Research Ethics Approval

Read this first

You should only use this checklist if you are carrying out a low risk research project through PSB Academy: This applies to:
- Undergraduate students.
- Taught postgraduate students.
- Members of staff evaluating service-level quality e.g. reviewing course delivery.

The term "project" applies to all research projects within PSB Academy.

Introduction to research ethics

Respect

One of the important qualities of a good researcher is to respect the people and their opinions that may form part of your research project. People who contribute their views to your research need to feel comfortable about what will happen to the information they give you, especially if your project is looking at an area which is confidential. As a general rule all research data should be treated confidentially and should not be discussed with colleagues, or participants referred to by name or in a demeaning manner. Respect also implies that you have taken the time to think through the research, to ensure you have good internal and external validity for the questions, and that the information you ask for will fulfil your research objectives. Are you are asking the right people the right questions?

Risk

You need to consider your personal safety during the research project and the safety of any other people involved in it. The ethical approval process is intended to help you identify risks to you and others.

For example, would the research you are carrying out:
- Endanger you by requiring data to be collected in unsafe places or by giving away personal data about yourself?
- Upset participants with research material that they may find distasteful?
- Damage the participants' job prospects by confidential data about them becoming known to others because your research makes it easy for them to be identify or because you accidently leaking information about them?
- Be reported and presented in a way that protects you and your participants from potential criminal or legal action?

Most risks can be minimised by taking sensible precautions. For example, if you are meeting people who you do not already know, you should always do so in a public place and let your Supervisor or a friend know who you are meeting, where you are and when you will return. Similarly, if you need to tell your participants how they can communicate with you, use your University email address, not your personal one. Is there is a risk to the participant in taking part in the research. For example, are you are distracting participants from doing their normal job, when their employer expects them to be doing something more important?

You have to limit the risk for the participant, by making sure they will not experience any come back from their employer because they helped you with your project.

It is also not normal practice to post up a questionnaire on the Internet. One reason why this is not a good idea is the fact that you may not know who is replying to your questionnaire, or whether their responses are valid or reliable. You are not allowed to send e-mail requests to staff, students or other people to participate in your research unless they have made a specific request.

Rights

As researchers we need to let those involved in our research understand what is expected of them, their rights including the right to withdraw from the research, and our obligations towards them and towards the data we collect about them. The responsibility for acceptable behaviour in this area lies with you and not with the University. Indeed, it is a disciplinary offence to misuse research data or to fail to abide by the University's Ethics policy.

This means that you must have ethical approval before you start your research project. If you do not do this, there will be disciplinary consequences for you and the research will be declared invalid. Special additional conditions may also apply to research carried out in your Faculty so check that you have followed those too.

Routes

The questions in the following checklist offers a guided pathway through the various issues surrounding your research that need to be addressed and researcher behaviour that would be expected from all of our students and staff. You will need to complete the checklist and receive approval before you begin to collect any data. It is not acceptable to produce it after you have collected your data or finished your project and you will be penalised if this occurs.

No living participants

The following diagram gives an overview of the routes through ethical approval. If there are no living participants involved in the research, then you are likely to be able to complete the Low Risk Research Ethics Approval Checklist and use Principal Investigator Certification (PIC) to state that there is no need for ethical approval. You still need to go through the checklist and answer the questions but the likely outcome is you can use the PIC declaration.

Living participants

If you intend to use living participants in your research, then you need to complete the Low Risk Research Ethics Approval Checklist and there is no guarantee that you will be able to use the PIC declaration.

Most projects, especially at undergraduate level, will involve using data that has already been collected which is called secondary data. In these cases, completion of the questionnaire is very straightforward.

Some projects might use a survey to collect anonymous data, i.e. data that cannot be traced back to named or identified individuals either from other students or from other groups of people. In this case, a participant information leaflet about the project needs to be prepared and offered to all participants in the study even though you will not take their contact details. The participant information leaflet needs to be pre-approved by the research Supervisor or the Faculty Research Leader before any data is collected and will need to be included in the dissertation or report.

Some projects might ask individuals to be interviewed to provide data. In these cases, the interviewees will need to provide what is called "informed consent". The researcher will need to make sure that all interviewees have completed informed consent forms before being interviewed and they will also need to be given participant information leaflets at the time when informed consent is requested.

It is not normal practice to collect data for undergraduate or master level research projects from children under 18 years of age, the mentally ill or participants under medical supervision. There are special regulations and legal requirements about these groups which must be followed. If you are planning to use any of these groups as a source of data in your research then this must be specially cleared with your Supervisor as participants from these groups cannot themselves give informed consent.

This means more work because these two leaflets have to be drafted and approved by research Supervisors or the Department Research Leader before any contact is made and therefore before any data is collected so this method of research requires a long development time and very good advance planning. Data collected in this way has to be stored securely. Again, a conversation with your Supervisor or the Department Research Leader may be necessary to cover this. It also needs to be destroyed after the research is completed and again this will need to be confirmed. You will need to convince interviewees that the information that they share with you will be treated confidentially and show to us that this is the case. Finally, the findings from research conducted in this way are normally shared with research participants in two ways:

- Interview transcripts may be sent to interviewees for confirmation.
- Summary findings of the research project should be offered to all participants.

Record keeping

It is also not acceptable to record interviews without getting permission or consent from the interviewees (so this might form part of your informed consent form). You need to provide details of how the information collected is confidential or not, how it will be used, stored and the disposal method. It is not a good idea to interview without seeking the prior informed consent of participants and having evidence of that consent. It is also not good practice to collect data and not "verify" by sending back transcripts of interviews to participants. Finally, the issue about the destruction of the data once the project is completed needs to be clarified.

All of this is intended to protect you. For example, if someone later says that they did not agree to being recorded or suggests that you have leaked confidential information about them. You need to be able to show that you have protected yourself and looked after any material very carefully.

In all cases the survey that will be used and the interview questionnaire or protocol needs to be signed off by Supervisors before they are used. It is also good practice to test them, not least to find out where the problems might be. In addition, when you write up your research, you can talk about the testing process as a demonstration of good practice, which for students may count towards your marks.

Frequently Asked Questions

Can I begin work before the project is ethically approved?
No. Primary data collection cannot begin until you have established that your project does not need ethical approval using this checklist or you have received written approval from your Faculty Research Ethics Leader.

What will happen if I proceed without approval or falsely self-certify research ethics approval?

Collecting primary data in the absence of ethical approval or falsely self-certifying the level of risk associated with a project will constitute a disciplinary offence.

For Students – this means disciplinary action resulting in immediate failure in any module or project associated with the research and potentially dismissal from the University.

For Staff – This means disciplinary action, which may potentially lead to dismissal.
If you do not have ethical approval, the University's insurers will not cover you for legal action or claims for injury. In addition, you may be debarred from membership of some professional or statutory bodies and excluded from applying for some types of employment or research funding opportunities.

What happens if the project changes after approval?
If after receiving ethical approval your project changes such that the information provided in this checklist is no longer accurate, then the ethical approval is automatically suspended. You must re-apply for ethical approval immediately and stop research based on the suspended ethical approval.

What about multi-stage projects?
If you are working on a project which involves multi-stage research, such as a focus group that informs the design of a questionnaire, you need to describe the process and focus on what you know and the most risky elements. If the focus group radically changes the method you are using then you need to re-apply for the ethical approval.

What is Principal Investigator Certification (PIC)?
If you answer No to all the questions in the low risk ethical approval checklist then it is likely that your project has a low ethical risk. You may sign the Principal Investigator Certification part of the checklist and proceed with your project using good ethical practices. If you are a student, your Supervisor needs to countersign to show they agree with your judgment. They may require some restrictions or changes to your project to reduce the ethical or other risks, which would be recorded on the PIC declaration.

What do I do with the completed checklist?

Students should discuss the checklist as it relates to the project with your Supervisor. Once s/he countersigns the PIC declaration at the end to say that this is a low risk project then you may begin your project. However, you must keep hold of the checklist and associated documents, as you need to bind it in to your final project report.

Staff should complete the checklist. If all your questions have "No" responses, then you need to sign the PIC declaration and you can proceed with your project. If you were unable to answer all the questions with a No, then you need to talk to your Faculty Research Ethics Leader. This may result in changes to your project or research design to maintain it as low risk. If this is the not the case then you may have to complete either seek approval through the Medium-High or Medical ethical approval routes before begin your project.

If you have any questions about the checklist or the questions on it, please consult your Research Supervisor.

Low Risk Research Ethics Approval Checklist

Applicant Details

Name: Goh Qian Ni

E-mail: qiannigoh03@gmail.com

Department: Coventry University, Finance and Accounting

Date: 11/01/2025

Course: PS6004EFA Project

Title of Project: Internal Control Effectiveness in Mitigating Fraud Risk in POS (Point-of-Sale) Transactions.

Project Details
Summary of the project in jargon-free language and in not more than 120 words about the Research Objectives, Research Design (e.g. Experimental, Desk-based, Theoretical etc) and Methods of Data Collection:

This project examines fraud risk in Point-of-Sale (POS) systems used by retail and food and beverage organisations.
The research objectives are:
(1) to identify key operational and process-level factors within POS systems that create vulnerabilities and increase fraud risk;
(2) to evaluate the effectiveness of existing internal control mechanisms in detecting and preventing POS-related fraud; and
(3) to propose additional internal control measures that can strengthen transaction integrity.
The study will adopt a desk-based research design using secondary data only.
Data will be collected from academic journals, industry and professional reports, publicly available fraud case studies, and internal control frameworks. No human participants will be involved

Risk to Participants

1) Will the project involve human patients/clients, health professionals, and/or patient (client) data and/or health professional data? Yes **No**

2) Will any invasive physical procedure, including collecting tissue or other samples, be used in the research? Yes **No**

3) Is there a risk of physical discomfort to those taking part? Yes **No**

4) Is there a risk of psychological or emotional distress to those taking part? Yes **No**

5) Is there a risk of challenging the deeply held beliefs of those taking part? Yes **No**

6) Is there a risk that previous, current or proposed criminal or illegal acts will be revealed by those taking part? Yes **No**

7) Will the project involve giving any form of professional, medical or legal advice, either directly or indirectly to those taking part? Yes **No**

8) If you answered Yes to any of these questions, this may not be a low risk project. If you are a student, please discuss your project with your Supervisor.

Risk to Researcher

1) Will this project put you or others at risk of physical harm, injury or death? Yes **No**

2) Will project put you or others at risk of abduction, physical, mental or sexual abuse?

Yes **No**

3) Will this project involve participating in acts that may cause psychological or emotional distress to you or to others? Yes **No**

4) Will this project involve observing acts which may cause psychological or emotional distress to you or to others? Yes **No**

5) Will this project involve reading about, listening to or viewing materials that may cause psychological or emotional distress to you or to others? Yes **No**

6) Will this project involve you disclosing personal data to the participants other than your name and the University as your contact and e-mail address? Yes **No**

7) Will this project involve you in unsupervised private discussion with people who are not already known to you? Yes **No**

8) Will this project potentially place you in the situation where you may receive unwelcome media attention? Yes **No**

9) Could the topic or results of this project be seen as illegal or attract the attention of the security services or other agencies? Yes **No**

10) Could the topic or results of this project be viewed as controversial by anyone? Yes **No**

11) If you answered Yes to any of these questions, this is not a low risk project. Please:
If you are a student, discuss your project with your Supervisor.
If you are a member of staff, discuss your project with your Faculty Research Ethics Leader or use the Medium to High Risk Ethical Approval route.

Informed Consent of the Participant

1) Are any of the participants under the age of 18?   Yes   No

2) Are any of the participants unable mentally or physically to give consent?   Yes   No

3) Do you intend to observe the activities of individuals or groups without their knowledge and/or informed consent from each participant (or from his or her parent or guardian)?   Yes   No

4) If you answered Yes to any of these questions, this may not be a low risk project. Please:
If you are a student, discuss your project with your Supervisor.
If you are a member of staff, discuss your project with your Faculty Research Ethics Leader or use the Medium to High Risk Ethical Approval route.

Participant Confidentiality and Data Protection

1) Will the project involve collecting data and information from human participants who will be identifiable in the final report?   Yes   No

2) Will information not already in the public domain about specific individuals or institutions be identifiable through data published or otherwise made available?   Yes   No

3) Do you intend to record, photograph or film individuals or groups without their knowledge or Informed consent?   Yes   No

4) Do you intend to use the confidential information, knowledge or trade secrets gathered for any purpose other than this research project?   Yes   No

5) If you answered Yes to any of these questions, this may not be a low risk project:
If you are a student, discuss your project with your Supervisor.
If you are a member of staff, discuss your project with your Faculty Research Ethics Leader or use the Medium to High Risk Ethical Approval or Medical Approval routes.

Gatekeeper Risk

1) Will this project involve collecting data outside University buildings?   Yes   No

2) Do you intend to collect data in shopping centres or other public places?   Yes   No

3) Do you intend to gather data within nurseries, schools or colleges?   Yes   No

4) Do you intend to gather data within National Health Service premises?   Yes   No

5) If you answered Yes to any of these questions, this is not a low risk project. Please: If you are a student, discuss your project with your Supervisor.
If you are a member of staff, discuss your project with your Faculty Research Ethics Leader or use the Medium to High Risk Ethical Approval or NHS or Medical Approval routes.

6) Is there any other risk or issue not covered above that may pose a risk to you or any of the participants?   Yes   No

7) Will any activity associated with this project put you or the participants at an ethical, moral or legal risk?   Yes   No

8) If you answered Yes to these questions, this may not be a low risk project. Please:
If you are a student, discuss your project with your Supervisor.
If you are a member of staff, discuss your project with your Faculty Research Ethics Leader.

Principal Investigator Certification

1) If you answered No to all of the above questions, then you have described a low risk project. Please complete the following declaration to certify your project and keep a copy for your record as you may be asked for this at any time.

2) Agreed restrictions to project to allow Principal Investigator Certification

3) Please identify any restrictions to the project, agreed with your Supervisor or Faculty Research Ethics Leader to allow you to sign the Principal Investigator Certification declaration.

4) Please ensure that you tick all the boxes below and sign this checklist.

5) Students must get their Supervisor to countersign this declaration.

I believe that this project does not require research ethics approval. I have completed the checklist and kept a copy for my own records. I realise I may be asked to provide a copy of this checklist at any time.

I confirm that I have answered all relevant questions in this checklist honestly.

I confirm that I will carry out the project in the ways described in this checklist. I will immediately suspend research and request a new ethical approval if the project subsequently changes the information I have given in this checklist.

Signatures of student/staff:

Date: ....
11/01/2025

Signature of Student's Supervisor:

Date: ....

I have read this checklist and confirm that it covers all the ethical issues raised by this project fully and frankly. I also confirm that these issues have been discussed with the student and will continue to be reviewed in the course of supervision.