Addendum A Research Ethics consideration and approval process information

A1 Research ethics consideration and approval process

A.1.1 The process of obtaining ethical consideration and approval may require consideration of ethical implications by academic supervisors, PhD Coordinators, University, Faculty or Departmental Research Ethics Committee, or a designated external ethical approval body.

A.1.2 A completed application which has been subject to peer review and academic methodology consideration should be provided to an ethical approval body.

A.1.3 Staff, doctoral researchers and postgraduate taught students and undergraduate Psychology students, should complete applications for ethical approval using the using the University's online application system. All other undergraduate students requiring ethical approval can complete the application forms which are available on the University website http://www.westminster.ac.uk/research-framework.

A.1.4 Where an application for ethical consideration or approval needs to be provided to an external ethical approval body, and the University does not have the remit to provide its own approval, a researcher may not proceed until external approval has been gained and this approval has been confirmed by the University.

A.1.5 When providing evidence of external ethical approval to the University, copies of the completed final ethics application form and any supporting documentation and conditions and/or approval letters received by the researcher should be provided to the University Research Ethics Committee.

A.1.6 Where the external organisation is outside the UK and ethical approval or conditions have already been received, the original documentation should be submitted to the University Research Ethics Committee for consideration.

A.1.7 Additional permissions may be required for compliance purposes such as organisational permission to conduct research on external premises, use participants or data belonging to an external organisation etc.

A2. Procedure

A.2.1 The University aims to promote good academic practice in research by asking individual researchers to complete and retain an initial assessment document to demonstrate that ethical implications have been considered – this will be the Part A Research Ethics application form or a local Part A equivalent form (approved by the University Research Ethics Committee) and a Cover-sheet. Where there are ethical implications, an application for ethical approval must be made and submitted to an appropriate Research Ethics Committee or ethical approval body. Staff, doctoral researchers or postgraduate taught course students applying to a Research Ethics Committee at the University, should make their application via the online application system. Undergraduate taught course students applying to a Research Ethics Committee should complete an application form and submit it to an appropriate committee via their supervisor who fulfils the role of Principal Investigator and is responsible for ensuring the application meets required standards in terms of research design and the identification of ethical issues.

A.2.2 All doctoral researchers must complete Annual Progress Review 1 (APR 1) which is scrutinised and signed off by a supervisor, the Faculty Research Director and the Graduate School Board. Completion of this process provides evidence that research design and a provisional assessment of ethical implications has been considered. The process includes research ethics consideration as good academic practice.

A.2.3 Research ethics implications should be considered at the design phase of all taught UG and PG student research project preparations when proposals are scrutinised by a supervisor. A checklist is available to support applicants and initial reviewers. The checklist focuses on the identification of ethical issues and the reasoning behind such identifications, as well as the purpose of carrying out research with ethical implications in the broader sense of research good practice.

A.2.4 Applications for research ethics approval are dealt with at respectively Departmental, Faculty, or University level (University Research Ethics Committee).

A.2.5. All proposals for conducting field work (research activity) in the UK or overseas require consideration and completion of a risk assessment in line with University Safety, Health and Wellbeing requirements: https://myintranet.westminster.ac.uk/my-journey/health-and-wellbeing/travel-overseas

A.2.6. All staff and students submitting proposals for conducting fieldwork (research activity) in the UK or overseas will be required to follow protocol in line with this Code of Practice in order to avoid invalidating insurance cover.

A.2.7. All proposals for conducting fieldwork (research activity) and/or for travel in the for purposes of University research, require travel insurance cover in line with the University Procurement requirements: https://myintranet.westminster.ac.uk/my-tools/bookings/travel/overseas-travel

A.2.7 Ethical approval shall be obtained before the commencement of any research which has ethical implications. A Research Ethics Committee may allow part of the research to commence, prior to full approval being granted, for those aspects of the research which do not relate to the ethical implications but which are intended to contribute to the final piece of research.

A.2.8 A Faculty Research Director, Supervisor or other designated named person/Research Ethics Committee Chair/Secretary will be available to give advice concerning the ethical implications of an application, if required.

A.2.9 A Research Ethics Committee reserves the right to request modifications or clarifications of any applications/proposals.

A.2.10 A Research Ethics Committee should review proposals in terms of ethical issues they raise, not the scholarly or scientific merits of the research. The scholarly or scientific standards of the proposal should be considered prior to its submission. By signing the application, the applicant confirms this has been done within the norms of regular professional practice. Such practice may include supervisory discussion or peer review, as appropriate to the application.

A.2.11 Exceptionally, where a Research Ethics Committee has concerns that the methodology described in an application may unnecessarily increase the likelihood of harm, then it may return the application for further clarification proportionate to the

risks involved. Where a Research Ethics Committee needs to appraise the value of a project in order to make a judgment about ethics issues arising from potentially methodologically unsound research, the advice of an experienced researcher independent to the project and the Research Ethics Committee, who has experience in the proposal's methodology and paradigm, should be sought.

A.2.12 A Principal Investigator or researcher cannot attend any discussion at a Local, Faculty or University Research Ethics Committee involving their own research proposal even if they are members of the relevant committee, unless invited. Members must also declare any special interest including personal, Faculty, departmental or financial etc. If the Committee Chair is involved in any such conflict of interest(s) then the vice-Chair or nominee will take over until the discussion is concluded. A conflict of interest register should be maintained by the Committee Secretary.

A.2.13 Dates of University Research Ethics Committee meetings will normally be published in the University Calendar. Applications for University Research Ethics Committee consideration and/or approval, via the appropriate method, should reach the Secretary no later than ten working days before the meeting at which they are to be considered.

A.3 Life Cycle of Research and Research Ethics Approval limitations

A.3.1 A research ethics proposal should clearly state the proposed date when the research will start and end, and any ethics approval would be related to this specific time frame.

A.3.2 The Code contains further details regarding ongoing ethics consideration of a research study, including the need to re-visit consent and participant information where new data or new participants may be used for which previous research ethics approval was not gained.

A.3.3 Secondary uses of research data which did not receive ethics approval previously must be submitted to an ethics approval body, where ethical implications exist and where the data is not currently in the public domain.

A.3.4 Similarly other changes in the protocol which are significant and/or raise ethical implications, which did not exist or where not known previously when consideration was given by an ethics approval body, should be submitted for consideration as a ‘significant change/amendment to protocol’ using the same application reference number.

A4. Pre and post award research good practice and research ethics

A.4.1 Applicants to external funding bodies or organisations should consider the external organisations Codes for research good practice and research ethics and take these into account, along with the University Research Governance Framework prior to applying for funding.

A.4.2 Some external funding bodies will require full ethical consideration or expedited ethical consideration by the University to be carried out prior to the award of the grant, and in some cases they require this to be carried out when making the grant application itself. Please check the guidance of the funding body.

A.4.3. As well as evidence of ethics consideration the funding body will require the organisation to confirm the research good practice and training requirements they may have as a condition of the grant, this may involve training to carry out the research ethically, as well as insurance and other liabilities.

A5. Decisions

A.5.1 Following consideration of each Application for Ethics Approval, a Research Ethics Committee decision shall be either:

- to approve the application;
- to approve the application subject to conditions or modifications;
- not to approve the application but invite the applicant to resubmit a revised or new application after addressing the concerns/conditions of the committee; or
- not to approve the application.

A.5.2 The applicant(s) shall be notified of the Committee's decision within ten working days of the meeting at which the application was considered.

A.5.3 Any application which has been approved subject to modifications should be submitted with revisions as required to the Committee Secretary within 10 working days of the response from the Committee having been provided to the applicant (and supervisor). The research should not normally begin until such modifications have been provided and approved by the Committee or separately by Chair's action.

A.5.4 If a proposal has been rejected and new information becomes available, a revised application may be submitted.

A.5.5 A Research Ethics Committee may require that changes are made to a research protocol for health, safety and wellbeing reasons. Please see Section 5 of the Code.

A.5.6 Ethical approval, in exceptional circumstances may be granted, with the Committee's approval, outside the Committee meetings (virtual or in person), advice must be sought from the Committee Secretary regarding this.

A.5.7 Approval shall normally be for the duration of the research project, which should be stated in the application form.

A.6. Appeals

A.6.1 An appeal against a decision by a Departmental or a Faculty Ethics Committee may be made to the University Research Ethics Committee only on the grounds that there has been demonstrable material irregularity in the conduct of the Committee's procedures. The decision of University Research Ethics Committee will be final.

A.6.2 The appellant shall submit his/her appeal in writing to the University Research Ethics Committee no later than 10 working days after the receipt of the relevant Committee's decision.

A.6.3 An appeal against a decision with reference to an application considered by the University Research Ethics Committee may be made to the Academic Registrar or nominee only on the grounds that there has been demonstrable material irregularity in the conduct of the University Research Ethics Committee procedure.

A.6.4 The appellant shall submit in writing his/her appeal to the Academic Registrar or nominee no later than 10 working days after the receipt of the University Research Ethics Committee's decision.

A.6.5 The conclusion of an appeal may determine:

- That the appeal is upheld and refer it back to the University Research Ethics Committee for review; or
- That the original decision of the University Research Ethics Committee is upheld and that no further action be taken.

A.6.6 The result of an appeal will be notified in writing to the appellant within 10 working days of the decision being reached.