



UNIVERSITY OF HEALTH AND ALLIED SCIENCES



RESEARCH ETHICS POLICY

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RESEARCH ETHICS POLICY

**RESEARCH OPERATIONS OFFICE
INSTITUTE OF HEALTH RESEARCH**

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TABLE OF CONTENT

1	INTRODUCTION	2
2	PURPOSE.....	2
3	AIMS	2
4	ENTITIES AFFECTED BY THE UHAS RESEARCH ETHICS POLICY	2
5	DEFINITION OF TERMS	3
6	POLICY PROVISIONS	4
7	RESPONSIBILITIES	7
9	APPROVAL DATES	8
10	ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND WORKS CONSULTED	8



1 INTRODUCTION

The University of Health and Allied Sciences (UHAS) is committed to maintaining and promoting the highest standards of integrity and probity in scientific research. Ethical values are central to the structures and practices of research governance of UHAS.

This policy sets forth the general principles to which UHAS subscribes and to which we expect every member of the University to adhere. These principles have been derived from national and international laws and regulations, University policies and generally accepted principles of ethical conduct.

2 PURPOSE

The purpose of the University of Health and Allied Sciences (UHAS) Research Ethics Policy is to emphasise the University's commitment to the highest standard of ethical conduct which ensures that all University research involving human and non-human participants conform to national and international ethical standards and regulations.

This commitment is an integral part of the University's values and ethos of "excellence, integrity, innovation, service and care". These ethos underpin our behaviour and how we conduct ourselves and our business as a pre-eminent health research and educational institution.

3 AIMS

This Research Ethics policy aims to;

- establish the framework for research ethics to ensure that all research activities in the University are conducted ethically and conform to accepted ethical standards;
- demonstrate a commitment to high quality, transparent and accountable research ethics throughout the University;
- protect the dignity, rights, safety and well-being of human participants and honour their trust in researchers and research;
- establish and empower an independent Research Ethics Committee to oversee and regulate research activities involving human and non-human participants;
- strengthen the research ethics review system in the University where research involves human and non-human participants;
- provide guidance on research ethics involving human and non-human participants for all staff and students;
- discourage unethical research practice and reduce risk to the University and individual researchers

4 ENTITIES AFFECTED BY THE UHAS RESEARCH ETHICS POLICY

This policy applies to

- i. all employees, students and visiting researchers of the University, including persons holding honorary University appointments, conducting research within, or on behalf of the University.
- ii. all individuals who, although are not members of the University, conduct or contribute to research activities involving human and non-human participants that take place within the University of Health and Allied Sciences



5 DEFINITION OF TERMS

These definitions apply to terms as they are used in this policy.

5.1 Autonomy

Refers to the consideration of each individual as an independent person, capable of making rational decisions about his personal choices.

5.2 Beneficence

The commitment to minimize the potential risks and maximize the potential benefits associated with research.

5.3 Benefit

The acquired right or privilege through a contract where payment of money or the giving of gifts is applied. It might also involve the impacted outcome of the research to the participants involved.

5.4 Confidentiality

The rules or promise that limits the access or places restrictions on types of information that has been received through an interaction with participants of a research.

5.5 Conflict of Interest

A situation in which an individual or any of his or her family has an existing or potential financial or other material interest that impairs or might appear to impair the individual's independence and objectivity of judgment in the discharge of responsibilities to the university. It is a variance between an individual's professional obligations and his or her private interests.

5.6 Ethical Conduct

Behavior conducted according to this policy and acting in ways consistent with what society and individuals typically think are good values.

5.7 Human Participants

The participation of human beings in a research process for investigation of a specific question which incorporates data collection and analysis. The process may include the use of surveys, questionnaires, interviews, focus groups or participant observation.

5.8 Informed Consent

This is the voluntary choice of an individual to participate in a research based on the appreciation and understanding of the facts, implications, benefits and future consequences of a research that may affect the person's decision to participate. In order to give informed consent the individual must have adequate reasoning abilities and is in possession of all the relevant facts at the time of giving consent.

5.9 Intellectual Property

This refers to creations of the mind, such as inventions; literary and artistic works; designs; and symbols, names and images used in commerce.



They are outcomes of intellectual activity and creative effort for which various rights and protections may be conferred by statute, contract or common law. It includes any invention, discovery, or creation, which may be protected by way of trademark, patent, design, copyright, know-how, trade secret, permit, and plant variety right (whether registrable or unregistrable) and all applications, drafts and workings relating to these rights.

5.10 Justice

Refers to the ethical obligation to treat each subject in accordance with what is morally right and proper and also to give each person what is due to him or her.

5.11 Research

Research refers to an original and systematic investigation (i.e., the gathering and analysis of information) designed and undertaken in order to develop or contribute to knowledge and understanding.

5.12 Researcher

An individual who devotes him/herself to the systemic investigation or inquiry.

5.13 Research Ethics

Refers to formally regulated elements such as protection of human and non-human research participants in the planning, conduct and reporting of research.

It is a diverse set of values, norms and institutional regulations that help constitute and regulate scientific activity

5.14 Research Integrity

Proposing, performing, and evaluating research in line with high ethical and scientific standards.

5.15 Research Protocol

Research protocol is a plan of a study showing a detailed set of activities for the research one proposes to carry out. It is a valuable practical timetable and guide to the activities and shows some foresight into what one is trying to achieve and includes the project title, project summary, project description, ethical consideration and references.

5.16 Risk

The potential that a chosen action or activity will lead to an undesirable outcome that may affect participants or researcher of a study.

5.17 Vulnerable persons/people/population

A person without the capacity to make informed decision based on the mental or emotional ability. A vulnerable person may include children depending on their age and some category of adults. They may be susceptible to exploitation or significant harm.

6 POLICY PROVISIONS

6.1 Compliance with Legislation, Guidelines and Codes

The University expects that research should be undertaken in accordance with commonly agreed standards of good practice, relevant legislation, guidelines and codes relating to



ethical practices in research, including but not limited to:

- i. The Declaration of Helsinki (1996);
- ii. The International Conference on Harmonization, Good Clinical Practice [ICH GCP (E6)] Guidelines;
- iii. Council for International Organizations of Medical Sciences (CIOMS);
- iv. Belmont Report;
- v. Applicable Laws and Statutory Regulations of Ghana and the University of Health and Allied Sciences.

6.2 Research Ethics Committee

This UHAS Research Ethics policy establishes and empowers an independent Research Ethics Committee (REC) to perform the following mandate;

- i. To review all research projects involving human and non-human participants for approval on behalf of the University.
- ii. To serve as an administrative body to protect the wellbeing of human and non-human research participants in research activities within and on behalf of UHAS.
- iii. To maximize the public benefit of research and minimize harm.
- iv. To oversee the activities in approved projects within their capacity as well as yearly scheduled continuing review and verification of compliance with approved research protocols and informed consent.
- v. Provide approval for the initiation of a new research project after successful review.
- vi. To request prompt reportage of any occurrences throughout the approved project life cycle.
- vii. To terminate or discontinue any previously approved protocol where necessary.
- viii. To ensure research compliance with national and international guidelines.

6.3 Ethics Approval Requirements

Research activities involving human and non-human participants must be approved and monitored by the UHAS Research Ethics Committee.

Researchers are responsible for submitting applications for ethical approval in accordance with the procedures or guidelines specified by Research Ethics Committee.

6.4 Basic Principles for Research

6.4.1 Moral principles

UHAS subscribes to and promotes the following moral principles of research ethics

- i. *Autonomy* – research should respect the autonomy, rights and dignity of research participants.
- ii. *Beneficence* – research should make a positive contribution towards the welfare of people
- iii. *Nonmaleficence* – research should not cause harm to the research participant(s) in particular or to people in general
- iv. *Justice* – the benefits and risks of research should be fairly distributed among people



6.4.2 General Ethics Principles

The following general ethics principles should be adhered to by researchers.

i. Essentiality and Relevance

Before undertaking research adequate consideration should be given to existing literature on the subject or issue under study, and to alternatives available. In view of the scarcity of resources, it should be clearly demonstrated that the research is essential to the pursuit of knowledge and/or the public good.

ii. Maximisation of Public Interest and of Social Justice

Research should be carried out for the benefit of society, and with the motive of maximising public interest and social justice. All efforts should be made to make public in an appropriate manner and form, and at an appropriate time, information on the research undertaken, as well as the results and implications of the completed research.

iii. Competence, Ability and Commitment to Research

Researchers should be professionally and personally qualified for the research. Commitment to research in general and to the relevant subject in particular is an essential prerequisite for good and ethical research.

iv. Respect for and Protection of the Rights and Interests of Participants and Institutions

Researchers should respect and protect the dignity, privacy and confidentiality of participants and where relevant, institutions, and should never expose them to procedures or risks not directly attached to the research project or its methodology. Research and the pursuit of knowledge should not be regarded as the supreme goal at the expense of the rights of participants and institutions.

v. Informed and Non-Coerced Consent

Autonomy requires that individuals' participation should be freely given, specific and based on informed consent. Direct or indirect coercion, as well as undue inducement of people in the name of research should be avoided. These act as barriers to autonomous decision making and may result in people consenting against their better judgment to participate in studies involving risks.

vi. Respect for Cultural Differences

Researchers should treat research participants as unique human beings within the context of their community systems, and should respect what is sacred and secret by tradition. Research should preferably be undertaken with, and not merely on, an identified community. In some situations the consent of "gatekeepers" may have to be obtained in addition to that of research participants.

vii. Justice, Fairness and Objectivity

Criteria for the selection of participants of research should be fair, besides being scientific. Easily accessible individuals or groups should not be inordinately burdened with research being carried out repeatedly on them.



viii. *Integrity, Transparency and Accountability*

The conduct of research should be honest, fair and transparent. Researchers should be honest about their own limitations, competence, belief systems, values and needs. The contribution of other researchers or members of the research team should be properly acknowledged. Researchers should not abuse their positions or knowledge for personal power or gain.

ix. *Risk Minimisation*

Researchers should ensure that the actual benefits to be derived by the participants or society from the research clearly outweigh possible risks, and that participants are subjected to only those risks that are clearly necessary for the conduct of the research. Researchers should ensure that the risks are assessed and that adequate precautions are taken to minimise and mitigate risks.

x. *Non-Exploitation*

There may be no exploitation of research participants, researchers (including students), communities, institutions or vulnerable people. There should be benefit to a community in which research is conducted. As far as possible, communities should receive feed-back on research carried out on them.

7 RESPONSIBILITIES

7.1 Responsibilities of the University

The University shall ensure that:

- i. researchers are given training and continuing education in research ethics
- ii. those conducting research are either adequately experienced and qualified, or supervised
- iii. the rights and dignity of all research participants are respected and are not exposed to any form of harm and unnecessary risk
- iv. the Research Ethics Committee is fully equipped with adequate resources and authorised to perform their duties independently without any form of interference from the University authorities.
- v. the autonomy and academic freedom of researchers is respected
- vi. an enabling environment for the conduct of ethical research is created and maintained

7.2 Responsibilities of Researchers

The researchers shall bear primary responsibility for the protection of human and non-human participants in their research. Researchers are to ensure that they:

- i. are adequately trained and qualified, or supervised, to undertake the activities related to their research
- ii. conduct research ethically
- iii. obtain ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee, maintain evidence of such approval and comply with the conditions of approval as stated on the relevant ethical approval letter
- iv. notify the Research Ethics Committee if any adverse events are observed
- v. adequately participate in and cooperate with all research quality assurance reviews
- vi. make all necessary efforts to bring the research and its findings to the public domain in an appropriate manner and at an appropriate time. The publishing of research



findings should be done in a manner which will not harm research participants or their communities.

- vii. protect those involved in or affected by their research work from any form of abuse of their rights or exposure to unnecessary risk. They should make reasonable efforts to anticipate and to guard against the possible undesirable or harmful consequences of research.

8 MONITORING AND EVALUATION

A monitoring and evaluation framework will be developed and applied in the implementation of this policy. Monitoring would be done in order to assess the achievement of intended objectives, make decisions aimed at improving performance, and to measure accountability to all parties. The policy will be reviewed and evaluated during and after the time of its implementation to ensure that the intended results are achieved.

9 APPROVAL DATES

This policy was originally approved by the University Council on 13th October 2017

This version takes effect from: 13th October 2017.

10 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND WORKS CONSULTED

The following documents were consulted and portions adapted in preparation of this policy document

1. Plymouth University Research Ethics Policy, 2015.
2. The University of Sheffield Ethics Policy Governing Research Involving Human Participants Personal Data and Human Tissue, Version 7.
3. University of Ghana Research Ethics Policy, 2013.
4. University of South Africa (UNISA) Policy on Research Ethics, 2013.



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