LONDON SCHOOL
OF SCIENCE
& TECHNOLOGY

1.1 Background

As part of our commitment to research, this ethical framework policy has been produced as a guide to ensure that researchers adhere to ethical principles and guidelines in line with international standards. All researchers are expected to go through this document prior to applying for ethical approval for their research. The framework will provide guidance f to enable researchers conduct research with integrity and ensuring other ethical principles such as consent and autonomy are applied. Researchers are expected to highlight potential ethical issues during their application and measures to mitigate them.

1.2 Purpose Statement

The ethical policy framework aims at ensuring both researchers and participants are safeguarded. The document also serves as a framework to enable ethical committee members in decision making for all ethical applications.

1.3 Application and scope

All primary research involving human participants should go through ethical approval at LSST. Potential ethical risks/issues should be highlighted and evidence of risk assessment should be submitted. In addition to this, research involving human data example; biodata, photographs, financial or administrative records, should also go through the ethical approval process. In the event that a researcher is collaborating with an external institution, an approval by the collaborating institution will suffice.

1.4 Responsibilities

All researchers (staff and students) are expected to adhere to high ethical principles and conduct research with a high level of integrity. Adherence to the ethical policy framework and approved protocols is expected throughout the research. In the event that the researcher deems that changes are necessary in the research protocol, the ethical committee must be notified for approval.

1.5 Definitions

Research: Research is the process of investigating new information that is often shared with the public.

Research Student: A research student could be a dissertation student or enrolled on a postgraduate program.

Anonymity: Data is anonymised by removing any characteristics that could lead to identification of the participant example names and date of births.

Confidentiality: This is achieved by ensuring that any information that could lead to identifying a person provided by the participant is protected and not shared. The method of achieving this should be stated in the application.

Health Research Authority (HRA): This body ensures that any research involving patients and the general public is reviewed and goes through the ethical approval process in order to protect the best interest of participants engaging in health and social care research.

Informed consent: Researchers must ensure that participants are fully informed about the research and made aware that participation is voluntary. Participants must further be briefed about the use of personal data if required, example email address, social media posts, photos or medical information.

Principal Investigator: The lead investigator in the project is referred to as the principal investigator. The principal investigator oversees the entire research and is often the person responsible for managing the research funds.

Risk assessment: Identifying potential risks to either participant, researcher or the environment as a result of the research. Once these risks are identified, making provision to mitigate these risks.

Vulnerable participants: These are participants with limited capacities in terms of communication, mental health needs, disabilities or learning. They might need support from other adults or community services. Example, children, elderly, people with disability, learning difficulties or people under custody.

1.6 PRINCIPLES

Researchers are expected to adhere to the key ethical principles set by international guidelines whilst conducting their research. Researchers must ensure that harm is prevented to participants by ensuring that appropriate risk assessments are taken and measures are put in place to minimise risks. Whilst it is important to broaden number of participants to validate data, researchers must ensure that minimal number of participants that would valid data is used. It is essential to consider the physical and mental wellbeing of participants and any potential impact on this. In the event of a potential ethical concern, the risk against the benefit must be clearly stated. Researchers should demonstrate a sound awareness of ethical issues relevant to their studies and must evidently demonstrate how these are minimised or avoided.

All participants should have full information about the research and also informed consent should be obtained. Confidentiality must be maintained particularly with regards to personal data or any information that could be linked to a participant.

Researchers must demonstrate autonomy and respect to human dignity particularly with respect to vulnerable individuals.

Researchers must ensure that they adhere to any relevant legal framework pertaining to their study.

The timeline of the project should be clearly stated and researchers must inform the committee of any adjustments as a review must be formed to ascertain if it will impact on other ethical issues.

1.7 Informed consent

Participants should be given detailed information about the research to enable them make an informed decision on taking part in the studies. Measures should be included to prevent coercion. Information should be provided in a format that is accessible. Informed consent should be recorded before proceeding with research. Participants must be 18 or over to give consent. Where participants are under 18, their guardian must be involved and alternative approaches for seeing consent may be required. Typically, consent should be from both parent/guardian and from the under aged participants. This must be clearly stated in the application.

1.8 Ethics Framework

The research centre will assess applications based on rights, fairness, common good and virtue. Primary research involving human participants will be reviewed to ascertain potential risks to participants or any other ethical issues that may arise with the aim of obtaining the best moral outcome. The review will be made by the ethical committee and a decision will be reached within 2 weeks of receiving an application. Research involving patients may require HRA approval

Research involving the NHS and Health and Social Care may require Human research authority (HRA) approval and applicants will be advised further.

1.9 Training

Members of the Research Ethics Committee shall receive relevant training where needed. Students go through ethical principles within their program. Ethics workshops will be provided by the research centre and supervisors should signpost students to this training when required.

2.0 Recruitment of participants

Researchers must demonstrate that they used methods that promote voluntarily participation. Researchers should take into consideration the role of power relationships example lecturer/student relationship. Other ethical principles such as the benefit from participation should be clearly stated to the participant as well as how confidentiality will be maintained. Inclusion and exclusion criteria should be clearly stated and contact detail of researchers should be included. Participants should be made aware of the right to withdraw at any point during the study and a statement of ethics should be made.

2.1 Vulnerability

Researchers must consider vulnerability during research design and during participant recruitment. Any participant that is considered to be a higher risk of exploitation or harm is considered vulnerable in ethical context. Researchers must evidently demonstrate how these participants will be protected from harm and how risk will be minimised. In the event of any legal requirements, researchers should provide evidence of how this will be met. Safeguarding measures should also be put in place for all vulnerable participants and researchers must ensure that they undergo a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check.

2.2 Risks to research team

In the event that the research is to take place outside of the college, the researchers must consider their vulnerability and that of any team members. Example visiting participant homes or locations where the researcher is in a lone location with a participant. Risk assessment must be provided in these circumstances.

2.3 Confidentiality

Researchers should have clear limits set for confidentiality in the study protocol. Example in situations where the researcher establishes that the life of participant is at risk or a criminal activity is discovered.

When eliciting consent, researchers should make the limits of confidentiality clear. For example, if an interview reveals evidence of illegal activities or that a participant is in significant danger, the researcher will be obliged to take action in response to that disclosure to protect the participant or third parties (duty of care). Disclosures should only be made to parties empowered to act on the information example the safeguarding contact person. Any risks to the confidentiality of data should be declared to the participants and explicitly stated in the protocol and ethics application.

2.4 Anonymity

Where possible, it is always best to maintain anonymity. Measures should be taken to protect any personal identifiers example data coding. Participants should be made aware of this and also be informed of any potential risks to a breach.

2.5 Gatekeepers

In some circumstances, researchers might have to go through a ‘gatekeeper’ in order to access participants for the research. A gatekeeper is a person or organisation that has the power to allow or deny the researcher access to potential participants. Researchers should consider this in their study protocol and state how permission will be sorted from the gatekeeper for access to the participants. Example of gatekeepers include head teachers, heads of departments in an institution or community leaders.

2.6 Security sensitive research

This is currently outside the scope of LSST research centre. Researchers pursuing any research that includes sensitive security information should contact relevant authorities and seek collaboration with an external body. Note that this research will have no affiliation with LSST.

2.7 Dissemination

Researchers should demonstrate active participation with the general public and community where appropriate. Studies that could impact on participants, their family and the community should be carefully planned and measures must be taken to ensure that dissemination will not jeopardise anonymity or cause stigmatisation to certain groups.

2.8 Appeals

Researchers have a right to appeal if their ethical application is declined.