

Research Impact and Ethics

Research impact is the effect, change or benefit to the non-academic world which occurs as a consequence of research. Researchers are increasingly expected to engage in impact activities, both to enhance the impact of their research ('pathways to impact'), and to evaluate the benefit that has occurred.

Ethical approval is required for all university research. The definition of research is the creation of new knowledge or understanding through a systematic process of enquiry, effectively shared. Impact activities do not generally fall under this definition. Instead impact would normally be classified as a form of service evaluation, with research being the 'service'. Therefore ethical approval for impact activities is not routinely required.

Potential impact activities should, though, be considered by researchers in their initial project design, and captured in the main ethics application for the project. The same high levels of rigour, respect and responsibility that are expected in the conduct of research must also be applied to impact activities. Impact activities should be undertaken ethically, and risks should be appropriately identified, managed and mitigated.

As well as general conduct expectations, there may also be occasions where discrete ethical approval should be sought for impact activities. The following advises when this might be the case.

Discrete Ethical Approval Not Required

Discrete ethical approval is not required for impact activities where:

- Data is collected with the sole purpose of evaluating the impact of a research project; and
- Data will only be used by members of the research team, and where required for formal research assessment exercises e.g. relating to the Research Excellence Framework (REF)

Discrete Ethical Approval Is Required

Discrete ethical approval is required for impact activities where:

- Data will be made available to an audience beyond the research team and/or for research assessment purposes, e.g. publications, conferences, websites etc. Researchers should be particularly aware of any prospect of their impact evidence collection generating findings they may later want to use in an output; or
- Data collection involves potentially vulnerable populations or work on sensitive topics that are different to those in the original research

In these cases, ethical review should be sought by submitting an amendment to the original ethics application for the project.

Research Impact and GDPR

Impact evidence is collected on a public interest basis. Researchers are advised to include the following statement in communications with impact evidence providers where data is being sought.

"The University undertakes research as part of its function for the community under its legal status. Data protection allows us to use personal data for evidencing the impact of research, with appropriate safeguards in place, under the legal basis of public tasks that are in the public interest. A full statement of your rights can be found at www.shu.ac.uk/about-this-website/privacy-policy/privacy-notices/privacy-notice-for-research."