

RUSI Ethics Policy for Research Projects

Principles

1. Research should be designed, reviewed and undertaken in a manner that ensures rigour, integrity and quality. This includes: honest presentation of research goals, intentions and findings; rigour in the design of research in accordance with clear and credible methods and/or methodologies, including clarity about what can (and cannot) reasonably be concluded from the research; appropriate recognition of authorship in published outputs.
2. Where appropriate, researchers should ensure that research subjects are informed, to the greatest extent possible, about the purpose, methods and intended possible uses of the research, what their participation in the research entails and what risks, if any, are involved. Some variation of this principle is allowed in specific research contexts, when agreed, and recorded, as appropriate by the RUSI Research Ethics Committee (REC). Where the project involves the collection and/or use of personal data, an appropriate legal basis for processing the data must be identified and made explicit.
3. Unless permission has been explicitly given, the confidentiality of personal information supplied by research subjects and the anonymity of respondents must be respected. The storage of such data is subject to data protection legislation and must be compliant with the law and RUSI DP policy.
4. Research participants must participate in a voluntary way, free from any coercion. Where their personal data is being used or collected, participants must give informed consent for their involvement in the research.
5. Harm to vulnerable individual research subjects must be avoided, and potential harm to other research participants (including researchers and other research subjects) taken into account, when assessing the benefits of research. 'Harm' is taken to mean more than just physical harm and can refer to emotional harm and risk of upset, as well as to reputational damage. However, it is acceptable for research to produce findings that make individuals and institutions uncomfortable if there is a potential public benefit in doing so.
6. The independence of research must be clear, and any potential for conflicts of interest must be explicitly addressed. While it is acceptable for research funders to exert influence over what is researched, it is not acceptable for funders to shape, or otherwise censor, the findings from research projects.

Process

1. This process relates to research projects, that is separate processes of investigation undertaken in order to generate new insights. It applies to all research under RUSI auspices. It does not include RUSI events, dissemination, capacity building and training, except where these are designed to contribute to research.

2. All research projects which RUSI is conducting will require a project ethics assessment (PEA). In addition, for research project proposals (including bids), the appropriate research group director will identify which proposals require a PEA before submission to a funder.
3. For each project being assessed, the responsible project leader should conduct a PEA, using the principles outlined above. This should include a written narrative explaining any ethical issues that arise under each heading, together with an explanation of how these will be addressed. A questionnaire will be available to assist in this process. Where personal data is to be collected or used, the legal basis for this must be documented as part of the PEA.
4. In the case of collaborative research projects in which partner organisations already have a respected research ethics process, the internal PEA should cross-reference any such process, and need only substantively address issues not covered therein.
5. Each PEA should be reviewed by the appropriate research group director, and if necessary amended. The director should then send the approved PEA, along with the latest draft of the full research proposal, to the Bids and Contract Manager (BCM). Where appropriate (including where there is an external bidding process), this should take place sufficiently in advance of submission to the funder to allow effective scrutiny.
6. The BCM will then arrange a review of the PEA by the REC, which will check whether the project meets RUSI's ethical principles. The REC will consist of experienced researchers from within the Institute. In many cases, approval can be given through Chair's action or a delegated alternate. In other cases, other members of the REC (preferably from research groups not involved in the project) could be involved. The REC can ask the project researchers to clarify and/or amend their proposal.
7. When new ethical issues, including but not limited to allegations of research misconduct, arise during implementation of a project, they should be brought to the attention of the REC, which will then decide upon an appropriate response.
8. The Research Committee will periodically review lessons learned in relation to this process, including suggestions for improvement and further training.
9. The BCM will retain a record of all relevant documentation.