Research Ethics Workshop

Dr Mark P. Healey
mark.healey@mbs.ac.uk

Academic Coordinator for Research Ethics and Governance, MBS

15th March 2013
Aims of the session

• To identify & explore ethical issues in research
  – What do you need to understand about ethics?
    (integrity, harm, consent, data protection, etc)
  – Recap of ethical approval, what it is and what you need to do
  – Further sources of information and support

This session is an introduction to research ethics (and ethical approval). You will need to do further thinking and reading as you plan your data collection, in particular heeding discipline-specific guidelines
What is research ethics?

- Following simple ‘rules’ of good practice
  - Including respect, honesty, and openness
  - Rules vary. See ESRC, EPSRC, BPS, BSA
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>ESRC Ethics principles</strong></th>
<th><strong>BPS Ethics principles</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research should be designed, reviewed and undertaken to ensure <strong>integrity</strong>, <strong>quality</strong> and <strong>transparency</strong>.</td>
<td>Respect for the Autonomy and Dignity of Persons.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants must normally be <strong>informed</strong> fully about the purpose, methods and intended possible uses of the research, what their participation entails &amp; what <strong>risks</strong>, if any, are involved.</td>
<td>Scientific Value.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The confidentiality</strong> of information supplied by participants and the anonymity of respondents must be respected.</td>
<td>Social Responsibility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research participants must take part <strong>voluntarily</strong>, free from any coercion</td>
<td>Maximising Benefit and Minimising Harm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Harm</strong> to research participants must be avoided in all instances.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The independence</strong> of research must be clear, and any conflicts of interest or partiality must be explicit.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What is research ethics?

• Following simple ‘rules’ of good practice
  – Including respect, honesty, and openness
  – Rules vary. See ESRC, EPSRC, BPS, BSA

• ‘First’ principles
  – Avoiding potential harm or distress to (self) and others – especially participants – arising from undertaking research
  – Achieving and maintaining integrity, quality, and transparency
  – Developing and gaining informed consent
  – Ensuring anonymity, confidentiality and data protection
  – Voluntary participation, right to withdraw
  – Maintaining independence and declaring conflicts of interests
Why research ethics matters

• As researchers, we have a ‘duty of care’ towards our participants
  – And a responsibility for ethical practice to the University

• We have a professional responsibility
  – To ensure that ethical considerations inform the design, conduct and reporting of any research we undertake

• A matter of competence and integrity as well as compliance
  – More than just ‘box ticking’

• The global marketplace

• Increasing stakeholder demands (e.g. funders, journals)
Ethics and publication: The AOM journals

• Applicability of the code
  – “The ‘Academy of Management (AOM) Code of Ethics’ sets forth principles that underlie the professional responsibilities and conduct of the AOM’s membership ... Violations of the ethical standards may lead to the imposition of sanctions, including termination of membership ...”

• The code also covers publication practices
  – “Nonmembers who participate in AOM activities (e.g., authors) also agree to adhere to the enforced ethical standards...”

• See the code for examples of ethical practices concerning the publication process, from data collection to plagiarism

Ethics and funding: The ESRC

1. “Ethics issues must always be addressed in the proposal. Research Ethics Committees (RECs) must consider all proposals that have been recommended for award by the ESRC before the research starts …”

2. “All ESRC-funded research must be subject to at least a light touch review

   – “Initial payment of a grant will only be made once any necessary REC approval is secured …”

Source: [http://www.esrc.ac.uk/_images/Framework-for-Research-Ethics_tcm8-4586.pdf](http://www.esrc.ac.uk/_images/Framework-for-Research-Ethics_tcm8-4586.pdf)
Research ethics first principles

- **Integrity** in analysis and presentation of your results (and those of others)
- Avoidance of **harm** to research participants and researchers
- **Informed consent** of research participants
- **Confidentiality**, anonymity and/or data protection issues
- Independence of researchers and dealing with **conflicts of interest**
Integrity: example

You have spent 9 months collecting data from a variety of databases and constructing and running a model to test your hypotheses. Your results are difficult to explain: they give no very strong indications and do not support the theory that you have employed.

• What do you do?
Integrity: what kinds of issues?

• Project design issues
  – Being self-critical about your expertise and ability to work in a professional way
  – Being explicit about your intellectual preferences and research design choices

• Interpretation issues
  – Avoiding findings that distort your data or may mislead others
  – Providing a full account of your evidence
  – Reaching justified conclusions

• Representing fairly the work and words of others
Harm: example

Your research includes finding out about how a range of different households access services like banking or travel on the internet. You plan to recruit a sample of households in the Manchester area and arrange home visits to study their internet use.

• What possible ethical issues might arise?
You are interested in how people use on-line communities to help deal with personal issues like divorce or bereavement. You plan to monitor on-line communities and how they work, as well as recruiting individuals who use them for focus groups and interviews.

• What possible ethical issues might arise?
Harm: what kinds of issues?

• Avoiding harm should be embedded in research design
  – You must think through risks of harm and consider what you can do to prevent or mitigate against them

• What is harm?
  – Physical, mental, emotional, developmental, financial….  
  – To whom?

• Research participants
  – What might be the direct or indirect consequences of participating?
  – How can you anticipate and avoid such outcomes?

• The researcher (i.e. you!)
  – What direct or indirect risks might you be exposed to?
  – How can you manage or mitigate those risks? Risk assessment

• Wider community
  – How might your findings have an impact on other groups?
Harm: tricky areas

• Working with vulnerable groups heightens risks and will usually imply the need for full ethical approval
  – NHS patients, staff, premises, relatives of patients
  – Children (under 16)
  – Vulnerable adults (e.g. learning difficulties, illness)
  – Prisoners or young offenders
  – Research on sensitive topics (e.g. illegal activities, abuse, sexual behaviour)

  – Those who could be considered to have a particularly dependent relationship with the investigator (e.g. students)
  – Individuals in a dependent or unequal relationship. E.g. power relations in organizations

For a full list, see the University guidelines
Consent: example

You are interested in leadership. You plan to undertake a couple of case studies of organisations to explore how leadership abilities are perceived at different levels. This will include talking to: (i) those designated as ‘leaders’ in some way by their role and (ii) those who report to them or who work in teams led by them (i.e. ‘followers’).

• Why does consent mean? Why does it matter?
Consent: what are the issues?

• Consent must be *informed*
  – Explaining what the study is for when recruiting participants, why they have been invited to take part, what will happen to them
  – Having some way of allowing participants to indicate that they understand and agree to take part

• Participation must be voluntary
  – Must make it clear that participation is voluntary; participants can withdraw at any time with no consequences and with no need to give a reason
  – Use of incentives is permitted (but they should not be coercive)

• Data usage
  – What will happen to the data? Who will see it? Where will it be stored and for how long? What will happen to the results? Will participants be informed of the outcomes?

_Dealt with via a consent form and an information sheet_
Consent: tricky areas

• Reactivity and deception
  – What if you want to observe, but disclosing your status or explaining what you are doing will affect what you observe? E.g. internet chat rooms.
  – Need to think about possible harm and the impact of any real or perceived deception. How would you justify your research design and what can you do to reduce the risk of harm?

• Online/electronic recruitment, including online surveys
  – What if you plan to recruit participants/collect data on the internet; how can you obtain consent? Participants need to be informed, give consent and also be able to ‘leave’ at any time

• Multiple stakeholder consent
  – E.g. if you are doing fieldwork in overseas organisations, what relevant authorities need to be informed and provide consent? How will you find this out?
You are interested in supply chain relationships and the extent to which firms in one industry have different ways of managing their suppliers. You have approached several companies: they are interested in your study but have concerns about discussing what they consider to be commercially sensitive information.

- What can you do?
Confidentiality and anonymity issues

• You need to consider whether you should (or can) offer confidentiality and, if so, whether you can maintain it
  – Will your participants require or feel reassured by being offered confidentiality?

• It is good practice to anonymize data wherever possible, particularly when collecting personal or sensitive information
  – Incorporate anonymity into the research design and dissemination of results
  – Who will have access to the data?
  – What happens to your data at the end of your study?
What constitutes personal sensitive data?

• The Data Protection Act (1998) defines eight types ...
  (a) Racial or ethnic origin of the data subject
  (b) Political opinions
  (c) Religious beliefs
  (d) Physical/mental health of the subject
  (e) Sexual life of the subject
  (f) Labour relations (membership of trade union) of the subject
  (g) Criminal offences (alleged or committed)
  (h) Proceedings for offences alleged or committed (e.g. court proceedings)

*If you are collecting any of these types of data, your research probably requires University ethics review*
Tricky areas: Data Protection

• In the UK, the Data Protection Act has very specific requirements if you are collecting and storing information about people who can be identified.
  – As far as possible, avoid the need to collect and store information on named participants
  – Or, if you need to identify people, you need to follow the requirements of the act

• N.B. Freedom of Information Act (the rights of others to request information about your research)
Are there other types of sensitive data?

- We might also add commercially/organizationally sensitive data
  - Identifiable individual or firm performance data, protected asset data, sensitive technical data
- ESRC state that elite interviews may concern sensitive data, by virtue of respondents’ privilege or position
- A useful rule of thumb
  - If you are collecting data that:
    (a) could reasonably cause harm (psychological, financial, etc.) or distress to participants if revealed to others, and ...
    (b) which would not ordinarily be revealed in everyday life ...
  You should probably seek ethical review and approval for your project
Conflict of interest?

You are investigating whether and how the inclusion of carbon footprint information on product packaging influences consumer buying behaviour. Your PhD is part-funded by a grant provided to the University by a consortium of food and drink manufacturers.

• What ethical issues should you consider and how might you address them?
Conflicts of interest: issues

• Do funders/sponsors have a vested interest in the results?
• Is the research likely to be ‘biased’?
  – How, when, why? Framing the questions ... publishing the results
• Might others *perceive* the research to be biased?
  – Could the media discredit? Could other researchers question your independence? What would be your defence?
• Commercial interests
  – Do you, or others, stand to benefit (e.g. financially) from your research?
• Disclosure of potential conflicts of interest
  – In all outputs (reports, articles, etc), be explicit and open about all the resources/support your research received
“So, what do I need to do?”
What you need to do

• Integrate consideration of relevant ethical issues into your research design

• Consider ethical issues throughout the research process
  – Planning, collecting data/ doing fieldwork, analysing results, dissemination and publication

• Obtain ethical approval before you commence your research
  – Before doing pilots, sending questionnaires, travelling for fieldwork, etc

Remember that research ethics is not just about getting approval it is about the planning and conduct of research.
What is the purpose of ethical approval?

• Compliance
  – To demonstrate that you have given appropriate consideration to the ‘safety, rights, dignity and well-being of participants’ (University definition) and yourself

• Competence
  – To show that you have identified possible ethical issues and have integrated appropriate responses and actions into your research plans, to ensure your research is safe, robust, and reliable
What if I don’t obtain ethical approval?

• A breach of research governance
  – You can be subject to the University’s misconduct in research procedures
• You may breach the terms of funding received
  – E.g. From research councils
• You will not be covered by the University’s insurance
  – For anything that happens to you or to your research subjects while conducting your research
• You cannot apply to study away (e.g. fieldwork leave)

*It is your responsibility, but there are lots of sources of information and advice (see end)*
Projects that require ethical review

- Studies that involve human participants undertaking an invasive procedure
- Studies that ask questions of a personal nature
- Studies that contain a process that may cause the participant harm or stress
- Studies that involve personal identifiable and/or sensitive data
- Studies that involve human tissue
- NB: The above list is not exhaustive

www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/services/rbess/governance/ethics
Projects that require ethical review

- Studies that involve human participants undertaking an invasive procedure
- Studies that ask questions of a personal nature
- Studies that contain a process that may cause the participant harm or stress
- Studies that involve personal identifiable and/or sensitive data
- Studies that involve human tissue
- NB: The above list is not exhaustive

www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/services/rbess/governance/ethics
Projects that do not require ethical review

- Studies that involve participants undergoing non-invasive, non-harmful or sensitive research by virtue of their professional role
- Research limited to use of previously collected, non-identifiable material consisting of or including cells in accordance with the terms of donor consent
- Research limited to use of human biological material not consisting of or including ...
- Research limited to use of previously collected, non-identifiable information

www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/services/rbess/governance/ethics
Types of ethical review @ UoM

1. The University of Manchester Committee on the Ethics of Research on Human Beings (UREC)
2. An NHS Research Ethics Committee (NHS REC)
2. An NHS Research Ethics Committee (NHS REC)
   - Applies if you are proposing to work with/involve:
     - NHS patients, their data or tissues
     - NHS staff where research is not limited to non-sensitive questions about their personal role
     - Participants who are users of UK Health Department services
     - Prisoners, where the research is health-related

• Updated: Governance Arrangements for Research Ethics Committees (GAfREC)
  - From 1 Sep. 2011, you **no longer** need NHS REC review for:
    - Research involving NHS staff recruited as research participants by virtue of their professional role ... (et al.)
University of Manchester Senate Committee on the Ethics of Research on Human Beings (UREC)

• Your research will have to be assessed by UREC, if you are proposing to work with participants who are:
  – Students
  – General public
  – Members of certain non-NHS support groups/ charities
  – Working within your place of employment

... and the type of research is:
  – Questionnaires
  – Interviews, focus groups
  – Case studies
  – Observational studies, ethnographic research
  – Overseas research

For further information contact UREC: research.ethics@manchester.ac.uk
Ethical review & approval @ MBS

• Two stage process

(1) Pre-screening at School level. For PhD students, the head of the doctoral programme oversees pre-screening. You must complete and submit the ethics form included in the eProg system, before collecting any data.

– “The purpose of this pre-screening is to ensure that projects are scientifically sound, have been assessed to see if they need ethics approval and, if so, go to the relevant ethics committee. It is not to undertake ethical review itself, which must be undertaken by a formal research ethics committee”
  http://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/services/rbess/governance/ethics/obtaining-ethics-approval/

(2) Review from UREC

– Paperwork, guidance on the University Research Ethics website
– Five committees, one flagged for Humanities
– Three outcomes
Does my research need ethical approval?

• It is part of your professional responsibility as a doctoral researcher to check this

• To inform your judgment, you should consult ...

  1. The university’s guidelines
     www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/services/rbess/governance/ethics

  2. Your supervisor(s)

  3. The School’s Ethics Coordinator (mark.healey@mbs.ac.uk)

  4. Relevant discipline-specific advice
     E.g. http://www.esrc.ac.uk/_images/Framework-for-Research-Ethics_tcm8-4586.pdf
ESRC: “Research involving more than minimal risk”

Full ethics review probably required for research that:

1. Involves potentially vulnerable groups
2. Involves those who lack capacity
3. Involves sensitive topics
4. Involves deceased persons, body parts or other human elements
5. Uses administrative data or secure data
6. Requires permission of a gatekeeper to access participants
7. Involves deception or is conducted without participants’ full & informed consent
8. Involves accessing records of personal or sensitive confidential information
ESRC: “Research involving more than minimal risk”

Full ethics review probably required for research that:

9. Might induce psychological stress, anxiety or humiliation
10. Involves intrusive interventions or data collection methods
11. Questions the safety of the researcher
12. Involves members of the public in a research capacity (e.g. participatory research)
13. Is undertaken outside of the UK
14. Involves respondents through the internet
15. Involving visual/vocal methods (where participants are identifiable)
16. Research which may involve data sharing of confidential information beyond the initial consent given (e.g. ‘whistle blowing’).
Completing the ethics form: requirements

- **Project protocol**
  - Aims and nature of project; research design; methods of data collection and analysis; details of participants; benefits

- **Overview of potential ethical issues and how they will be addressed**
  - Risks to participants and others
  - Procedure for gaining consent
  - Security and anonymity of data

- **Participant information sheet**
- **Consent form**
- **Supplementary materials (e.g. advertisements)**
Sources of information: ethical approval

• University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) approval
  – [http://www.campus.manchester.ac.uk/researchoffice/governance/ethics/](http://www.campus.manchester.ac.uk/researchoffice/governance/ethics/)
  – Templates for information sheet, consent form, advertisements
  – Step-by-step guidance on the application process

• NHS approval: [http://www.nres.npsa.nhs.uk/](http://www.nres.npsa.nhs.uk/)

• IRAS: [https://www.myresearchproject.org.uk/](https://www.myresearchproject.org.uk/)
Research ethics resources: Internal

1. UoM Research Governance website
   http://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/services/rbess/governance/ethics/

2. MBS Research Ethics Intranet (coming soon)
   https://intranet.mbs.ac.uk/Programmes/PostgraduateResearch/FieldStudiesandResearchEthics/tabid/253/Default.aspx

3. Methods@Manchester:
   http://www.methods.manchester.ac.uk/

4. UoM Lone worker policy and guidance
   http://www.campus.manchester.ac.uk/healthandsafety/CoPs&Guidance/lo ne_working-g.pdf

5. UoM Risk assessment
   http://www.campus.manchester.ac.uk/healthandsafety/CoPs&Guid ance/risk_assessment-g.pdf
Research ethics resources: External

1. The Research Ethics Guidebook: A Resource for Social Scientists http://www.ethicsguidebook.ac.uk/

2. ‘The ethicist’ blog, Academy of Management http://ethicist.aom.org/


Example disciplinary ethics codes

1. ESRC Framework for Research Ethics
   http://www.esrc.ac.uk/_images/Framework-for-Research-Ethics_tcm8-4586.pdf

2. BPS Code for Human Research Ethics
   http://www.bps.org.uk/what-we-do/ethics-standards/ethics-standards

3. BSA Statement of Ethical Practice
   http://www.britsoc.co.uk/about/equality/statement-of-ethical-practice.aspx
Questions or comments?

Dr Mark P. Healey
mark.healey@mbs.ac.uk

Academic Coordinator for Research Ethics and Governance, MBS