Checklist for Ethics Reviewers

This checklist is designed to help you to consider all aspects of the research ethics application that you are reviewing and should address most of the concerns that might come up. However, please remember that this is not exhaustive, and each application will raise its own questions.

Summary of the Research

- Is there likely to be a worthwhile outcome? (The purpose is not to conduct a methodological review, but research should be of sufficient merit to justify the time and effort contributed by participants).
- Do the potential benefits of the research balance against the potential risks to participants?

About the Participants

- How will permission or access to participants be obtained? Are the gatekeepers involved identified/on board with evidence provided?
- What are the inclusion/exclusion criteria for participants? Are these appropriate?
- How will consent be obtained? Is this method appropriate? Can the researcher be sure that participants can give their informed consent that is free from coercion? (Informed consent is not necessarily required in all cases, but if it is not to be gained there must be a good reason).
- What is the potential for harm to participants – pain, discomfort, stress? (almost all research involving participants will have some potential for physical or psychological harm and the risk should be acknowledged). How will this be minimised/addressed/managed?
- Is the researcher likely to uncover any issues unrelated to the research? (e.g. illegal activity, illness or disease etc). How will the researcher handle such an eventuality?
- Are participants able to withdraw from the research and how will this be done?
- Are participants potentially vulnerable (i.e. because of the situation they find themselves in e.g. asylum seekers, refugees) or vulnerable? Are the implications of this addressed?

About the Data

- What measures have been taken to ensure anonymity, confidentiality, and security of personal information concerning research participants? Are these appropriate to the research? Are these realistic?
- Who will have access to the data?
- How long will data/recordings/samples be held? Does this take into account any intended future use?
- How will they be stored?
- Are there any implications for the Data Protection Act 1998 or the new General Data Protection Regulation (comes into effect in May 2018)?

Supporting Documentation

- Are relevant supporting documents included? (e.g. information sheets, consent forms, interview schedules or interview topic guides, non-standardised questionnaires etc.)
- Are material for participants clear and free from technical terms, jargon and abbreviations as far as possible to enable participants to give their ‘fully’ informed consent to take part in the research?
- Are the materials appropriate for the intended audience (e.g. children and young people)?
- Is it clear to participants in the information sheet:
  - whether their data will be anonymous/confidential/aggregated?
  - how to withdraw?
  - what is being asked of them and what they are contributing to?
  - what their data will be used for and any potential future use?
  - how the data will be managed?
  - how to complain if they wish to do so?
  - who is leading the research and how to get in contact with them?
General Considerations

- Is there enough detail in the application?
- Are the dignity, rights, safety and well-being of participants considered?
- Will the researcher be safe? Is there a procedure in place for risks to the researcher?
- Does the research have any implications for the reputation of the University?
- Are there any obvious gaps, ambiguities or uncertainties in how the research will be carried out?