

Ethical Guidance for Edge Hill University Staff ¹Undertaking Research with Edge Hill University Students

September 2022 – September 2025



Edge Hill
University

1 – This also applies to requests from external organisations wishing to work with students.

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Contents

Glossary of Terms	3
Purpose	3
Introduction	3
Considerations for Good Practice	4
Suggestions	5
Conclusion	6
Bibliography	7
Endmatter.....	7

Glossary of Terms

EHU – Edge Hill University

GDPR – General Data Protection Regulation

Purpose

This guidance applies to EHU staff, visiting staff, postgraduate students and other external staff and post graduate students wishing to conduct research with EHU students as participants.

Introduction

3.1 In some research situations, the participation of university students is a requirement of, and therefore integral to, the research question. In curriculum research, research into teaching methods in higher education, and indeed in many other areas within higher education, the participation of university students has become widespread. Student participation in educational research activities, as well as in broader research (both of which are designed for instructional or educational purposes and primarily benefit lecturing staff and students) is encouraged. This allows students to experience research activities from the perspective of the research subject.

3.2 All research, regardless of its intention (for research or instructional), must have undergone institutional ethical scrutiny before any data can be acquired.

3.3 The lecturer-student relationship is a pre-existing one, but it is a relationship that may compromise the voluntary character of the participants' decision to become involved in research. Typically, such a relationship involves unequal status, where one party, typically the lecturer, has or has had a position of influence, power, or authority over the other. Students, within a lecturer's class setting, for example, may volunteer to participate in the belief that doing so will place them in a (more) favourable situation with the lecturer undertaking the research activity, leading to better marks or good references. On the other hand, they may also believe that failure to participate will negatively affect their relationship with the lecturer/investigator. For example, they may believe that they will receive lower marks, less favourable references, be considered to be uncooperative, or may even be ridiculed for not participating.

3.4 This paper presents some suggestions and guidance that should be considered when submitting applications to the relevant University Research Ethics Committees. It should be read in conjunction with the [Edge Hill University Code of Practice for the Conduct of Research \(RO-GOV-01\)](#) and the [Edge Hill University Framework for Research Ethics \(RO-GOV-03\)](#).

Considerations for Good Practice

4.1 The research proposal should make explicit how the project will exhibit good practice when undertaking research with EHU students and how it will conform to professional codes of conduct, Research Councils' guidance and Acts.

4.2 Student participants always maintain all the rights and privileges normally associated with ethically approved studies.

4.3 The researchers should adhere to all of the University regulations; on the use of Human Tissue (see <https://www.edgehill.ac.uk/document/human-tissue-quality-manual/>) and Research with vulnerable groups within the student body (see <https://www.edgehill.ac.uk/research/governance/?tab=ethics-and-risk>)

4.4 The underlying principle of the regulations governing the use of human subjects in research is that the subject's participation is voluntary, based upon appropriate, accurate information and the possibility of seeking further information when required. Where relevant and if applicable, research proposals should outline specifically how those considerations will be addressed regarding research involving EHU students.

4.5 The student should be made aware of the fact that they may withdraw from the research process at any time, without prejudice and may request for their data to be removed from the study within a specific time frame (as approved by the relevant ethics committee).

4.6 A student declining to participate in or deciding to withdraw from the research should not suffer any adverse consequences, such as unfair discrimination, reduction in the level of care, or any other disadvantage, either actual or perceived.

4.7 People in the categories of relationships described in the **Introduction** to this guidance are vulnerable to being over-researched because of the relative ease of access to them as research populations. Researchers should take account of this vulnerability in deciding whether to seek out members of these populations as research participants.

4.8 Researchers should take special care to safeguard the confidentiality of all information they receive, particularly in shared workplaces.

4.9 Data Protection legislation regulates how the University can process personal information. The Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation apply to anybody who handles and manages the personal data of any individual. Research activity must comply with the legal and institutional requirements. Please see EHU guidance for GDPR and research <https://go.edgehill.ac.uk/display/compliance/GDPR%2C+UK+GDPR+the+DPA+and+Research> and refer to the EHU Data Protection policy when conducting research. <https://www.edgehill.ac.uk/documents/data-protection-policy/>

Suggestions

5.1 In pursuing research activities wherein students are your participants, thoughtful development of a protocol that balances the competing interests of subject protection and valuable research may be challenging but achievable.

5.2 Generally, researchers may not access classroom performance evaluations for the sole purpose of research, whether they be grades, formative, or summative assessment tasks, without prior written and witnessed permission from the student. Furthermore, they may not access information for research purposes in a (current) student's records without prior written and witnessed permission from the student.

5.3 In the research design, researchers should identify and take steps to minimise potentially detrimental effects of:

- an unequal or dependent relationship on the conduct of the research; and
- the research on participants involved in the relationship.

5.4 It is essential that when research activities undertaken by students are not part of the required class activities, students should not feel that relationships with their instructors, the level and quality of instruction received, and their learning outcomes (including grades) are dependent on participation. Where students are involved in research and instructional activity with the same member of staff, consideration should be given as to whether it is appropriate or acceptable for:

- knowledge of research participation to be made blind to that member of staff
- the use of financial incentives for those students

5.5 Solicitation of volunteer student participants for research must be undertaken in a non-coercive manner.

5.6 Data collection should not be scheduled in the time allocated for teaching and instructional activity without justification.

5.7 Where financial rewards are to be offered for participation in research, staff members should carefully consider whether the use of financial rewards will alter the character of the teacher-student relationship and whether steps could be taken to ensure the separation of teaching and learning activities from paid research participation.

5.8 Altering a student's grades for participation in research is strictly **NOT** permitted.

Conclusion

6.1 In some research situations, university students may be required to undertake research overseen by lecturers with whom there is a power relationship. In such instances, the researchers are expected to treat such participants as vulnerable. Like other research volunteers, students who become research participants must be allowed to withdraw from the study within a specified time from the beginning of the research process, without any actual or perceived detriment. The informed consent statement should make clear the consequences of withdrawing from a project prior to completion. Finally, all data should be safeguarded.

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Endmatter

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