

UNIVERSITY *of York*

Department of Language & Linguistic Science  
Ethics Committee

## **Guidance Notes on Applying for Ethics Permissions**

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## 1. Introduction

Like the university as a whole, the Department of Language & Linguistic Science expects the highest standards in the conduct of all research (and other academic activities) undertaken in its name and on its premises using its facilities. All research undertaken by staff, students and other affiliates of the Department of Language & Linguistic Science should be conducted in a manner that complies with ethical guidelines.

This document is designed to provide guidance to our ethics procedures and explain the ethics application process. It is meant to supplement, rather than supersede, the general [University of York ethical guidelines](#) and explain how they apply to the research we do.

For any specific queries or concerns about the content of this document, or questions that are not covered here, please contact the LLS Ethics Committee at [linguistics-ethics@york.ac.uk](mailto:linguistics-ethics@york.ac.uk).

Note that this document was written primarily with research activities in mind, but good ethical governance applies to all academic activities including teaching and impact. If you are conducting non-research related activities but believe it may have ethical implications, contact the LLS Ethics Committee at the email address above.

## 2. Is ethics permission needed for my project?

As a general rule, activities that involve data collection require ethics permission before data collection can begin. However, there are exceptions, so for clarity we have outlined the following guidelines:

### Research that always requires ethics permission

- Any research that involves audio or video recording of individuals
- Any research that involves experimental procedures, including online surveys
- Any research that involves systematically using the internet as a corpus (e.g. social media or google searches; [see section 5.1](#)).
- Any research that involves questions about a participant's opinions or personal history, especially if they touch on potentially upsetting or controversial topics.
- Any research that involves data collection outside university grounds (e.g. interviewing people at their homes).
- Any research that involves contact or data collection from people who are legally unable to give consent (e.g. people under 16) or vulnerable populations.
- Any research involving deception of any kind (note that it is not considered deception if you just aren't specific about what you are measuring. Deception for these purposes means deliberately telling your participants an untruth).
- Any research which involves commercial or government partners, or that may have implications on legal procedures or policy making.

### Research that usually does not require ethics permission

- Informal data collection methods such as grammatical judgments where no recordings take place and no personal or demographic information (beyond language proficiency) is collected, nor is any quantitative data reported.
- Any research that relies solely on published materials, including academic articles, grammars and academic corpora.
- Research that re-uses unpublished data collected previously, *but only if* explicit consent was granted at the time for such re-use.

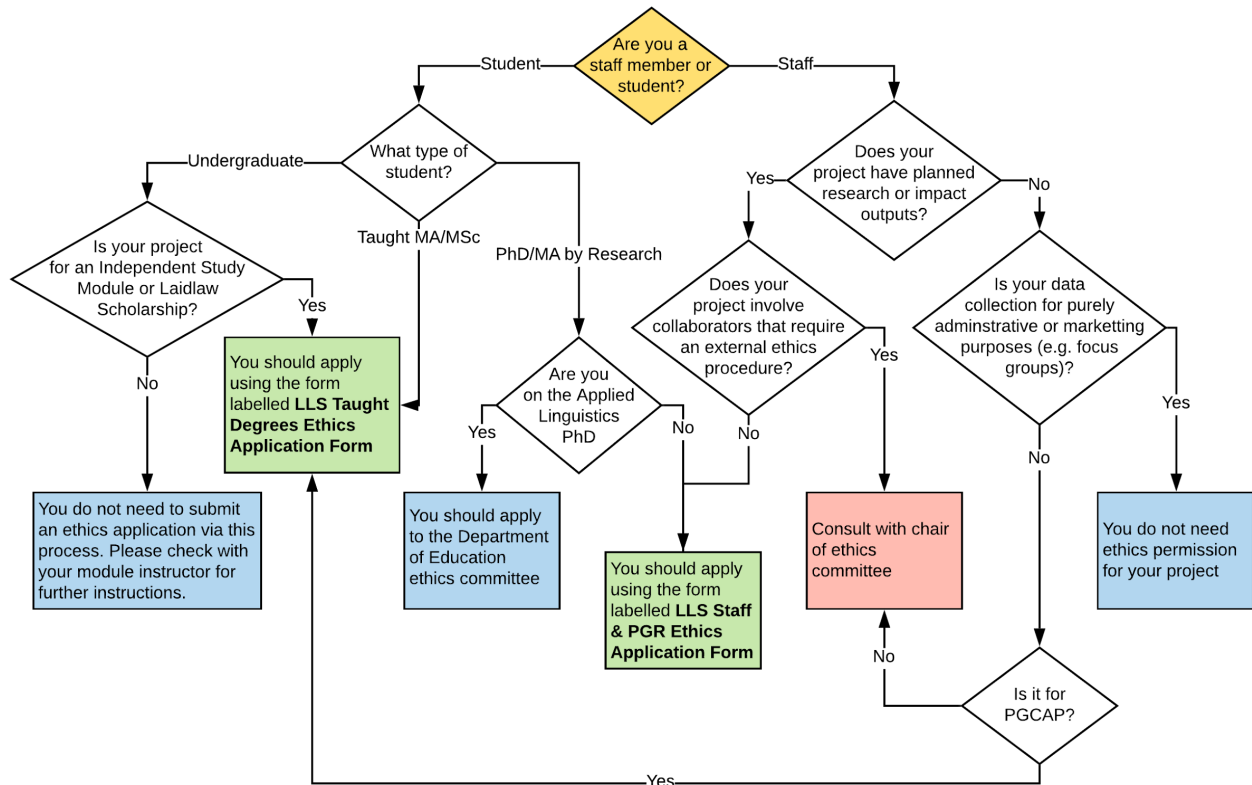
### Research that is not permitted

- Research that re-uses unpublished data collected previously if no explicit consent for re-use of this data was granted.
- Research that puts the participant or researchers at unjustifiable risk.

**If your research does not fall into any of the above categories, it's probably best to submit an ethics application, but feel free to contact the Ethics Committee for clarification.**

## 2.1. Ethical approval flowchart

Once you have determined that your research activities require an ethics application, the following flowchart is designed to help you decide what form to fill:



## 3. Issues to consider

### 3.1. Working with internet data

The internet is considered by many researchers to be a large corpus of real language data. However, it is worth remembering that people who post on the internet may not consider the possibility that researchers will look at their words. Especially in social media, people may have expectations of privacy that can be circumvented by a clever researcher but should probably be respected. For example, someone may post something on twitter that is only visible to their followers, and they might not realise that someone may be following for the explicit purpose of research (and would perhaps block the researcher if they knew). Similarly, posts from an internet forum dedicated to people in a specific community may have been written without an expectation that they will be used for research (even if the researcher is a legitimate member of the same community). **If you plan to use internet data, you *must* be explicit about what level of privacy would have been reasonably expected by the creators of your data, and how you plan to respect them.** Note that deception in order to access online data (e.g. posing a member of a community to gain access to private posts) will not be approved.

### 3.2. Data storage, management and protection

Please refer to the [University's Data Protection Policy](#).

### 3.3. Working with schools/nurseries - Disclosure and Barring Service checks

Gaining access into a school or nursery in the UK in order to collect data from pupils is very likely to require that you first obtain a Disclosure and Barring Service check (DBS). As such, please read the following paragraphs very carefully.

Firstly, in cases where you will be supervised **at all times** by a member of the school staff, then it is not always necessary that you will need a DBS check. However, it is a matter for the school, rather than the University, to decide whether they require you to have a DBS check, so even in cases where you are being supervised, it is still possible that the school may require you to get DBS clearance before it gives to permission to you to collect such data in the school.

Secondly, in cases where you will be alone with a pupil or a group of pupils (i.e. unsupervised by a member of the school staff), such as when you may wish to conduct a one-to-one interview in private, or do some work with pupils on a particular task, it is certain that the school will require you to obtain DBS clearance before it gives you permission to collect such data in the school.

Unfortunately getting a DBS check can take some time. It can sometimes take as little as three or four weeks, and sometimes as long as three or four months. The DBS says that about 90% of

enhanced disclosure applications are processed in four weeks. However, if you are an overseas student, it may take longer, and because convictions overseas are not included in DBS checks, a school may not think a DBS check is appropriate if you are not going to be accompanied by a member of the school staff whenever you are with children.

In addition, you will have to pay for the cost of the DBS check yourself (the cost for an enhanced check is somewhere around £40 - £50). You may well think that given the risk of a long delay that could be caused to your data collection plans if the DBS check took a long time, plus the expense involved, that collecting data which requires a DBS check is not the best way forward for you.

If however you wish to pursue a project that requires a DBS check, you should in the first instance discuss this with your supervisor, and if you decide to go ahead, you need to bear in mind that the responsibility to obtain and pay for a DBS check lies with you. You will then need to contact the school you are hoping to collect data from, and see whether they require a DBS check. If they do, you clearly need to apply for a DBS check several weeks before you actually plan to start collecting your data at the school.

The school may be able to provide you with a DBS check application form. You should also consult the [Government website](#). [University of York Student Support Services](#) need to provide a counter-signature, to indicate they have checked your form and the relevant documents.

## 4. Taught students (undergraduate and taught masters)

### 4.1. Before you begin

Before you finalise your plans to collect your own data, you should discuss your proposed research project with your supervisor (or a DAP member, if a supervisor has not yet been appointed). Make sure you both agree on the scope and nature of the data collection appropriate for your project.

Note that if you are joining an existing project, you *must* submit an ethics approval form of your own even if the project already has ethical approval for the data collection involved.

If your project does not involve collection of new data (for example, if it is based entirely on corpora or grammars), then you do not need to seek ethics approval. Note, however, that projects based on unpublished existing data (e.g. data previously collected as part of a prior research project in the department) can *only* be used if such use was covered by the original ethics permission for the data in question. It is your responsibility to ensure that such permission is in place; if the original researcher is unsure or unavailable, you should feel free to contact the departmental [Ethics Committee](#) to check.



**IMPORTANT: You must not commence your research until your project has received ethical clearance through the Department's procedures, either via an approved ethics application or agreement by your supervisor that you do not need ethical approval.**

**You must not deviate from the approved procedures without permission from your supervisor. This includes any commitments you made about participant anonymity and data storage.**

**Collecting data without ethics permission and failure to follow the agreed ethics proposal are both research integrity violations and may result in disciplinary action according to the university academic misconduct procedures.**

### 4.2. Seeking approval for new data collection

After you have talked through your plans with, you should complete the department's [Taught Students Research Ethics Approval Form](#). Here is an outline of what will happen to your application:

1. If your application contains one of the following, your supervisor will direct the proposal to the chair of Ethics Committee to review:
  - o Data collection from children, teenagers under 16, or vulnerable adults.
  - o Deception
  - o Sensitive or potentially distressing topics

- o Procedures that may put participants or researchers at risk
2. Otherwise, your supervisor will judge whether your proposal meets standard ethical considerations.
    - i) If they decide it does, they will approve it, and will then send it electronically to the appropriate administrator.
    - ii) If they decide it does not, they will ask you to modify your plans and submit a new audit form – which will then be reviewed again in the same way.
    - iii) If they cannot reach a decision, or if there is a disagreement between you and your supervisor as to whether their agreement is correct, they will forward the proposal to the chair of Ethics Committee to review.
  3. If your proposal is referred to the chair of the Ethics Committee, the chair of Ethics Committee will then either provide guidance on how to resolve the remaining issues, or, if there is reason to do so, will pass on the proposal to be reviewed by the Ethics Committee.

Please note that it is your responsibility to allow enough time for the above review process to be concluded before you begin data collection. Generally, supervisors will try to respond to ethics applications within **1 week** from when it is submitted, and the full ethics review process takes **2 weeks**. However, because there is the possibility that you may have to resubmit the application and have it re-reviewed, you should submit the application as soon as possible.

#### 4.3. What happens when changes occur to the research design as originally agreed?

If your plans change as you carry out the research study, you should discuss any changes you make with your supervisor. If they think these are minor, there is no need to take further action. But if the changes are larger, then your supervisor may advise you to amend your PGT Research Ethics Approval Form and will review this with you again in the same manner as outlined above.

#### 4.4. Sample review by full Ethics Committee

At the summer term Ethics Committee meeting, approximately 5% of the total (but no fewer than 2) of the annual total student forms that have been submitted will be randomly selected to be discussed. This is to ensure that supervisor decisions comply with departmental standards. In addition to this 5%, all forms that were reviewed by the Ethics Committee will be discussed retrospectively.

In exceptional cases where it is felt that a student application was misjudged by their supervisor, the Ethics Committee will work with the student to ensure that their research can proceed in a way that is both in accordance with ethical guidelines and does not pose a disadvantage to their studies.



## 5. Staff and Research students

### 5.1. Seeking approval for new data collection

New ethics applications for staff and research students should be submitted on the appropriate form ([see flowchart](#)) to [linguistics-ethics@york.ac.uk](mailto:linguistics-ethics@york.ac.uk). All staff and research student applications will be reviewed by at least two members of the Ethics Committee. These will usually be the chair of Ethics Committee and a second member of Ethics Committee. The ethics review process is not anonymous, and either reviewer may contact the applicant if they have queries while writing the review. Once both reviews are complete, the chair of Ethics Committee will compile the two reviews into a single response.

In no case will a reviewer be assigned who is a named researcher on the application, or who is otherwise involved with it. If the chair of the Ethics Committee is involved with the project, they will recuse themselves and deputise an uninvolved member of the committee to act as key reviewer for the application. The deputised member will select the second reviewer and compile the response.

An ethics application can have one of four outcomes:

1. **Accept without revision** – in which case, data collection can proceed immediately
2. **Accept with minor revisions** – the application must be revised and resubmitted. However, it will not require additional review, and data collection can proceed immediately after resubmission is acknowledged.
3. **Accept with major revisions** – the application must be revised and resubmitted. When resubmitted, the Chair of Ethics Committee will evaluate whether the revisions were sufficient; if they are, the application is accepted, otherwise, or if the revisions created new concerns, it must be re-revised. In some cases, the chair of Ethics Committee may decide to send the application to additional reviewers as well.
4. **Reject** – the application cannot be accepted in its current form.

### 5.2. Applications involving external collaborators

**Note: this section does not apply to research students. MA by Research and PhD in Linguistics students must always submit applications relating to their postgraduate work to the LLS Ethics Committee, and PhD in Applied Linguistics students must always submit applications to the Education Ethics Committee, regardless of who else is involved in their supervision. MPhil/PhD students in Language and Communications should consult with their supervisors as to which department they should apply to.**

If the application involves external collaborators who are subject to another Ethics Committee (whether via another University of York department, another academic institution, or a

non-academic body), it is usually sufficient to undergo only one full ethics review. In general, this should be determined by the affiliation of the application's PI, but in some cases (e.g. research conducted at YNiC) it may be necessary to undergo review by the external body even when the primary researchers are affiliated with LLS. If you are unsure who to apply to, please contact the Chair of Ethics Committee for clarification.

The department Ethics Committee should be informed of any application to an external body that involves a LLS staff member. Once an external body approves a project involving an LLS staff member, a copy of the approved application should be submitted to the Ethics Committee for archival purposes.

If you are collecting data from NHS patients or staff, or Social Service users or staff, you will need to apply for approval through the [Integrated Research Application System \(IRAS\)](#).

- Staff: please fill in the IRAS form first and send your completed form to LLS
- Students: applications for approval through IRAS should normally be **pre-reviewed** by the LLS Ethics Committee