

When ethical approval is required (some examples)

Ethical approval is required for research involving:

- Potentially vulnerable people, for example children and young people, those with a learning disability or cognitive impairment, or potentially vulnerable individuals in a dependent or unequal relationship.
- People who lack capacity to make decisions or who during the research project come to lack capacity. Such research should be reviewed by an appropriate body operating under the Mental Capacity Act 2005 (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/9/contents>)
- Potentially sensitive topics, for example participants' sexual behaviour, illegal or political behaviour, experience of violence, abuse or exploitation, mental health, their personal or family lives, or their gender or ethnic status. Elite interviews may also fall into this category.
- Administrative or controlled data. Appropriate approval within the relevant governance regime(s) is needed for use of these datasets. In many cases a light-touch review confirming that researchers have met these requirements will be sufficient. Issues however may arise when data are linked and where it may be possible to identify participants.
- Individuals or groups where permission of a gatekeeper is normally required for initial or continued access to participants. This includes research involving gatekeepers such as adult professionals (e.g. those working with children or the elderly), or research in communities (in the UK or overseas) where access to research participants is not possible without the permission of another adult, such as another family member (e.g. the parent or husband of the participant) or a community leader, and research where participants are in a dependent relationship with the gatekeeper (e.g. employees recruited through their workplace). Permission for access to other groups, for example participants in a long term cohort study, may also need to be requested from a data producer who controls access to the group.
- Justified deception or research conducted without participants' valid and informed consent at the time the study is carried out. It is recognised that there are occasions when the use of covert research methods is necessary and justifiable and consent may need to be managed at a point beyond the completion of research fieldwork.
- Access to records of personal or sensitive confidential information, including genetic or other biological information, concerning identifiable individuals. See the Data Protection Act 1998 (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/29/contents>).
- Intrusive interventions or data collection methods, for example techniques where participants are persuaded to reveal information which they would not otherwise disclose in the course of everyday life. Also research which would or might induce psychological stress, anxiety or humiliation, or cause more than minimal distress.
- Risk to the safety of the researcher, for example researchers working in the field and international research assistants working outside the UK in their own community.
- Members of the public in a research capacity in research data collection, e.g. participatory research.
- International partners or research undertaken outside of the UK where there may be issues of local practice and political sensitivities. It is also necessary to act in accordance with the legal and ethics review requirements in the countries included in the research. Researchers should also consider these issues when undertaking social media research, as most of this is international in scope as data are often drawn from a range of international settings.
- Social media and participants recruited or identified through the internet, in particular when the understanding of privacy in these settings is contentious where sensitive issues are discussed - for example in 'closed' discussion groups where there is potential for quotes to be identifiable and including where visual images are used.
- Other visual / vocal methods, particularly where participants or other individuals may be identifiable in the material (e.g. images, sound recordings) used or generated.

- Linking or sharing of personal data or confidential information beyond the initial consent given (including linked data gathered outside of the UK), for example where the research topic or data-gathering involves a risk of information being disclosed that would require the researchers to breach confidentiality conditions agreed with participants.