

Guidelines for ethics application

All research projects, involving animals or human participants need to go through ethical approval **before** you start collecting data.

NOTE: In some instances, your research may need a Home Office Project License or external review by the appropriate national organization (see here for more guidance on this https://biosciences.exeter.ac.uk/media/universityofexeter/schoolofbiosciences/documents/EthicsFlowChart_2.pdf)

All other applications will go to the biosciences ethics committee.

Applications are submitted using the online e-ethics system which can be accessed here <https://eethics.exeter.ac.uk/CLESBio/>

If you are off campus you will need to use a VPN to access the system (see here for instructions how to do this: <https://as.exeter.ac.uk/it/network/vpn/>).

General guidelines for filling in ethics applications can be found here: <https://biosciences.exeter.ac.uk/exeter/info/> (Under the ethics tab) The form itself also has embedded help (see '?' icons).

Please make sure you are familiar with the ASAB guidelines for research involving animals and/or the BPS guidelines for research involving humans.

Please also make sure your research is GDPR compliant <https://www.exeter.ac.uk/gdpr/>.

Application process

The process of applying for ethical approval of your project involves the following key stages:

1. You will fill out and submit the online form.
2. If you are a student, this will then go to your supervisor to check over and sign off (NB. It may be returned to you at this stage for amendments).
3. Once your supervisor has signed the form off it will be available to review by the CLES Biosciences Ethics Committee. After review by two members of the committee, your application may be
 - A) approved (application is 'favourable' or 'favourable with conditions', in which case you may be asked to upload extra information but will not have to resubmit the application)
 - or
 - B) referred back to you (application is 'provisional'). In the latter case your application is sent back to you for amendments to be made (this is quite common, and is usually just because you have provided insufficient detail to enable a decision to be made). Re-submitted applications will also need to be signed off by supervisors.
4. **You will receive an email informing you when your application has been approved. You can then start collecting data. If you haven't received an email informing you that the application is approved then it has not been approved.**

We aim to process your application within two weeks. **If your application needs more urgent approval please contact me on the email address below explaining why approval is urgent.**

Please take particular note of the following points:

- When submitting an application for ethical approval that involves animals please make sure you have included a clear statement about how you have specifically considered the 3Rs in your research.
- The applications need sufficient methodological detail for the committee to be able to assess the ethical implications of your proposed work.
- **If the application does not have a clear statement about ethics and/or significant errors it will be returned to you, which may slow up the approval process.** The ethics committee is there as protection for researchers, so we need the applications to provide enough stand-alone info for us to be able to assess the application.

Quick guide to key info:

Typical Track A – computer modelling, database projects, majority of projects involving invertebrates, some projects involving humans (e.g. questionnaires where no sensitive personal questions are involved), majority of projects involving plants/unicellular organisms etc, observational studies of wild vertebrates.

Typical Track B – all other projects, including all work on captive vertebrates and non-invasive studies of wild vertebrates

The application needs to have an explicit statement regarding how the project has considered the 3Rs: Replacement – do I need to use animals or would an alternative be more appropriate (e.g. computer modelling)? Reduction – how can I minimise the numbers of animals I use (e.g. appropriate experimental design)? Refinement – how can I refine my experiment to maximise/improve animal welfare?

The ONLY exceptions to this are projects involving databases (but then there needs to be a statement about what permits/ethical approval were obtained for the project that yielded the data being used, if known, and what the benefits are of using the database cf. live animals), mathematical modelling projects and non-animal projects with no ethical implications (for example, projects involving infecting plants with pathogens may have potential ethical implications if the pathogens could potentially infect non-target individuals/species).

Definitions:

Animals – all vertebrates except humans/all invertebrates

Non-animal – humans/other organisms

For studies involving animals:

Termination – will animals be killed during/at the end of the experiment, yes or no? Seems simple enough but surprising how many people can't answer this correctly.

Observational study – no direct interactions with animals/effects on e.g. behaviour.

Non-invasive – interactions with study organism, but does not involve invasive procedure (e.g. any experiment involving handling of animals or protocols that might affect behaviour/physiology etc).

Invasive – requires invasive procedure (e.g. taking tissue samples). Note that if working on vertebrates (including humans) in the UK if you tick this box you are indicating that you require a Home Office licence. No undergraduate/MSc/MSci project should require a HO licence.

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