



ETHICS PROCESS AND COMPLETING THE ETHICS FORM

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Introduction:

All undergraduate Empirical Project and research-based modules/assessments require ethical approval by the School Research Ethics Committee (SREC) before any data collection can begin. This process protects participants, protects you as the researcher, and ensures that all research conducted within the University meets the standards expected by:

- The British Psychological Society (BPS)
- Code of Ethics and Conduct (2021)
- Code of Human Research Ethics (2021)
- Ethics Guidelines for Internet-Mediated Research (2021)
- GDPR and the Data Protection Act (2018)
- UWTSD Research Ethics & Integrity Policy
- Other guidance specific to your study

Ethics approval is not about making your project complicated, it's about demonstrating that you understand your responsibilities as a researcher and that you have taken reasonable steps to plan for the safety, dignity, and rights of all involved.

No data collection can start prior to gaining ethical approval from SREC and signed off/agreed by your supervisor

This Guidance Document:

This document provides an overview of:

- The ethics process
- Possible panel outcomes
- What each major section of the form is asking for
- Common issues and how to avoid them
- FAQs students regularly ask

This guide does not repeat the green guidance text on the form. Instead, it helps you understand the bigger picture.

Key Ethical Principles You Must Demonstrate:

Even though the form has its own guidance, your application should always reflect the following core principles from the BPS:

1

Respect for Autonomy

- Informed consent
- Right to withdraw
- Transparent participant information

2

Scientific Integrity

- Clear rationale
- Appropriate methods
- Avoiding deception unless absolutely necessary

3

Social Responsibility

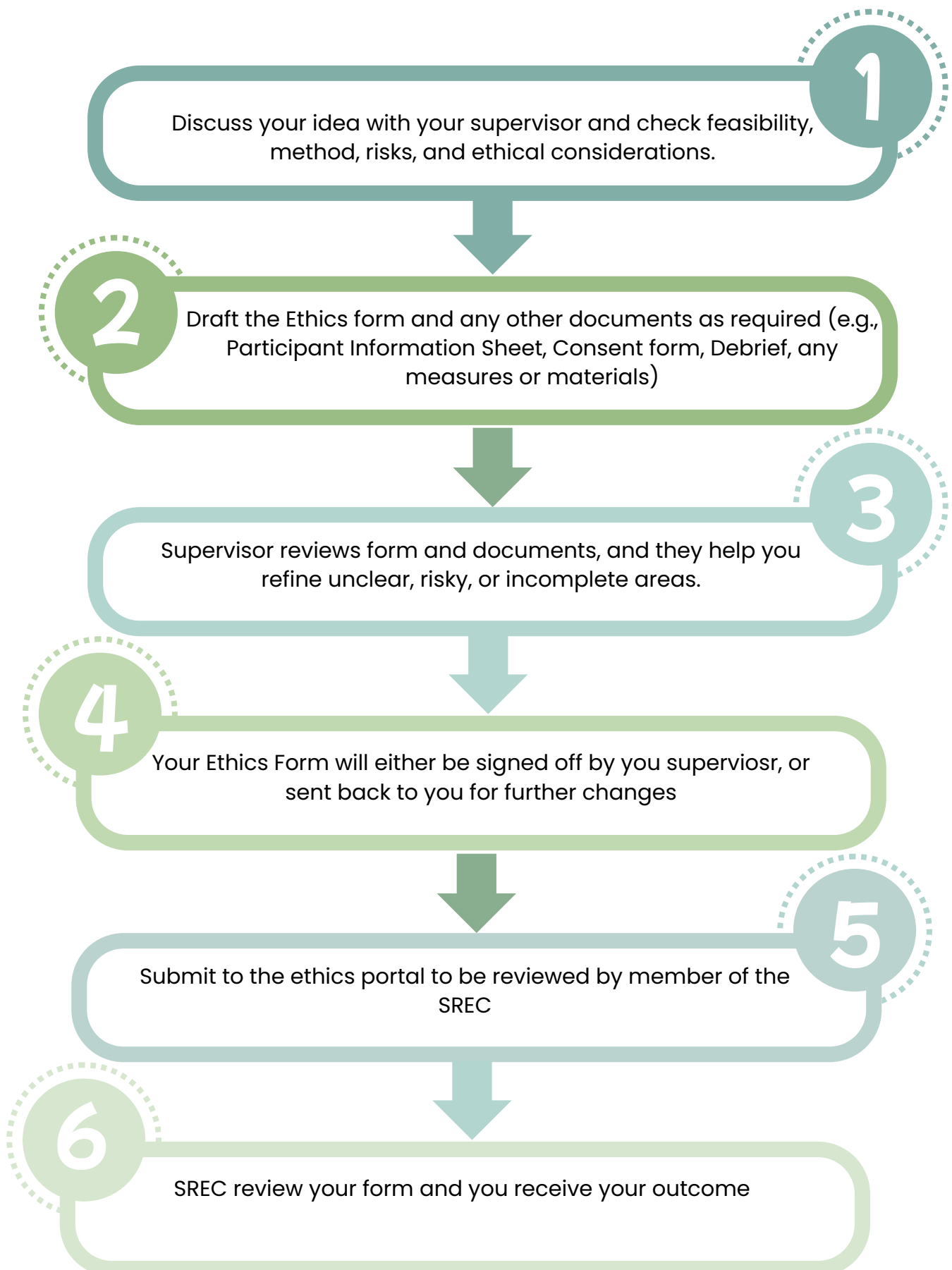
- Considering potential harm, distress or discomfort
- Avoiding insensitive or offensive content

4

Maximising Benefit, Minimising Harm

- Realistic risk assessment
- Strong mitigation strategies
- Careful data handling

Overview of the Ethics Process: Step-by-step flow



Ethics Review Outcomes:

These are the five possible decisions that may be made on your application.

1. Approved: No Changes Needed

Your application meets ethical requirements, and you can begin data collection immediately (with final agreement for supervisor)

2. Conditional Approval: Supervisor Sign-Off

Your form is almost correct. Only very small changes are needed, and your supervisor can confirm these without resubmission.

3. Conditional Approval: Chair's Action

Your application requires substantive revisions (but not enough to require a full resubmission). Once your supervisor has signed off on any changes, your form must be sent back to the Ethics Committee Chair to review your changes.

“Substantive” does not mean “serious”, it simply means the changes affect ethical assessment.

4. Resubmit

There are significant issues with the form, and the ethics panel must see a revised application at the next scheduled meeting.

5. Not Approved/Reject

The project has fundamental ethical issues and cannot proceed in its current form. A new project, or major redesign, will be required.

Examples:

- Working with vulnerable populations without justification or expertise
- High-risk methods not permitted at undergraduate level
- Project requires external approvals beyond the university's scope

What Makes a Strong Ethics Application?

- Clear, concise writing
- Non-specialist language
- Realistic risk assessment
- Strong, practical mitigation
- Consistent answers across sections
- Full set of supporting documents
- Methods and participants aligned with your research question
- Supervisor input clearly reflected

Common Issues That Delay Approval:

- Missing documents (PIS, consent, debrief, materials)
- Vague descriptions of methods
- No mitigation for identified risks
- Confusing or contradictory participant information
- Overlong literature summaries
- Not explaining withdrawal properly
- Insufficient detail on data storage
- No explanation for inclusion/exclusion criteria
- Using terms like “no risks apply”

Supervisor vs Student Responsibilities

Students are responsible for:

- Writing the ethics form (the initial form) and completing ALL sections
- Making any changes after feedback from the supervisor
- Creating/developing all materials
- Identifying risks and implementing risk mitigation
- Adhering to the ethical guidelines and data protection protocols
- Submitting draft and final version on time

Supervisors are responsible for:

- Providing academic and ethical guidance
- Reviewing drafts before submission
- Ensuring accuracy
- Signing off minor amendments (after SREC outcome)

Understanding the Sections of the Form

This guide summarises what the panel is looking for in each section.

SECTION A: About You

Straightforward details. Ensure accuracy (name, email, supervisor).

SECTION B: Ethical Guidance Documents

You must show awareness of BPS and UWTSD policies.

Ticking these boxes = confirming your project complies.

Add in any additional guidance your specific project follows

SECTION C: Project Description

You must write for a non-specialist audience - your form may be reviewed by someone who knows very little about your topic

Purpose: what topic and why it matters

Research question: specific, testable

Aims: broad goals

Objectives: concrete steps you will take

Methods summary: factual “what will happen”

SECTION D: Research Activity

You must show:

- What your participants will actually do
- Whether your study has any risk factors

SECTION E: Intended Participants

You must say:

- Who your participants are and how they are being recruited/identified
- Whether your group is appropriate, and clear inclusion/exclusion criteria
- Whether there are any issues of deception or withdrawal of data

You also need to demonstrate that you understand power, vulnerability, and coercion

Understanding the Sections of the Form Continued:

SECTION F: Risks

You must show:

- You recognise risks (no project is “risk-free”)
- You explain your specific risks, not generic ones
- Mitigation strategies that genuinely reduce risk

SECTION G: Consent, Debriefing & Confidentiality

The panel looks for:

- Clear PIS and consent procedures
- Right to withdraw explained properly
- Confidential or anonymous participation clearly defined

SECTION H: Data Protection & Storage:

You must demonstrate:

- GDPR compliance
- Secure storage (preferably university systems)
- Who will access data
- How and when data will be destroyed

SECTION I: AI Tools

You must explain:

- Whether you are using AI
- What for
- Whether it touches personal data
- How you will maintain accuracy, fairness and confidentiality

SECTION J: Declaration

This acknowledges that:

- Everything you’ve written is accurate
- You will follow the approved protocol

No form should be submitted without a supervisor signature in the declaration!

FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions):

1. When can I start collecting data?

Only after you receive full approval.

2. Can I advertise my study before approval?

No, recruitment counts as data collection.

3. What happens if I miss the submission deadline?

Don't worry. You will simply have to wait and submit at the next opportunity

4. What if I want to change my method later?

You must submit an ethics amendment. Never change methods without approval.

5. What if my project involves deception?

Deception can be used, but it must be justified, minimal, and fully explained. Debrief must fully explain this and show the real purpose of the study.

6. What if I am unsure whether something counts as “risk”?

Include it. The panel prefers over-caution to missing risks.

7. What happens if my application is rejected?

Dont stress! You will work with your supervisor to redesign or replace the project.

8. What if I want to use AI to help plan the study?

You must state this under Section I. Please note, but no identifiable data may be entered into public AI tools.

9. How detailed should my method be?

Describe it like a procedure; step-by-step, clear enough that someone could replicate your study accurately.

Final Submission Checklist

Before submitting, ensure you have:

-  Completed the entire ethics form
-  Attached PIS
-  Attached consent form
-  Attached debrief sheet
-  Attached all questionnaires/materials
-  Clear, non-specialist project description
-  Detailed method (no justification)
-  Clear risks and mitigation
-  GDPR-compliant data storage plan
-  Supervisor has reviewed your draft