the completed report form, any supporting documents and the relevant sub-committee minutes, should be kept by the ethics sub-committee which performed the review. Records of any action beyond this level will be maintained by Registry (Research Strategy and Policy Office/Research Grants and Contracts/Secretariat to University Ethics Committee/HR as appropriate).

April 2014
UNIVERSITY OF YORK
University Ethics Committee

Annual audit of the ethical conduct of ESRC-funded projects

It is a requirement of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) that major research organisations should undertake an annual ethical conduct audit of at least one ESRC project per year, randomly chosen (ESRC Framework for research ethics). At the University of York, this is a paper-based exercise overseen by the University Ethics Committee and conducted by the departmental/subject-level ethics sub-committee which signed off the project in question.

The reviewers appointed by the ethics sub-committee and the reviewee - ie the lead PI for the project based at York - are asked to complete the form in sequence as indicated, attaching any supporting documents. Please expand the text boxes as needed. The report will be considered formally by the relevant ethics subcommittee, and the reviewee will be notified of the outcome. If, in exceptional circumstances, there are any matters of serious concern, these will be referred to the PVC for Research and pursued with the ESRC as necessary.

A summary of the process and its outcomes will be reported to the University Ethics Committee and the University Research Committee for information.

Project title:
Principal Investigator (name and department):
Date of review:

1. **For the reviewers:** please look over the project details as signed off by your sub-committee (enclosed with this form). Then agree a list of areas which have ethical implications, for the PI to report against on how the project is being/has been conducted. (eg ensuring informed consent, securing special permissions, storage of research data, data access arrangements, etc). Please list these areas below, then forward the form to the Chair of your subcommittee, who will arrange for it to be sent to the reviewee.

2. **For the PI:** please provide concise details of how the project has been/is being conducted under the headings listed above, focusing on ethical considerations. Please highlight any changes which have been made and/or any subsequent issues which have arisen, with details of how these have been handled. If you feel it would be helpful, please attach supporting documents eg a copy of the informed consent form, any protocols, any special permissions. Please then return the form and any attachments to the reviewers via the ethics subcommittee Chair.
3. For the reviewers: please consider the PI’s response against the project details signed off by the sub-committee and provide brief comments below, flagging up any recommendations or concerns. If there are points of information which could be resolved by a phonecall or email to the PI, please do so (assuming the review is not being conducted anonymously). Please return via the ethics subcommittee Chair, including details of any additional information subsequently provided by the PI in response to your queries (if applicable).

4. For the PI: to complete the process, if you would like to respond to the reviewers’ comments, please do so below, then return the completed form plus any attachments to the ethics subcommittee Chair.

Thank you for your time and co-operation. If you have any queries or comments about this process, please contact Alice Wakely in the Research Strategy and Policy Office: alice.wakely@york.ac.uk

Research organisations are expected to establish and publish working procedures for monitoring research and for undertaking occasional ad hoc audits.

It is expected that research organisations will undertake occasional ad hoc audits of ESRC-funded research. How often this is done will depend on the amount of ESRC research undertaken in the institution. In major institutions it is anticipated that an REC[*] should undertake an audit of at least one ESRC research project per year, randomly chosen, or in the case of a large centre, part of a project. Principal Investigators and supervisors of students need to know that they must keep good records of their ethics procedures in case they are called to account. Initially this could be a paper exercise, asking to see consent documents, other special permissions and relevant paperwork, information on data storing and data sharing, as well as a note from the Principal Investigator on changes that have been made, and highlighting specific problems.

Where an REC or a designated sub-committee considers that a monitoring report or ad hoc audit has raised significant concerns about the ethics in the conduct of the study, it should request a full and detailed account of the research for full ethics review by the main institutional REC.

Where an REC or designated sub-committee considers that a study is being conducted in a way which is not in accord with the conditions of its approval or in a way which does not protect the rights, dignity and welfare of the research participants, it should initially bring together a meeting of all those concerned with a view to resolving the difficulties. In an extreme situation, the REC may withdraw its approval, and require that research be suspended or discontinued. The ESRC must be informed of this decision and reserves the right to recoup its grant funding, pending further investigation, in extreme cases of ethics misconduct.

[*REC= research ethics committee*]