

Institute of Development Studies

Research Ethics Policy

1. Introduction

The Institute of Development Studies is committed to promoting and upholding the highest ethical standards in our research as part of our commitment to engaged research excellence. This policy sets the principles of ethical conduct expected of all our staff and elaborates how they are put into practice. It updates our existing research ethics policy in recognition of continuing change in our research environment and in line with updates to the University of Sussex Code of Practice for Ethics, the UK Economic and Social Research Council Framework for Research Ethics, UK Medical Research Council, the UK Natural Environment Research Council and other key research bodies in UK and overseas.

Research in this policy is taken to include all IDS activities involving organized inquiry, data collection and storage, analysis, synthesis, communication, convening, teaching¹ and consulting. The policy encompasses not only our engagement with research participants/subjects, co-researchers, partners/clients, students and funders, but also with those affected by our research results in our work to influence policy and practice.

This document outlines how our research is conducted with integrity and minimises physical, mental, legal or financial risk for the Institute or any of its members, partners or participants. It addresses the need for ethical approaches that work across a range of different social research methodologies, at multiple levels from local to global, in ways that are respectful of the ethical position of partners, colleagues, participants and affected parties in different social cultural contexts, on issues that are dynamic, often contested and sometimes sensitive. The policy is reviewed annually to reflect our experience, developments in our field and in research ethics for the social sciences and more generally.

2. Objective and Principles

The objective is *to expand our good relationships* by acting with integrity, taking others' needs and wishes into account, and *using moral deliberation imaginatively and with good effect*. The IDS research ethics policy aims to provide a framework for supporting this objective.

Essential principles are that our research:

- avoids doing harm,
- seeks informed and voluntary consent from those taking part,
- respects confidentiality and anonymity,
- results are shared and
- where there is risk, takes adequate steps to minimise it.

In putting these principles into practice, IDS creates an environment in which our researchers are supported to go beyond prudence and engage in active and accountable ethical deliberation on the basis of clear principles. IDS recognises that researchers' needs and norms may clash with the

¹ Ethical review for student research projects is governed by the University of Sussex. The IDS PhD Convener is a member of the University of Sussex C-Research Ethics Committee.

needs and norms of those they encounter in their research work. Respecting the autonomy and integrity of our researchers, IDS acts in support of their ethical conduct.

3. Elements

IDS provides an environment for ethical research that provides:

- a) training and debate for all (raising awareness, sharing dilemmas, considering issues, exploring contingencies, generating understanding of and contributing to resources and procedures);
- b) resources (checklists and formats, guidelines from different disciplinary/professional bodies, case studies and examples, peer based mentoring support before, during and after the project life cycle);
- c) confidential engagement (discussion with members of the advisory board to raise concerns and discuss possible avenues for support and follow up);
- d) mandatory procedures (this policy, approval processes, systematic responses to problems, reporting and monitoring).

4. Responsibilities

Responsibility for the ethics policy lies with the IDS Directorate. People taking responsibility for delivery of the policy are:

- a) Research Ethics Convenor ([see ToR](#)) – reports to the [Research Strategy Committee](#) with an annual report. Takes lead on training, resources and procedures, including chairing the [Research Ethics Committee](#) (10 days per year).
- b) Research Ethics Committee (REC) – Appointed by Research Strategy Committee, chaired by the Convenor, and supported by the [Fundraising & Development Office](#), the committee reviews and updates the research ethics policy. Members undertake ethical reviews and monitoring of higher risk projects and contribute to refresher training and mentoring support. The committee consists of 5 people within IDS and possibly one person from outside IDS. It represents a range of different research methodologies and norms. The external member has extensive social research experience. The committee meets once a year. Additional meetings may be convened if urgent need arises. (Participation is understood to be part of staff member's collegial contribution to IDS). Members of the Committee, including the Convenor are encouraged to serve on the Committee for a period of at least 3 years. They should not serve for more than 5 years.
- c) The Research Ethics Committee Secretary supports the committee with organising and minuting meetings, directing ethics queries to different committee members and maintaining online resources.

5. Debate and Training

The fundamental principle of this policy is that the project leader bears the primary responsibility for research ethics. Debate and training are essential for raising awareness of ethical dilemmas and approaches. IDS is responsible for providing the right environment (guidance and procedural safeguards) for ethical research to flourish. We recognise that social research in a multitude of different cultures and contexts is always going to generate unexpected combinations of difficulty, so acting ethically will always include a measure of inquiry and imagination, as well as adherence to basic procedures and knowledge of essential principles.

IDS will provide interesting and useful training that equips staff to act ethically in their various research roles. As part of their commitment to engaged research excellence, clusters will be expected to discuss how they approach research ethics and may decide to nominate particular members to take part in training, or may request a tailor-made event for their particular research theme and methodological paradigm. Training will be organised by the Convenor and designed and delivered by her/him and by members of the REC:

- a) Debates and workshops – creating spaces for members of staff to share ethical questions, experiences and dilemmas and explore ways of approaching solutions and safeguards;
- b) Seminars - inviting internal and external researchers to pose ethical questions and provoke discussion;
- c) Refresher training – available to all (including IDS students) in short sessions. Thought-provoking and practical, the training will identify crucial ethical moments, debate dilemmas, discuss courses of action from preparation through to response, confirm mandatory procedures, identify core principles and point to useful resources.
- d) Online training modules will be one option to consider in addition to the above.

The aim of refresher training is to build commitment in individuals to:

- understand research ethics as central to research excellence;
- act effectively on research ethics issues;
- conduct their work according to IDS requirements and procedures;
- know how to source additional help, both internal and external to IDS.

6. Resources

The Research Ethics Committee, will develop a bank of materials accessible through the intranet that can support people in their planning and responses to ethical questions. Committee members will also provide face to face support:

- a) **Intranet resources** including the IDS research ethics policy and procedures, links to ESRC, UoS and other relevant guidelines, checklists and formats for research proposals, examples of ethics narratives in proposals, case studies and examples including researching with vulnerable people, formats for field research, notes and insights from seminars and training sessions.
- b) **Email support** to researchers preparing research proposals, or faced with ethical dilemmas during research processes. Please contact m.cruickshank@ids.ac.uk
- c) **Face to face mentoring** for those who request more detailed support m.cruickshank@ids.ac.uk

7. Research Project Ethical Review

The aim of the ethical review is for researchers to be prepared to address ethical issues that may arise during the research process. Ethics review begins with self-assessment by the researcher. Staff will be expected to write clear ethical statements in proposals, agree ethical approaches and procedures with partners, conduct research using ethical principles and share experience with colleagues. The IDS awareness raising, refresher training and online resources are designed to support this expectation. The researcher leading on a project (here called the Principal Investigator or PI, but also including lead convenors, communication project leaders, consultancy team leaders and so on) is responsible for getting research ethics approval, without which the project may not proceed.

All proposals include a [research ethics checklist](#) with simple yes/no answers, accompanied by a narrative statement that addresses how the research will be planned and organised to deal with ethical issues that could arise at any stage of the project. This includes appropriate methods for training field researchers, achieving informed consent, confidentiality and data protection and avoiding harm at any stage from planning to dissemination. Research proposal submissions should be accompanied by appropriate attachments (forms and information sheets) where relevant.

For small projects (including consultancies) below £20K the PI or project lead should complete the ethics checklist and statement and file it in the project file on CRM.

For projects between £20K and £75K, which do not go through [the IDS Proposal Review Group \(PRG\)](#), the PI should discuss the ethical approach with one senior researcher or relevant senior member of IDS professional staff. Where they come to agreement the senior staff member gives ethics approval. In cases where they find the plan for minimising risk insufficient, they submit the proposal to the Research Ethics Convenor who may involve members of the REC in helping the PI to ensure ethical procedures are in place. The approval is completed by uploading the relevant documents to the project file on CRM and checking the relevant box.

For projects over £75K the checklist, narrative and attachments are included in papers submitted to the PRG, as part of the process of approval of the research proposal. When the PRG gives approval for the proposal to proceed, it must include an approved ethical submission. If the proposal is funded, the PI, in designing the detailed research plan, should extend the ethics narrative as necessary and submit a copy to a senior member of the PRG for discussion and approval. In cases where the PI and PRG member find the plan for minimising risk insufficient, they forward the documents to the Research Ethics Convenor, who may involve members of the REC in supporting the PI to ensure ethical procedures are in place. This is done in liaison with the PRG member. The approval is completed by uploading the relevant documents to the project file on CRM and checking the relevant box.

In accordance with standard procedures in the UK university sector, the ethics review takes account of the level of risk with any project in order to ensure that the review process is proportionate. IDS recognises three levels of risk: low, medium and high. The first stage of review involves the PI filling a checklist that identifies the level of risk.

- i) **Low Risk:** Answering NO to all the questions on the checklist means that the project is low risk and can be approved by the PI her/himself ([see ethics checklist](#)).
- ii) **Medium Risk:** Answering YES to any of the checklist questions will trigger the procedure for higher risk. This involves provision of a narrative explaining how harm will be avoided, informed consent achieved, confidentiality and anonymity secured and risk minimised. The person making the approval with the PI (senior staff member or PRG, depending on project size) identifies whether the project has included appropriate inquiries, safeguards and contingency considerations to be signed off as medium risk. The narrative should demonstrate that the PI has understood the guidance, held discussions with advisors, local colleagues and partners, or has experience of an effective ethical approach, and has proposed relevant approaches and protocols ([see ethics checklist](#)).
- iii) **High Risk:** If the PI, senior staff member or PRG member(s) find that the project, being complex is high risk, needs additional support in drawing up its ethical research narrative, then the project proposal should be deliberated with the REC. In this case the Research Ethics Convenor may a) review the project alone, or with one other member of the REC, or b) if a more complex case, send it to several members of the REC. In a particularly complex case the REC may call in external advice. REC members are required to declare if they have any professional or financial interest and thus exclude themselves from performing the independent review ([see ethics checklist](#)).
- iv) A project that does not achieve research ethics approval must not go ahead. For a project not to achieve REC approval, at least two members of the REC must oppose its approval. Appeals are addressed to the IDS Director.
- v) Once research ethics approval has been given, the approval is recorded on the CRM system, allowing the project to go ahead and generating a unique ethics approval number. A high risk project includes a CRM trigger for a mid-term and end of project discussion with the ethics convenor on how the ethical approach is working, followed by attachment of a narrative agreed between the PI and the REC.

8. Working in Multiple Cultures and Jurisdictions

Almost all IDS research presents dilemmas where different norms of ethical behaviour pertain. We all come from and work with people of different cultures, nationalities, gender identities, ages, statuses, religions, philosophies and many other fundamental differences of perspective and power. The PI must consider how the principles of IDS ethics norms can be followed with integrity in the local circumstances

We also work in a wide variety of jurisdictions. The PI must establish whether local ethics review is required and ensure that it is acquired before proceeding with the research. Researchers are also responsible for understanding the laws to which research and researchers are subject in all the different jurisdictions in which they may operate.

Researchers should collaborate with local colleagues and partners to work through what is to be done about legal requirements and ethical issues, including inequities of resources and power, political risks, differences of cultural norms, gatekeeping, vulnerability, confidentiality and notions of informed consent.

Where multiple institutions are involved in a research proposal, and where the institutions adhere to the same principles of ethics, only one ethical review is required. In most cases, the institution at which the Principal Investigator is based is the one to undertake ethics review. Where IDS is not the lead institution, once ethics review has been approved at the institution of the PI, the ethics approval can be recorded by IDS.

9. Data Protection

Researchers are responsible for working with partners to make sound practical arrangements to maintain the integrity and security of research data, with support from the Institute. Researchers and research material are subject to the provisions of the UK Data Protection Act 1998 ([see IDS Data Protection policy](#)). Data management plans must be robust and demonstrate that care has been taken to anonymise, store and protect data effectively.

10. Monitoring Ethical Conduct of Research

While the initial ethical review process at the start of a research project receives much attention, it is also vital that the researcher maintains ethical conduct throughout, even in the light of changing circumstances. Principal investigators are responsible for monitoring that ethical processes are being adhered to. For projects of a year or longer, the PI should agree with the REC a date for reviewing how the ethical procedures are performing in practice. Where new ethical issues arise, PIs should return to the review procedure in section (7) above. Monitoring should be proportionate to the nature and degree of risk entailed in the research.

The PI or her/his supervisor must report any adverse (undesirable) events arising out of or during the research, as soon as reasonably possible. In the case of a serious adverse event the PI must immediately stop the research and alert the IDS Ethics Convenor, Director of Research or Director within 24 hours. In case of doubt mentoring support can be provided.

11. Procedures in the Case of Complaint

IDS takes allegations of research misconduct very seriously. Our procedures in the case of complaint are based on those of the University of Sussex. Where formal investigation of a complaint or allegation is warranted (as established by the IDS Director of Research and one other senior member of staff), the case will be handled by the IDS Director.

12. Monitoring the Policy

The Research Ethics Convenor should, at half-yearly intervals, monitor those ongoing high-risk projects that have been approved by the REC or PRG and report progress to the Research Ethics Committee annual meeting.

The Research Ethics Committee will make an annual report to the Research Strategy Committee (RSC). The Director of Research who chairs the committee will, in turn, take a short report to the Strategic Leadership Group (SLG). The report will include information on ethics reviews carried out and a short narrative report on training and resources and on how IDS staff members have dealt with issues arising. The report will also include any recommendations for amendment to the IDS Research Ethics Policy. The Director of Research monitors the performance of the ethics convenor and the ethics committee.

Issue Number	Date	Changes Made	Owner	Approved By
2	November 2015	Updated	Research Ethics Committee	
1	August 2014	First Issue	Research Ethics Committee	Research Strategy Committee