

# RESEARCH IN THE WORKPLACE

This document is intended to be read in conjunction with the Research Ethics Guidelines for Applicants, which can be accessed online:  
<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/innovation/research/support/ethics/applications/apply.aspx>

## CONTENTS

SECTION A Introduction

SECTION B What if potential research participants already know me in my professional role?

SECTION C What if potential research participants are in my professional care?

SECTION D Can I identify the participants in my final report?

SECTION E Can I use workplace information in my research?

SECTION F What happens if my host institution wants to see my research data?

SECTION G What if I want to access potential participants through the host organisation?

SECTION H What happens if other ethical guidelines and codes of conduct are involved?

SECTION I What happens if my professional obligations are tested during the course of my research?

## SECTION A – Introduction

It is recognised that students often have dual roles, and may be studying and carrying out research whilst continuing an additional professional role. Students for whom this applies often choose to conduct their research project in their place of work. This paper is intended as a guide for applicants as to the common conflicts which arise from this.

All researchers are expected to address conflicts of interest which may arise from their research, and to explain exactly how they will do things in simple, understandable terms. A common problem is for a researcher to state that they will do things to ethical standards, without outlining *how* they will do this. At each stage of the application you should demonstrate the practical steps that you intend to take to ensure that your research meets accepted ethical standards.

### Terms used in the paper

**Researcher** –The researcher or student researcher. It is assumed for the purposes of this paper that your professional role is not that of academic research and that you are likely to be working towards an undergraduate or postgraduate qualification. At all times in this paper 'the researcher' is a reference to your capacity as a King's College London staff member or student.

**Host organisation** – This is the organisation which is granting the access to recruit participants (for example, a school or company). In this kind of situation the host organisation is often also the researcher's employer or place of work. This can be separate from the funder (who provides financial assistance) and also the sponsor (which is the organisation taking responsibility for the study).

**Research** – The College only requires **research** to undergo formal ethical review. Audits and service reviews may fall outside of this category. It is up to the staff member responsible for the study to decide whether the study is research or not. Guidance is provided here:

<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/innovation/research/support/ethics/training/evaluation.aspx>

### **SECTION B – What if potential research participants already know me in my professional role?**

This can create additional perceived pressure to participate on participants who know you (e.g. those who manage you in their professional capacity, report to you, or are in your professional care), as they may feel more awkward in declining a request to help you with your research.

You need to make it clear to your potential participants that there is no pressure to participate.

To do so you must consider, and must demonstrate clearly to the reviewing committee:

- How you are going to communicate clearly to your potential research participants that there is no pressure to participate.
- What additional practical arrangements you intend to put in place to ensure that this is the case.
- What additional practical arrangements you intend to put in place to ensure that those who do agree to participate can change their mind at any point *without having to give a reason* even after they have participated in the research activities (for example, when a researcher is already known to participants, participants could be given the option of asking to withdraw data via communication with a third party (such as a university supervisor or another member of the department) in case they should feel reluctant to ask you face-to-face).

It should always be made clear to participants that they can choose to withdraw from the project entirely at any time, including once their participation is complete (before the research report has been written up).

### **SECTION C - What if my potential research participants are in my professional care?**

Researchers who wish to involve those to whom they owe a professional duty of care (such as teachers and their pupils, or doctors and patients) should be especially careful to clarify that there is no perceived pressure to participate, and to ensure that participation cannot have any effect on the professional care provided to the participants (and that the participants are aware of this). For further guidance relating to vulnerable participants consult the Research Ethics Guidelines for Applicants.

In some cases initial recruitment by a third party or recruitment by poster or email could be the best option – this allows participants to take a positive step if they wish to participate rather than having to decline an invitation.

### **SECTION D - Can I identify the participants in my final report?**

You need to think carefully about the levels of anonymity and confidentiality which you can realistically offer to your participants. Additional considerations in this type of research include:

- The dual nature of the audiences for the research findings. For example, if a participant is referred to in the dissertation as 'the Head of Section' this may protect the participants' anonymity to the external audience, but render them immediately identifiable to those at the host institution who may also be reading the research findings.
- The anonymity of the host organisation itself should also be carefully addressed: if an organisation wishes to be named, could this compromise the anonymity of participants?
- If the organisation does not wish to be identified how will it be described in the final report?
- If individuals do not wish to be identified, and could be easily identified if their job title was used, how will they be described in the final report?

You should make clear to the potential participants what will happen to the data they are being asked to provide and take any necessary additional steps to preserve the confidentiality of the data provided by the participants. If anonymity within the 'internal' audience at the host institution is not possible, participants must be fully aware of this before they agree to participate.

#### **SECTION E - Can I use workplace information in my research?**

Yes you can, but you must ensure that you separate your working role from your role as researcher. The host organisation (your workplace) is responsible for ensuring compliance with law (e.g. the Data Protection Act 1998) and good conduct (e.g. that research with human participants is conducted ethically) for work undertaken within its remit. This includes the provision of anonymous, unidentifiable data to you to use in your capacity as a researcher. You may use anonymous, unidentifiable information provided to you by your workplace if you have permission from your workplace to do this.

If you intend to use data that can be linked back to an individual, then King's College London also has a responsibility for ensuring your planned use of the data complies with law and is ethical - you must therefore apply for ethical approval.

You should bear in mind that there may be extreme circumstances where you, your workplace or your supervisor feel that ethical approval is necessary because even the use of unidentifiable data raises serious ethical issues - in this case you should consult with the Research Ethics Office.

#### **SECTION F - What happens if my host institution wants to see my research data?**

Host institutions who are also the researcher's employers may ask for access to the data of a research project when they:

- allow the researcher to recruit potential participants through their organisation
- allow access to data held at their organisation, or
- fund the researcher's course attendance

You should:

- Take care to negotiate at the beginning of the research process exactly what information the host institution will have access to.
- Ensure that you do not compromise the anonymity and confidentiality of the information provided by the participants (for this reason it is expected that in most cases the host will not be allowed to access raw data).
- Ensure that the arrangements for sharing data generated by the project are clearly set out in your application, as these arrangements will be carefully scrutinised by the review committee.

## **SECTION G - What if I want to access potential participants through the host organisation?**

You should:

- Always request permission to recruit potential participants if the primary contact is through the host organisation
- Always seek any additional permissions which might be needed (for example, if research is taking place in a school, parental permission may be needed, in addition to assent from the children to participation).
- Take care to separate the activities undertaken as part of the participants' normal professional relationship with you from activities undertaken as part of their research relationship with you as the researcher (especially if the professional activities might involve a degree of confidentiality or pastoral care which may not be extended to the research)
- Always make your dual role clear.

An example of clear differentiation would be to describe yourself as a student researcher at King's College London rather than, for example, a form teacher or a company employee.

## **SECTION H - What happens if other ethical guidelines and codes of conduct are involved?**

Organisations, particularly those involved in the care of vulnerable people or care of children, often have their own ethical guidelines and codes of conduct.

You should:

- Ensure that you familiarise yourself with these and abide by them.
- Ensure that you abide by the code of conduct which is most extensive and negotiate arrangements which will allow you to fulfil obligations under both (for example, the ethics committee would not necessarily require that you have a CRB check prior to undertaking a study within a school, but the school would. Given this, you should comply with the rules of the school and obtain a CRB check).

In the UK the UK Health Department's Research Ethics Service, which includes the National Research Ethics Service (NRES) and falls under the Health Research Authority (HRA), approves all research falling under its remit and also has legal responsibilities for approving some particular types of research. For guidance on when ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committees in the NRES system is needed, see the following:

<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/innovation/research/support/ethics/committees/otherrecs/nhsapproval.asp>  
[X](#)

You should check any relevant professional bodies, charities or funding organisations as many will have research guidelines that your work should adhere to. Some of these are listed here: <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/innovation/research/support/ethics/training/links.aspx>

### **SECTION I - What happens if my professional obligations are tested during the course of my research?**

Occasionally your professional role and your role as a researcher will come into conflict. A common conflict is where your professional role obliges you to take action following a disclosure made by a participant, which falls outside your obligations for disclosure as a researcher.

You should:

- Identify the potential for such a conflict as early as possible.
- Discuss this with your supervisor.
- Ensure that you are familiar with the disclosure obligations relevant to your research.
- Outline the solutions you have identified within your application form
- Explain to participants in your information sheet exactly what your obligations for disclosure are.

Approved by College Research Ethics Committee: January 2009