

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 the previous 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, the 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 our engagement with research participants/subjects, co-researchers, partners/clients, students and funders, as well as with those affected by our research results in our work to influence policy and practice.

This document outlines how research ethics is approached and conducted. 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.

This research ethics policy relates to particular aspects of IDS Institutional risk, concerning ethical standards and reputational risk, with the Risk Management Policy covering mitigation of overall physical, mental, legal or financial risk to the Institute and its members, partners or participants. It complements policies covering other aspects of risk e.g. the Fundraising Ethics Policy, the Travel Risk Policy and the Whistle Blowing Policy, and is aligned with others e.g. the Safeguarding and Data Protection Policy. As such this policy does not cover ethics of research funding, safeguarding in research and data protection issues. Neither is research integrity within the remit of this policy, but is covered by the IDS Code of Practice for Research, and the RCUK Policy and Guidelines on Governance of Good Research conduct, although these complement this policy.

2. Responsibilities

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

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.

- a) Research Ethics Convenor reports to the Research Strategy Committee with an annual report. Takes lead on procedures, guidance and support, training and engagement, and resource development including chairing the Research Ethics Committee (15 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 input and mentoring support. The committee consists of 5-10 research and support staff from IDS (and can include one external member). It represents a range of different research methodologies and norms. The committee meets a minimum of twice 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 appropriate committee members and maintaining online resources.

3. Objective and Principles

The objective is to cultivate, maintain and advance the *good and trusting relationships* at the heart of engaged excellence, by acting fairly and justly, with virtue and care, by taking others' needs and wishes into account, and by *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, and aims to do good
- seeks informed and voluntary consent from those taking part
- respects confidentiality and anonymity
- shares the benefits/burdens of research justly, and ensures mutual access to results
- where there are risks, takes adequate steps to minimise them

In putting these principles into practice, alongside commitments to co-construction, people's choice, inclusion, appropriate attribution, and project impact, IDS creates an environment in which our researchers are supported to go beyond prudence and engage in active and accountable deliberation on the ethical dilemmas they inevitably face. IDS recognises that researchers' needs and norms may clash with the 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.

4. Elements of provision

IDS promotes and supports ethical research through:

- a) **Ethics training and engagement** (section 5) - Raising researcher and staff awareness, stimulating reflection and debate, considering issues, sharing dilemmas, exploring contingencies, generating understanding of and contributing to resources and procedures

- b) **Confidential support** (section 6) - Peer-based mentoring from ethics committee advisory board members before, during and after the project life cycle to raise concerns, discuss possible avenues for risk mitigation, and provide guidance and support
- c) **Resources** (section 7) - Checklists and formats, guidelines from different disciplinary/professional bodies, case studies and examples);
- d) **Mandatory procedures** (section 8-14) This policy, approval processes, systematic responses to proposals and problems, progress reporting and monitoring

5. Engagement, debate and training

Fundamentally, the research project leader (PI) bears the primary responsibility for research ethics for any given research project. Nevertheless, IDS is responsible for providing the right environment (guidance and procedural safeguards) for ethical research to flourish. As social research in a multitude of different cultures and contexts is always going to generate unexpected ethical challenges and dilemmas, ethical choices to mitigate risk necessarily involves reflection, responsiveness and imagination, as well as knowledge and adherence to essential principles and basic procedures. Engagement in debate and training input are thus essential for raising awareness about ethical challenges and approaches to navigating them.

IDS will aim to provide thought-provoking and practically useful input, awareness raising and support. Whilst the PI holds responsibility for research project ethics, this should equip all staff to act ethically in their various research, teaching and support roles. The aim is to build commitment 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.

As appropriate to needs, this may include:

- a) **Concrete training input** available for staff in short sessions as introduction or refresher - to identify core principles, to ensure understanding of mandatory responsibilities and procedures, to clarify guidance and support processes, to point to useful resources, and to discuss courses of action from proposal preparation through adaptive responses, and monitoring requirements,
- b) **Workshops and discussions** on navigating ethics in reality – to create safe space for staff members to share ethical experiences, questions and dilemmas and explore ways of approaching risk mitigation, safeguards and solutions. Sessions will identify crucial ethical moments, and debate dilemmas and approaches to particular contextual and methodological issues.
- c) **Stimulating Seminars** - inviting internal and external researchers to pose ethical questions and provoke discussion on ethical practice

Training or other input will be organised, designed and delivered by the Convenor or by REC members. 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 ethics development activities, or they may request tailor-made input for their particular research theme and methodological paradigm.

Responsibility for training IDS students in research ethics lies with IDS Teaching and the Master's and PhD conveners. In addition, student research proposals are subject to a separate University of Sussex ethics review process, which falls outside the remit of this policy. Nevertheless, IDS ethic principles should inform the teaching programme, and the ethics convener will liaise with conveners to ensure joined up thinking and clarity on responsibilities, cross over and process differences. If resources are available the ethics convener and the REC can contribute to ethics teaching design and delivery.

6. Confidential support

The ethics convener and REC members provide peer-based mentoring and support for researchers at different stages of research design, proposal writing, project preparation and research delivery as detailed in the mandatory procedures (section 8). This is either:

- a) **Email support** to researchers preparing research proposals, or faced with ethical dilemmas during research processes, or
- b) **Face to face guidance and mentoring** for those who request more detailed input

To arrange please contact S.Bartlett@ids.ac.uk. In addition, IDS researchers and staff are welcome to approach the ethics convener for support on research ethical questions.

7. Resources

Over time, the Research Ethics Committee plans to develop a bank of materials accessible through the intranet. The aim would be to support people in planning ethical approaches, preparing for ethics review, and responding to ethical realities.

Current **Intranet resources** include the IDS research ethics policy and procedures, links to ESRC, UoS and other relevant guidelines, and checklists and formats for research proposals. During the next two years this will be expanded to include a range of other materials such as prompts to aid thinking about ethical practice for different research contexts or methods (e.g with vulnerable people, in complex or conflicted contexts, or using visual and digital methodologies), case examples of how researchers have navigated ethical challenges, notes and insights from seminars and training sessions, and ethics papers and resources. The Ethics convener will develop resources in relation to expressed and surveyed needs, and progress in developing resources will be reviewed each year.

8. Research Project Ethical Review procedures

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 are 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 others such as lead

convenors, communication project leaders, and consultancy team leaders) is responsible for research ethics approval, without which the project may not proceed.

All proposals should 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 mitigate ethical issues that have been identified, or could arise during the project. This includes appropriate methods for training field researchers, achieving informed consent, respecting confidentiality and avoiding harm at any stage from planning to dissemination. Although covered by other policies, the checklist also prompts responses on data protection and safeguarding (see sections 10 and 11 below) to provide additional institutional assurance that risks will be considered, identified and addressed. 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 research projects between £20K and £100K, 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 the 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. If plans are approved, the process is completed by uploading the relevant documents to the project file on CRM.

For projects over £100K the checklist, narrative and attachments are included in papers submitted to the PRG, as part of the process of research proposal review. If the PRG gives approval for the proposal to proceed, it must include an agreed ethical submission. If the proposal is funded, when the PI designs the detailed research plan, the ethics narrative should be extended as necessary, and a copy submitted 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 in a checklist that identifies the level of risk, and then following the procedure associated with it:

- 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 respected 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) consider the project ethics are high risk, or need additional support in drawing up the ethical research narrative, then the project proposal should be deliberated with the REC. In this case, at least 2 members of the Research Ethics Committee will review the project. If it is a complex case the Research Ethics Convenor will be asked to review, and may decide to 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). If the Ethics Convenor is involved in the proposal or project then other members of the committee should review the statements (if need be), and the project should be signed off by Research Director. If no members of the Research Ethics Committee are able to review the project proposal, then it should be referred to the Research Director.

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.

Once research ethics approval has been given, the approval is recorded by the Research Ethics Administrator. At a minimum a high risk project should be reviewed mid-term and at the end of the project, and a narrative produced on how the ethical approach is working, any unforeseen risks that have arisen, and any necessary adjustments made in response to emerging issues. This narrative should be agreed between the PI and the REC, and uploaded to the CRM. Lessons on ethical approaches or navigating issues may be anonymised and contribute towards the development of resources.

9. 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, such as in consortium projects, once ethics review has been approved at the PI's institution, the ethics approval should be recorded on

CRM by the IDS lead. In this case, the PI on the project should get in touch with Research Ethics Administrator who will be able to review the proposed mitigation measures and, in collaboration with the Research Ethics Conveyor, will be able to provide an Institutional letter of support if agreed. CRM should also show the leading institution and which projects are consortium projects or proposals.

10. Safeguarding

There is a question on the ethics checklist to ensure researchers consider any safeguarding issues. If safeguarding risks have been identified through this, or during the ethics review, a safeguarding risk assessment should be completed and action taken to address the risks. (Please refer to the IDS Safeguarding Policy for further information). The project or issue would be referred to the Head of HR, who would ensure that this is carried out and actions agreed to address and remove or adequately reduce risks. The head of HR would also provide guidance and support, and involve additional IDS management or external advisors if necessary.

11. 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 GDPR 2018 (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 and in line with the regulations. If the ethical review identifies potential issues then the PI will be referred to the data protection officer for additional compliance support.

12. 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, especially as circumstance can often change as a project evolves. Principal investigators are responsible for monitoring that ethical processes are being adhered to, and for adapting responsively as research progresses. For projects of a year or longer, the PI should agree with the REC a date for reviewing how the ethical procedures are playing out in practice. Where new ethical issues arise, PIs should return to the review procedure in section 5 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, such as public unrest or danger to participants, 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.

13. 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.

14. Monitoring the Policy

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
4	June 2020	Updated	Research Ethics Committee	<i>Julie Shaw</i>
3	2018	Updated	Research Ethics Committee	<i>Julie Shaw</i>
2	November 2015	Updated	Research Ethics Committee	
1	August 2014	First Issue	Research Ethics Committee	Research Strategy Committee