

## SSPS Research Ethics Online Self-Assessment Procedures

The School of Social and Political Science attaches great importance to research ethics, and has developed rigorous procedures for ensuring proper ethical review and accountability. All research conducted by members of the School, including undergraduate and postgraduate dissertation projects, are subject to these procedures. The ethical review process is designed to support researchers in managing risks associated with their research, and to ensure the highest professional standards in designing, conducting, and disseminating research.

Prior to embarking upon a research project, ethics self-assessment should be conducted by the person ultimately responsible for the research project, often in conjunction with an advisor, depending on the applicant's status:

In relation to staff,

- Principal Investigators will often conduct ethics self-assessment in conjunction with project researchers;
- Postdoctoral research fellows should conduct ethics self-assessment in conjunction with their postdoctoral mentors.

In relation to students,

- Doctoral students should conduct ethics self-assessment in conjunction with their doctoral supervisors, and the process should be integrated into the student's Review Board;
- Masters by Research students should conduct ethics self-assessment in conjunction with their dissertation supervisors;
- Taught Masters and undergraduate students whose dissertation projects entail original fieldwork should conduct ethics self-assessment in conjunction with their course organisers and/or their dissertation supervisors (once assigned).

Self-assessment is conducted via an online [ethics form](#) (EASE login required). Draft applications can be saved as a PDF to share with colleagues and advisors, and can be saved online for future revision via [Your Submissions](#). Completed applications should be submitted electronically, and are assessed by at least one designated reviewer, depending on the applicant's status:

- Staff applications are reviewed by the Deputy Director of Research, sometimes in conjunction with the Research and Research Ethics and Integrity Committee (see below)
- Student applications are reviewed by the relevant course organiser or dissertation supervisor, sometimes in conjunction with the Director of the Graduate School or Undergraduate School as appropriate (see below)

After reviewing the self-assessment form, the relevant reviewer will contact the applicant with one of the following outcomes:

- Any application may require revision, which can be done by logging into [Your Submissions](#) and then revising and resubmitting the application;

- In the case of applications judged to be Level 1 or 2 (see below), ethics approval may be granted immediately (subject to any other ethics procedures that may be required e.g. by funding bodies);
- In the case of applications judged to be Level 3 (see below), scrutiny by an ad hoc Research Ethics Subcommittee will be required prior to ethics approval being granted.

Research projects may not proceed until ethical approval has been granted. These possible outcomes relate to three levels of ethical scrutiny:

**Level 1**, in which the self-assessment process identifies no reasonably foreseeable ethical risks. The relevant reviewer will either confirm **Level 1** ethics approval or request revision prior to ethics approval.

**Level 2**, in which the self-assessment identifies particular risks and requires further scrutiny. This higher level of scrutiny will generally be required for research on sensitive topics or illegal practices, research involving vulnerable groups or children, research that could adversely affect participants or the researcher, or in cases where there are impediments to obtaining the informed consent of participants. This list of possible risks is not exhaustive. In most cases, these types of risks can be dealt with through standard procedures, checks, and safeguards, which need to be elaborated via the online [ethics form](#). The relevant reviewer will either confirm **Level 2** ethics approval or request revision prior to ethics approval. The Research and Research Ethics and Integrity Committee will be informed about all staff **Level 2** applications dealt with on its behalf.

**Level 3**, in which a proposed project creates more serious risks, usually because of physical or psychological harm to the researcher or participants. **Level 3** applications are scrutinised by an ad hoc Research Ethics Subcommittee normally comprising some combination of the following:

- The applicant (in all cases);
- The Director of the Graduate School or Undergraduate School as appropriate (if the applicant is a student);
- The course organiser (if the applicant is a student);
- The supervisor/mentor (if the applicant is a student or postdoctoral research fellow);
- The Deputy Director of Research (if the applicant is staff);
- The Subject Area's Research Convenor (if the applicant is staff);
- One additional member of the Research and Research Ethics and Integrity Committee (if the applicant is staff)

Quorum is three reviewers (not counting the applicant). The Ethics Subcommittee determines whether the project can proceed in its current form, whether it requires modification, or whether it cannot proceed. The Research Office reports **Level 3** applications to the College Research Committee. NB within SSPS **Level 3** designation is rare for staff and extremely rare for students.

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