The Research Ethics Committee of the
Faculty of Humanities and the Faculty of Law

Guidelines for researchers applying for ethical approval of research projects with the Research Ethics Committee of The Faculty of Humanities and The Faculty of Law

The following is a guide as to the requirements for research projects seeking approval from the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Humanities and the Faculty of Law, which functions as an Institutional Review Board (IRB). In the application, applicants are encouraged to describe the plans for the research project in greater detail as well as account for how the project meets the stated requirements. The requirements specified below are guidelines in the sense that the Committee will decide whether a project is approvable. The Committee will in any case base its judgments on an overall assessment of the research project and may as a result include other requirements than the ones explicitly mentioned here.

Any supporting documents such as research protocols, consent forms, recruitment scripts/information for participants, questionnaires etc. relevant to the research project should be forwarded to the Research Ethics Committee to review together with the application form itself.

1. Informed consent

Informants may in general only be involved in research (e.g. via interviews, focus groups, participant observation etc.) based on their *informed consent*. Informed consent is defined by a number of internationally recognized conventions and guidelines. The Committee emphasizes the importance of informing the research project's participants of the following:

- the overall purpose of the project, i.e. what questions the project intends to answer and which specific steps are taken (interviews, participant observation, video recording etc.) in order to do that;

- the product of the project (Ph.D. dissertation, monograph, scientific paper, report to authorities, exhibition etc.);

- possible risks and disadvantages of participation, cf. point 2 below;

- possible advantages of participation;

- the possibility of being quoted or mentioned anonymously or nonanonymously in the finished product (such a possibility is not required but participants should be informed of the possibilities);

- the possibility for informants to withdraw from the project and at what point in the research process this is feasible;

- the possibility of reviewing, and possibly commenting on, transcriptions and/or the final product (such possibilities are not required but participants should be informed of the process).

The information must be presented in such a way that it is clearly understandable for the informant. As a general rule, the researcher should present information in a written document but this can be done orally, if appropriate (if e.g. the informant is functionally illiterate).

The given consent may be written or verbal. The responsible researcher should be able to document that the information has been presented and that consent has been given, either by written consent or, for instance, by recording the process of exchanging information and consent.

Exceptions to the standards of all the above points may occur. Especially in situations where a researcher is observing groups of individuals in further specified contexts, the information may be given to the group as a whole. The consent to participation may reside in the members of the group accepting the researcher's presence and, as a result, individual informed consent is not required.

Observations in public space generally do not require informed consent. The same can be the case for observations carried out in online media and internet fora, as long as they have the same standing as a public space.

If an applicant finds that a research project does not require individual informed consent from its participants, he or she should state the reasons why in his or her application.

2. Risks

The project and its results may not inflict damage on its participants, nor expose them to significant risks of damage. This applies to the way in which respondents are recruited, the investigation itself and the final product. It also applies to any

potential emotional strain caused by the recruitment, the project, the investigation itself or the ensuing publication of the results. This includes the risks of inflicting *unwarranted* damage to a person or group's public reputation by publishing the project's results.

3. Reasonable purpose

An investigation should have an academically reasonable purpose, i.e. it should have the potential to produce new and relevant knowledge.

4. Safe storage of data

Data collected in the project must be stored safely, i.e. it should be inaccessible to unauthorized persons and stored in a way that minimizes the risk of loss of data. Data storage must be conducted in a way that makes it accessible to other researchers for similar research purposes and available for examination, in case questions of the project's results or integrity arise. Data must be stored for at least 5 years (cf. the *Danish Code of Conduct for Research Integrity*) after the end of the project period. Here, data means any form of collected material, not only sound or video recordings but also printed material, items or other significant objects which are important to the purpose of the project For information on safe storage of personal data and research data please consult the Employee Guide on KUnet and the Research Portal.

5. Anonymised publication

Generally, anonymization of informants depends on the purpose of the investigation (procedures of informed consent must still be applied). Normally, however, the investigation's results are only published in anonymised form. Here, anonymised means removal or modification of names or descriptions that may make it possible for outsiders to identify the individual in question.

6. Restricted use

Data collected in connection with research projects may not be used for anything else than research purposes. Data collected for research purposes may not be used for research purposes that move beyond what respondents have given their consent to. If the material collected in connection with a research study is to be used for teaching purposes, a special agreement should be made or a special section in the consent form should specify this.

7. GDPR compliance

In accordance with the GDPR and the Danish Data Protection Act, projects that collect and register personal data must be registered in the University of Copenhagen's joint record of biobanks and record of research projects containing personal data. Find out more and fill in the registration form here