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Research Ethics Policy	LS035	2	
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Group Executive Team	June 2025	June 2028	
LEAD PERSON	Chief Strategy Officer		
EQIA DATE	June 2025	DPIA DATE	June 2025

RESEARCH ETHICS POLICY

Policy Statement

Activate Learning is fully committed to the advancement of high-quality academic research and ensuring that all activities are undertaken in a way that safeguards the dignity, rights, health, safety, freedom of expression and privacy of those involved. This commitment extends to participants, researchers, students and third parties.

Purpose

This Policy (and associated procedures) provides a framework for decision making on ethical issues. It aims to safeguard and protect the rights of researchers and research participants.

Benefits

There are many benefits from having a policy that sets out recommendations on research ethics practice. The Policy (and associated procedures):

- a. Sets out Activate Learning’s overall position on research ethics
- b. Provides a framework to support Activate Learning in maintaining high ethical standards
- c. Helps to embed best practice principles, therefore strengthening Activate Learning’s commitment to high-quality, transparent, and accountable research practices.

Scope

This Policy applies to all Activate Learning employees engaged in research, Higher Education (HE) students of Activate Learning and other individuals who are undertaking research using Activate Learning premises or facilities and/or Activate Learning’s name.

This Policy and associated procedures do not currently cover research with animals which may cause pain, suffering, distress, or lasting harm to the animal(s) in line with the Animal Scientific Procedures Act (1986).

Where ethical approval has been obtained from another institution e.g., a university, further approval is not required unless Activate Learning staff and/or students are recruited as participants.

This Policy should be read in conjunction with Activate Learning’s Research Ethics Procedures which sets out the general framework for ethical conduct in relation to research activities and the Data Protection Policy, both of which are published on Activate Learning’s SharePoint site.

Responsibilities

The Research Ethics Committee has an oversight of all ethical considerations and will review activities to support, implement, and embed the highest standards of research integrity in accordance with all relevant bodies.

The Research Ethics Committee comprises:

- Chief Strategy Officer (Chair)
- Group Director of Strategy and Innovation
- Director of Higher Education
- HE Programme Co-Ordinator
- Group Head of Risk and Resilience

- Diversity and Inclusion Manager

External consultation will be sought when an application goes to FRE2 level and requires specialist expertise (for instance, subject specific) or contains significantly complex ethical considerations.

It is the responsibility of the Research Ethics Committee Chair to ensure that all members have the relevant skills, training, and knowledge to adequately fulfil their role.

The role of Research Mentor will be carried out by the Policy and Research Analyst where a researcher is not affiliated with an external awarding body or qualification. Researchers carrying out qualifications will receive research mentoring via their awarding body and therefore formal mentoring will not be provided by Activate Learning.

The primary responsibility for the conduct of ethical research lies with the researcher. It is fundamental that all staff and HE students engaged in research act ethically; encourage ethical behaviour in those with whom they collaborate; are aware of subject-specific ethical guidelines; and, where necessary, consult on ethical issues. Activate Learning is fully committed to ensuring that all staff and HE students are fully apprised of their responsibilities in this regard.

Principles

Researchers must abide with the following principles which underpin the ethical conduct of research:

- a) Researchers should avoid, prevent, or minimise harm to others. Participants should not be subjected to unnecessary risks or discomfort and their participation in the project must be essential to achieving aims that could not be realised without their participation. The principle of minimising harm also requires that the minimum number of participants to ensure statistical validity is involved with the study.
- b) The physical, mental and social well-being of the participants should be promoted. Protection of the participant is the most important responsibility of the researcher.
- c) Ethics concerns the minimisation of risk and the weighing of risk against benefits. All researchers should be aware of the ethical issues that may arise in the course of their work and should be encouraged to take responsibility for their own actions.
- d) Everyone involved in a research project should be treated fairly. Researchers should weigh up and make judgements about competing claims and conflicts of interest, regardless of the priorities of the researchers. Participants should be selected in an equitable way avoiding populations that may be coerced into taking part. There should be equality in distributing the Participant Information (PI), including benefits and risks, among all relevant population group(s).
- e) Participants must give their informed consent before taking part in a study. Valid consent must be given voluntarily (not forced by coercion or manipulation) by participants who are competent (not undermined by mental status, disease, or emergency) and have accessed the PI to make their own judgement. Respect for human dignity entails an ethical obligation towards vulnerable people or groups whose diminished decision-making capacity makes them vulnerable.
- f) Researchers should take precautions to protect participants and data according to current GDPR guidelines.
- g) Research must be undertaken in accordance with any relevant laws or legislations including those from other countries, if relevant.
- h) A project timescale must be approved in advance of commencing data collection. Any extensions or any major divergence from the approved project must be subject to further ethical approval.
- i) Researchers' contributions are acknowledged within Activate Learning, particularly where the research outcomes inform ongoing policy and practice.

For participant recruitment at external institutions, any additional guidelines specified by that institution must be followed and appropriate authorisation obtained.

Failure to follow Activate Learning's Research Ethics Policy and/or Procedures may result in disciplinary action being taken in line with the Student Code of Conduct or the Professional Conduct Policy for staff.

If there is any cause for concern or complaint about the way approved research is conducted, stakeholders are encouraged to use the process as set out in the Research Ethics Procedures.

References

[British Educational Research Association \(BERA\)](#)

Associated documents

Research Ethics Procedure - Staff .pdf

Research Ethics Procedure - Students .pdf

Research Ethics Procedure - Reviewers .pdf

Participant Information and Consent Form Template – online (e.g. surveys)

Participant Information and Consent Form Template – in person (e.g. interviews)

FRE1 Human Ethics Form

FRE2 Human Ethics Form

FRE2 Animal Ethics Form

Data Protection Impact Assessment

Equality Impact Assessment