Forest Research

# SERG Statement of Research Ethics

Bianca Ambrose-Oji, Mark Atkinson
and Chris Pollard 2020

The Research Agency of the
Forestry Commission

Forest Research is the Research Agency of the Forestry Commission and is the leading UK organisation engaged in forestry and tree related research. The Agency aims to support and enhance forestry and its role in sustainable development by providing innovative, high quality scientific research, technical support and consultancy services.

# Contents

# 1. Introduction

This Code of Ethics sets out principles that should be applied to the entire range of research conducted by the Social and Economic Research Group (SERG) at Forest Research.

SERG researchers should respect the rights and dignity of all participants in their research. In addition, SERG researchers should respect the legitimate interests of stakeholders such as funding bodies, academic and government institutions as well as wider society.

Social and economic research is conducted in a range of settings, using different qualitative and quantitative research methods, different sampling techniques and different forms of interaction with research participants.  The social researcher is therefore required to make ethical judgements based on the context in which they are working. In addition, SERG researchers are members of a range of professional and academic bodies, which promote and adhere to a range of different ethical codes of practice. The principles set out in this document therefore underpin a wide range of research methods and designs.

This being the case, it is not really possible, nor appropriate to prescribe a single set of ethical ‘rules’ to be followed when conducting social research (De Vaus 2004; Social Research Association 2003).  Members of SERG will need to make choices on the basis of an agreed set of principles and values, and on balancing the sometimes conflicting interests of those involved.

Systems of research governance and the application of ethical codes of practice are becoming an increasingly important focus of attention for research organisations and funders of research.  This has been brought about by an increased concern for accountability in research and demands for information sharing and systems open to public scrutiny. In addition to this is the recognition that research is now being conducted in an era of advanced information and communication technology - including social media and online research, which presents researchers with new challenges around the collation, access and management of information.

Within this complex research landscape, there is national level legislation that must be complied with during the course of research.  Information privacy, fair representation, health and safety, and intellectual property are issues of particular relevance to research that have associated legislation.  The most important are the General Data Protection Regulation 2016 and the Data Protection Act 2018, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002, and the Equality Act 2010. These pieces of legislation place duties on organisations, including public agencies and apply not only to the conduct of research and treatment of research participants during the collection of information, but also to subsequent storage, analysis and use of data. There are also further legal commitments and ethical issues around the presumed consent and disclosure of sensitive information in the case of secondary use of datasets supplied by a third party for example, from UK country-level forestry bodies. Third party data suppliers such as the Office for National Statistics or the UK Data Archive need to be consulted about their particular ethical and data management requirements. Ethical standards also need to be taken into account when using third parties through research commissioning processes.

In short, the social scientists in SERG will be making informed and deliberative decisions about their ethical practice, and research design and management in accordance with the key principles outlined below. Decisions made will need to be justified with reference to these principles. Appendix 1 outlines how to develop an application for ethical approval for a research project in preparation for scrutiny by a funder or other internal or external governing body, applying the principles outlined below.

# 2. National Legislation: Key issues and advice

## 2.1. Data Protection

The **Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA)** which is the UK implementation of the **General Data Protection Regulation 2016 (GDPR)** established the main principles in relation to the processing (i.e. the collection and management) of personal data.

Researchers must also adhere to GDPR in the following cases:

- a researcher based in the EU collects personal data about people anywhere in the world
- a researcher outside the EU collects personal data on EU citizens

Personal data refers to that through which the research participant is identifiable (either directly or indirectly). These data will include names, addresses, contact details and socio-demographic information in cases where small-area geographic information is also known. The Medical Research Council (MRC) provides information on personal data and processes of anonymisation and pseudo-anonymisation. The key messages concerning the processes for anonymisation and pseudo-anonymisation of person-level data include the following:

- Although the law regarding whether data are identifiable is binary, in reality identifiability is on a continuum from inherently anonymous to inherently identifiable.
- Information may be identified in itself (the **content**) or in combination with other data (the **context**):

    - **Content**: direct personal identifier e.g. names, telephone numbers, email and postal addresses
    - **Context**: information that may identify an individual in combination with other data e.g. postcodes, small area geography data, age and gender

- Consider the likely viewer of the information when shared / archived. What other data would they reasonably have access to? Consider any motivation a viewer might have with respect of persons in the data.
- Personal data may have to be held alongside research data and linked separately with a secure cypher code.

The DPA and GDPR define six principles that need to be complied with when processing personal data. All personal data must:

- be processed lawfully, fairly and transparently
- be kept for the original purpose
- be minimised (i.e. only the personal data that is necessary is collected)
- have the accuracy upheld
- be removed if they are not necessary
- be kept confidential and their integrity maintained

In addition, researchers must have at least one of six possible legal grounds for processing personal data, of which the most relevant for the purposes of social research is the **consent of the data subject**. In this case, consent is given to process the research data for the purpose expressed by the researcher.

If researchers are processing data for a purpose where consent was not explicitly gained (for example using administrative data) there can be legitimate grounds if doing so for **public interest**. Conditions where data might be used in the public interest are described here. Examples of work SERG might undertake in the public interest would be processing operational data in relation to plant health (for example the use of statutory plant health notices) or new woodland creation to support particular policy development or interventions.

Following these principles should enable compliance with DPA and GDPR. Forestry Commission has a Data Protection policy, which details the roles and responsibilities of staff in respect of these requirements. For further information contact the Data Protection Officer and the IT security specialist. All staff have a responsibility to comply with the Data Protection policy and any breach or loss of data can be reported using the Loss of Data form.

## 2.2. Freedom of Information

The **Freedom of Information Act 2000** provides the right for individuals and organisations to request information from public bodies and covers information and data in a variety of forms from emails, handwritten notes, photographs, audio and video recordings as well as other documentary evidence. However, there are exclusions to the data which can be released as part of a Freedom of Information request e.g. where this would be in conflict with confidentiality under the data protection legislation, where it might harm commercial interests or endanger the protection of the environment. In either case the procedural issues of particular relevance to research are the need to maintain an organised system of record keeping and accurate process notes, as well as providing clear information about who to contact about a particular piece of research. This advice has remained largely unchanged with the result of data protection legislation since 2016 (i.e. GDPR 2016 and DPA 2018).

In order to address the above issues, Forest Research has developed a data strategy, which in part aims to facilitate compliance with Freedom of Information requests. The Forest Research Information Assets Register (FRIAR) will collate all data from Forest Research projects in order to process such requests, where appropriate. Freedom of information responsibilities are also outlined in the Forest Research Data Protection policy. SERG researchers have a number of responsibilities in respect of Freedom if Information:

- Ensure that all projects identify information assets and staff members who are responsible for these assets. These assets may include raw and processed datasets, research materials and written reports. These staff should assist FRIAR in collating details about SERG information assets
- Ensure any information assets are archived in shared areas so they can if necessary, be accessed by other SERG staff

The relationship between the DPA and Freedom of Information Act can be complex. There are also variations in interpretations of the legislation between Scotland, England and Wales. Some Guidance is given here, although it will always be best to seek advice on specific issues.

Detailed advice on any data protection or freedom of information issues should be taken from the Commissioners Office (informationrights@forestrycommission.gov.uk) and the Data Protection Officer.

## 2.3. Equality and diversity

The **Equality Act** means that as a public agency Forest Research has a duty to ensure equality of access to its goods and services by all members of society regardless of their social characteristics.  This includes considering diversity and equality issues within research. The Forestry Commission's Equality and Diversity Strategy promises the development of effective programmes of social research which not only explore diversity and equality issues, but which:

- Engage with and include the views of people from diverse backgrounds particularly minority and under represented groups;
- Understand the needs and embed behaviours which support the inclusion of different groups of people in research activity, wherever possible.

The Government Social Research Unit suggests ways to provide equal access to the research process, for example:

- assistance with costs incurred in research participation;
- providing appropriate services, e.g. transport for those with accessibility/mobility problems, or interpretation facilities for interviews or induction loops for those with hearing impairment;
- using different methods of data collection, e.g. offering a choice between self-completion and interviewer assisted interviewing in projects where respondents have difficulty reading or comprehending written material;
- applying appropriate sample design, e.g. considering the implications of excluding sparsely populated areas in highly clustered sample designs and considering the case for over-sampling under-represented or hard-to-reach groups;
- and seeking greater user-involvement, e.g. asking specific representative groups about improvements to research designs.

Forest Research has set out **Equality and Diversity** objectives and a range of equalities guidance which can be found here.

For more detailed information about equality and diversity issues the right person to contact is the Human Resources policy manager.

## 2.4. Working with children and vulnerable people

Working with children and vulnerable people of any age is subject to a number of different protection measures. As a general rule, where research involves children or other vulnerable groups, an appropriate level of disclosure should be obtained from the Criminal Records Bureau (CBR) for all researchers in contact with participants. However, the legislation regulating contact with children and vulnerable adults is complicated and evolving and the issues involved should be discussed with the relevant persons. The key principles involved which have a bearing on research include:

- protecting the **child, vulnerable person, yourself** and the **Forestry Commission and Forest Research** from harm, and accusations of inappropriate behaviour
- ensuring **children and vulnerable people** have a safe and positive research experience
- reassuring **parents, guardians** and **others** responsible for **children and vulnerable people** taking part in research
- ensuring informed consent or assent is given by **children**, **vulnerable people** and/or their **parents**, **guardians** and **others** responsible for them.

Research that brings us into contact with children, young people and vulnerable adults will need special attention:

- **Children** are legally defined in England and Wales as persons under the age of 18. In Scotland persons are considered adults when they become 16 but statutory guidance supporting the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, refers to both children and **young people** below the age of 18.
- **Vulnerable adults** are defined as aged 18 years or over; Who may be in need of community care services by reason of mental or other disability, age or illness; and who is or may be unable to take care of him or herself, or unable to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation.

In some cases a CRB check may be needed, under the Protection of Freedom Act 2012, regulated activity is defined as "*close and unsupervised contact with vulnerable groups including children*". However, some schools and other institutions might also require CRB checks and clarification should be sought directly from the institution. The UKRI also has a page on working with children and young people.

# 3. The SERG Ethical Statement

Forest Research has committed us (SERG) to adopt the contents of the UK's Universal Code of Ethics for Scientists (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/universal-ethical-code-for-scientists ) However, this code is not designed to replace codes of conduct specific to particular disciplines and professions.

As Government Social Researchers a further point of reference will be the Government Social Research, 2012, Professional Guidance and Ethical Assurance.

We will follow this guidance as it applies to all stages of the research cycle including the publication and dissemination of information and research data in a timely and appropriate manner. More information on this aspect of research is included in the following GSR publishing guidance.

Because of the complexity of contemporary social research work, SERG will refer to established codes of professional practice and ethical guidelines to provide further detailed advice.  As stated in the introduction to this document the most relevant code of practice to use will be dictated in some measure by the subject and scope of the research being undertaken. So, for some of the details of our ethical and professional obligations in particular subject areas we will need to use additional sources. Those codes of practice and ethical guidelines that have greatest relevance to our work are:

- Market Research Society, 2019 Code of Conduct and Professional Standards
- Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) 2015 Research Ethics Framework
- Social Research Association Ethical Guidelines

Note that all Research Councils UK funded research is subject to ethics review by a Research Ethics Committee (REC).

## 3.1. Our Ethical Responsibilities

SERG researchers recognise their ethical responsibilities towards different stakeholders in research (Bryman 2004; Bulmer 2001; Social Research Association 2003).  These include:

- Ourselves and our own professional integrity
- Other members of our research group

- Forest Research, Forestry Commission, DEFRA group, NRW and Scottish Government
- Sponsors and funders of particular pieces of research work
- Individuals and organisations playing a role in locating, contacting or recruiting research participants (including community gatekeepers)
- Research participants
- Users and readers of our research and the wider public.

This means that we shall be working to:

1. Share information appropriately, guard privileged information, open ourselves to collegial review and discussion concerning research design and management as well as providing practical support to good practice amongst the group and within the organisation.

2. Ensure appropriate and impartial design, analysis, recommendations and dissemination techniques with respect to wider society, funders and users of research.

3. Treat research partners and research participants with respect, and protect them as far as possible from commercial and individual harm or disadvantage.

## 3.2. Our Key Principles and Values

There are six key ethical and professional principles that SERG researchers will use to guide their research design and professional conduct, as follows:

### 3.2.1. Integrity and quality

Good quality research is based on intellectual honesty and professional integrity. It is about the way in which research is planned and conducted, how results are recorded and reported, and how the results from research are disseminated, and applied. Good research practice will allow ready verification of the quality and integrity of research data, provide a transparent basis for evaluation and lead to better research. Forest Research has a Quality Management System (QMS), which supports quality assurance at various stages in the research cycle. SERG researchers will maintain high personal research standards as well as comply with the agency's QMS processes.

### 3.2.2. Enabling Participation

The potential impact of choices in research design (such as sample design, data collection method and so on) on participation will be considered. Care and thoughtfulness of design will be applied in all cases, but particular attention will be given to the effect of research design on what are described as the 'protected characteristics' in Equality legislation. This would include different faith and belief backgrounds, sexual orientation, gender, age, ethnicities, and disabilities including those with caring responsibilities, and those with physical or mental impairment. If barriers are identified, measures will be taken where possible to overcome these. For example: ensuring research venues have suitable access and other facilities; providing research participants with transport or allowances for the costs incurred taking part; organising research events at appropriate times of the day and week; adjusting sample design to over-sample under represented or minority groups (where considered appropriate in consultation with FR statisticians); considering the gender of the researcher/facilitator; providing a translation service or signer.

Incentives, expenses or compensation may form an important aspect of enabling participation and will be considered in relevant circumstances. Compensation can be paid in recognition for participants' time and childcare / travel expenses. The Government Social Research Profession recommends that remuneration should be considered for longer survey interviews, most qualitative research or ongoing longitudinal surveys where participants do not attend in their professional capacity. Incentives can also increase representation in a study and therefore ensure participants are taking part in work of integrity and quality. In the case of some difficult to reach populations, high incentives are necessary to enable participation and increase representativeness. SERG researchers should therefore consider these in appropriate circumstances and The Government Social Research Profession (DWP, 2013) provides further information on payment of remuneration.

### 3.2.3. Informed consent

We understand that respondents must participate voluntarily and their participation must be based on a clear understanding of the objectives and nature of the research including who the sponsors are, an understanding of what the data collected will be used for and how this might be achieved. All participants should receive verbal or written briefing before participating in research (see Appendix 2 for an example written briefing). Researchers will need to exercise professional judgement about how this is expressed, recognising that in some circumstances a full explanation of all aspects of the research may influence the answers provided. We will ensure that participants are made aware of their right to refuse participation or withdraw from participating in the research. The right to withdraw will be guaranteed at any point in the research process and will not affect the payment of any compensation, ensuring that the promise of this is not coercive to potential participants. As part of the briefing participants will also be made aware of risks associated with the potential research (if any) and how any data will be recorded, managed, and stored. Finally, in face to face research participants should be given the opportunity to ask any questions prior to undertaking the study.

Wherever possible and practicable participants will be offered feedback on findings, for example in the form of a debriefing (see Appendix 4 for an example of a written debriefing), summary report or given the opportunity to comment on draft publications. Participants will also be told about how their data will be stored / used / shared / and if necessary, destroyed. Destruction of data is typically undertaken in the case of personal data, which has been collected for the purposes of recruitment or contact of participants for example, as part of a longitudinal study. These personal data may be destroyed at the request of the participant or if the contact is no longer required. Alternatively, if personal data is kept for future contact then participants should be informed of this. Debriefing is particularly important in the event deception or withholding of information is used as part of research. For example, withholding information regarding research is frequently used in experimental designs such as randomised control trials to evaluate interventions (interventions may include medical, health or wellbeing programmes/procedures or policy and management interventions). In these designs, details regarding an intervention of interest are withheld from some or all of the participants in order to evaluate the efficacy of an intervention. Any withholding of information to participants must be clearly justified in the research design and clearly set out to participants following the completion of the study. Consent may be given verbally or in written form. Consent applies to:

- Taking part in the research
- The storage and use of data
- The secondary use of data

Please note that the FRIAR will require a clear statement of the consent status of every research project and every associated dataset. Care will be taken when considering the use of personal data, where consent was not given for research purposes. This can occur, for example when data was collected for statutory reasons or in providing a non-research service. In this scenario, additional consent may be required to use the data for research purposes. Example consent forms can be found in Appendix 3 and further detailed advice on the ethics of consent and data can be found here.

If working with children Child Protection status (CPS) and informed consent will be a specific concern that takes these ethical principles further. Careful thought needs to be given to how information is given to the child and parent/guardian, explaining: what will happen; what is being asked of the child; that the child can agree or disagree to take part, without any adverse consequences; that the child may withdraw at any time; that the research methods and questions will be given in clear language at a level that the child can understand, using visual aids if necessary. Young people between 16-18 years of age with sufficient understanding will be considered able to provide consent. The situation for children under 16 will vary. The power to consent, in law, remains that of the parents or legal guardian. SERG researchers agree in the case of children under 16 years of age that no research shall be conducted without a specified means of gaining their assent and in addition, the consent of their parents or guardians, or persons acting *in loco parentis*.

Informed consent from vulnerable adults and people with mental health and learning difficulties also presents similar issues. When planning research with vulnerable people additional advice will be taken to ensure appropriate measures have been taken to achieve informed consent. Where participants are involved in longer-term data collection, the use of procedures for the renewal of consent at appropriate times will be considered.

### 3.2.4. Confidentiality and Data Protection

Personal data, opinions and statements expressed by participants during research will be used and stored in accordance with GDPR 2016 and DPA 2018. The anonymity of respondents will be maintained unless it has been agreed otherwise, and the identity of those providing particular responses will not be revealed to others taking part in research.

### 3.2.5. Avoiding harm

SERG researchers will uphold the individual rights of participants and respondents and treat them in such a way as to ensure they are neither harmed nor disadvantaged as a consequence of taking part in research wherever possible. This is a particularly important consideration when planning research with vulnerable and marginal groups in society. It is also important to acknowledge that taking part in research can be a very positive experience for some, but for others the experience may be disturbing. Even if not harmed, participants might perceive apparent intrusions into their private lives, build false hopes or expectations, or find themselves uncomfortable due to introspection of self-knowledge. Researchers will take special care to avoid and manage any such effects and to inform participants of any potential risks and benefits arising from taking part in research. Avoiding harm should extend to all participants except in cases where researchers have an overriding duty to statutory authorities.

### 3.2.6. Independence and impartiality

Maintaining confidence in research as well as providing useful research rely on the ability of SERG researchers to maintain high scientific standards in the methods employed in the collection and analysis of data, and the impartial assessment and dissemination of findings. We will consider the available methods and procedures for addressing a proposed inquiry and ensure that an impartial assessment of the respective merits and demerits of alternatives is included in our research design. We will also ensure that we do not pre-empt research outcomes. As members of a government research agency we will ensure the evidence emerging from our work will be brought to the attention of policy makers and other users in a way that is clear and accessible, as well as conforming to professional and ethical standards to protect against distortion and bias in the interpretation of findings.

## 3.3. Standard Operating Procedures

The Forest Research QMS incorporates good research practice in the form of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) published and maintained by the Quality Assurance Manager. Having been approved through a process of expert and peer review over 600 regularly updated SOPs are an integral part of the Forestry Commission's scientific and ethical research practice. There are many SOPs covering a variety of issues and SERG researchers will need to identify the most appropriate to the form and scope of their research as they develop the formal Study Plan for each project. Whilst there will be variations, those generic SOPs that apply to most of our work and that should be given due consideration are:

| | |
|---|---|
| SOPO132 | Writing Plans for all social research studies |
| SOPO165 | SERG operating procedures applying to large projects |
| SOP0133 | Record keeping for studies of the relationships between people and woodlands |
| SOP0134v2 | Writing interim and final reports for Social Research studies |
| SOP0067 | Preparing and running participatory focus group and discussion group research |
| SOP0119 | Transcription of audio recordings for social research |
| SOP0123 | Conducting a literature review |
| SOP0533 | Interviewing for Social Research |
| SOP0089 | SERG Communication Procedures |

## 3.4. Risk Assessments

There is a need to complete Risk Assessments in line with Forestry Commission Health and Safety Policy as well as part of good research practice. More detailed information on how to complete Risk Assessments can be found in the Forestry Commission guidance and the FR Risk Assessment, which cover specific work areas. There may be risks associated with the job and tasks to be performed, and there may be risks associated with the site location and site condition. Each of these three categories will need to be considered and included.

**General Guidance** on completing Risk Assessments can be found here.

**Specific Risk Assessments** of relevance to SERG include:
CHES/GEN/004 – Expectant mother

CHES/GEN/006 – Working in the forest [general]
CHES/EHS/064 – Lone fieldwork [2]
CHES/EHS/066 – Driving at work
CHES/EHS/068 – Visiting community forests, Greenfield sites, parklands and wetlands
CHES/EHS/070 – Working with the public

The Forest Research Principal Safety Policy Statement can be found here and the CHES Safety Plan can be found here. The Risk Assessments connected with any research project will be kept in the Centre Health and Safety system and managed by the Centre Health and Safety Co-ordinator for the Head of Centre.

# 4. Resources

| **Resource** | **URL** |
|---|---|
| Doing the Right Thing. Working Paper 11 (2003) The Department for Work and Pensions. | http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/WP11.pdf |
| Guidelines for good practice in Evaluation (2018). | www.evaluation.org.uk |
| The Magenta Book: Guidance for evaluation (2020). HM Treasury. | https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-magenta-book |
| Legal and Ethical Issues. UK Data Archive. | https://www.ukdataservice.ac.uk/manage-data/legal-ethical.aspx |
| Policy and Guidelines on Governance of Good Research Conduct. (2013). Research Councils UK | https://www.ukri.org/files/legacy/reviews/grc/rcuk-grp-policy-and-guidelines-updated-apr-17-2-pdf/ |

# 5. References

Bryman, A. 2004. *Social Research Methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bulmer, M. 2001. 'The Ethics of Social Research' in Gilbert, N. (ed.) *Researching Social Life*. London: Sage.

De Vaus, D. 2004. *Surveys in Social Research*. London: Routledge.

The Department for Work and Pensions. 'Doing the Right Thing. Working Paper 11'. HMSO London

Economic and Social Research Council 2015. 'Research Ethics Framework'. Swindon: ESRC.

Green, J. and Thorogood, N. 2004. *Qualitative Methods for Health Research*. London: Sage.

Social Research Association 2003. 'Ethical guidelines'. London: Social Research Association.

# Appendix 1. Social and Economic Research Group (SERG) Ethical Approval Application Form

## SECTION A

Section A gives guidance on how to go about completing the form to obtain ethical approval for your project.

Section B includes a checklist of other documents attached to this application and details of any other ethical approval processes associated with this project.

Questions in Section C are to ensure investigators are aware of the range of ethical issues involved with social science research.

Details of the ethical issues arising from the work are then required to be entered in Section D.

References

The primary document for reference is **Social and Economic Research Group: Research Ethics** (held on the SERG shared drive > Research Ethics folder)

References (including websites) are contained within the Social and Economic Research Group: Research Ethics document, and below.

Equality, diversity, and Inclusion

Freedom of Information

Forest Research General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) intranet page

Information Commissioner's GDPR guidance

Government Social Research Professional Guidance - Ethical Assurance for Social Research in Government

Sociological Research Association, 2003, Ethical Guidelines

British Sociological Association, 2017, Ethical Guidelines

Economic and Social Science Research Council, research ethics

## SECTION B

Please ensure that you have included all the relevant attachments regarding your application

| **Attachments Checklist** | |
|---|---|
| Social and Economic Research Group Ethics Application Form | Yes |
| Participant consent form | Yes |
| Participant brief materials (e.g. handout, presentation slides) | Yes |
| Participant debrief materials (e.g. post-study feedback, handout, presentation slides) | Yes |
| Questionnaire sheet / screenshots of online questionnaire | Yes |
| Interview / focus group guide | Yes |
| Data collection materials for other research methods | Yes |
| External permissions letters / forms / emails | Yes |
| Relevant risk assessment/s (See section 3.4 of SERG Statement of Ethics) | Yes |
| *List any other documents attached with your application:* | Yes<br>Yes<br>Yes<br>Yes |

| **Has ethical approval been obtained from Forest Research for a very similar project? If so, a whole new approval may not be required. Please give details here** | |
|---|---|
| Ethics approval code: | |
| Project title: | |
| Date of approval: | |
| Researcher name: | |

| **Has ethical approval been obtained from any other organisation for this specific project? If so, please give details here** | |
|---|---|
| Organisation: | |
| Date of approval: | |
| Details (e.g. external approval code): | |

| **Signature** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Applicant | | Date: | |
| Print name | | | |

## SECTION C

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Project details** | | | |
| C.1.1 | Researcher name | | |
| C.1.2 | Project title | | |
| | | | |
| C.1.3 | Project description summary (note this information may be available in project funding proposals) | **What** are the aims of the research?<br>**Who** are your participants?<br>**Where** are you planning to do it?<br>**How** are you planning to do it?<br>**What** type of data will you be collecting?<br>**How** will you obtain voluntary informed consent?<br>**How** will you handle data? | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| C.1.4 | Estimated start date | | |
| C.1.5 | Estimated duration | | |
| C.1.6 | Funder(s) | | |
| C.1.7 | Does the funder(s) have a policy which may impact how FR can handle data collection/storage/sharing/destruction? | | Yes |
| C.1.8 | Partner(s) | | |
| C.1.9 | Does the partner(s) have a policy which may impact how FR can handle data collection/storage/sharing/destruction? | | Yes |
| C.1.10 | Does the research raise ethical issues involving responsibilities to funders, roles in research, intellectual property, publication strategies/co-authorship, policy implications etc.? | | Yes<br>*if Yes, give details in SECTION D* |
| | | | |
| C.2.1 | Who are your participants? | | |
| C.2.2 | How will you recruit your participants? | | |
| C.2.3 | What are the inclusion and exclusion criteria for recruitment? | | |
| C.2.4 | What is the proposed sample size and how is it justified? | | |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| C.2.5 | Estimated duration of participant involvement | | |
| C.2.6 | Location(s) of participant involvement | | *if a location falls outside of the UK, give details in SECTION D* |
| C.2.7 | Do you have permission of those responsible to access the location for research? | | Yes |
| C.2.8 | Will inducement other than expenses be offered to the participants? | | Yes<br>*if Yes, give details in SECTION D* |
| C.2.9 | What are the benefits to the participant of participation and how will they be maximised? | | |
| | | | |
| C.2.10 | Does the research method (sample design, location, data collection method, etc.) result in barriers to participation for any group, particularly regarding 'Protected Characteristics'? these are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage / civil partnership, pregnancy / maternity, race, religion / belief, sex, sexual orientation. | | Yes<br>*if Yes, give details in SECTION D* |
| | | | |
| C.2.11 | Will the participants be informed… | | *if No, give details in SECTION D* |
| C.2.11.1 | that participation is voluntary? | | Yes |
| C.2.11.2 | about the goals of the main project and the experimental procedure (Section C.3 & C.4 above) in advance so they can make an informed decision about whether to participate or not? | | Yes |
| C.2.11.3 | that they can withdraw at any time and for any reason and not have to give any explanation? | | Yes |
| C.2.11.4 | whether they will be given the option to omit questions they do not wish to answer (if questioning is used)? | | Yes |
| C.2.11.5 | that they are free to reject the use of audio, visual, and audio-visual recording equipment (if used)? | | Yes |
| C.2.11.6 | that their data will be treated with full confidentiality and that if published, will not be identifiable as theirs? | | Yes |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| C.2.11.7 | that their contribution may be credited unless they specifically ask for anonymity? | Yes |
| C.2.11.8 | of how data will be stored, who will have access, and how and when it will be destroyed? | Yes |
| C.2.11.9 | of where they will be able to access the results of the project, if applicable? | Yes |
| C.2.11.10 | Who to contact if they have any questions or concerns? | Yes |
| | | |
| C.2.12 | Do participants fall into any of the following categories? | *if Yes, give details in SECTION D* |
| C.2.12.1 | Children (under the age of 16 in Scotland or 18 in England and Wales) | Yes |
| C.2.12.2 | Protected adult, receiving care or welfare services? | Yes |
| C.2.12.3 | People with learning or communication difficulties? | Yes |
| C.2.12.4 | People potentially engaged in illegal activities? | Yes |
| | | |
| | | *if Yes, give details in SECTION D* |
| C.2.13 | Is there any significant risk (including physical, psychological harm or distress, economic, financial or legal risks) to any participants, or those involved in the project? | Yes |
| C.2.14 | Does the project involve misleading participants in any way? | Yes |
| | | *if Yes, give details in SECTION D* |
| C.2.15 | Are any participants in a dependent relationship with the investigator(s)? | Yes |
| C.2.16 | Do investigator(s) have any conflict of interest? | Yes |
| C.2.17 | Does the study involve discussion of sensitive topics? | Yes |
| | | |
| **Data Protection** | | |
| C.3.1 | Does the research require the collection of personal data? | Yes |
| C.3.2 | Does the research require the collection of 'Special Category' data? This is personal data relating to race, ethnic origin, politics, religion, trade union membership, genetics, biometrics, health, sex life, or sexual orientation | Yes |
| | | |
| | Data collected will include: | |
| C.3.3.1 | Anonymised data | Yes |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| C.3.3.2 | How stored: | | | |
| C.3.3.3 | Who can access: | | | |
| C.3.3.4 | How shared: | | | |
| C.3.3.5 | Destroyed | Yes | When? | |
| C.3.3.6 | Held indefinitely | Yes | | |
| | | | | |
| C.3.4.1 | Pseudonymised data | | | Yes |
| C.3.4.2 | How stored: | | | |
| C.3.4.3 | Who can access: | | | |
| C.3.4.4 | How shared: | | | |
| C.3.4.5 | Destroyed | Yes | When? | |
| C.3.4.6 | Held indefinitely | Yes | | |
| | | | | |
| C.3.5.1 | Fully identifiable data | | | Yes |
| C.3.5.2 | How stored: | | | |
| C.3.5.3 | Who can access: | | | |
| C.3.5.4 | How shared: | | | |
| C.3.5.5 | Destroyed | Yes | When? | |
| C.3.5.6 | Held indefinitely | Yes | | |

| Are the following Standard Operating Procedures applicable to the study? | | |
|---|---|---|
| SOP0002 v4 rev.C | Writing plans for all experiments, experiment series or runs of experiments | Yes |
| SOP0003 v3 rev.A | Writing interim and final reports | Yes |
| SOP0067 | Preparing and running participatory focus group and discussion group research | Yes |
| SOP119 | Transcription of audio recording for social research | Yes |
| SOP123 | Conducting a literature review | Yes |
| SOP133 | Record keeping for studies of the relationships between people and woodlands | Yes |
| SOP537 | Planning and conducting interviews for social research | Yes |

## SECTION D

| |
|---|
| Please write a statement on the ethical issues raised by the project and what procedures are employed to address each issue, paying particular attention to those areas above which have been specified for further detail in SECTION D. Refer to the “Social and Economic Research Group: Research Ethics” document for discussion of issues and advice regarding the areas raised in this application: |
| |

# Appendix 2. Example of participant information sheet (briefing)

**Purpose of study**
This study aims to add to the field of environmental psychology by examining the way people make moral judgements about the use of land. The results may form part of research disseminated through academic publications, conferences, meetings and may be deposited onto an online data archive.

**Procedures**
To begin with, you will see a single short moral dilemma. Please read the dilemma carefully, giving your opinion as to whether the action in question is morally appropriate or inappropriate. We will measure the responses you give. The online survey will then ask a series of questions concerning your feelings about the environment and questions regarding demographics including your age and gender. The study is estimated to take 3 – 5 minutes to complete. Please be aware that there are no ‘right’ answers.
Following the dilemma, a debrief page will be displayed giving more details of the purpose of the study. The debrief will also relay information regarding what will happen next to your data and what resources to contact regarding: questions, withdrawal or post-experimental psychological harm. This research project ensures anonymity and confidentiality, as no identifiable or personal information will be collected in this study.

For more information please read the following sections.

**Potential risks and ethical considerations**
You will be required to consider a single moral dilemma and respond in accordance with whether you believe the action suggested is morally appropriate or inappropriate. Some of the actions proposed involve sensitive themes concerning the environment, for example deforestation and environmental pollution. Similar dilemmas have been used in previous social and psychological research (e.g. Kortenkamp & Moore, 2001; Khachatryan et al., 2013) and no ethical issues have yet to emerge. You will always have the choice to abandon the study anytime by simply closing the browser window. The research team has identified no risks associated with the current research.

This project has been reviewed by the *[insert relevant research ethics committee here]* (Reference Number: )

Questions and concerns can be directed to the research team of *[insert email and contact here]* or [*insert relevant research ethics committee here].* Please read through this form thoroughly. Once you have read this form and have given your consent to take-part in the research, the study will begin.

**Benefits**

You will be contributing directly to the field of environmental psychology and results will be shared with the academic community.

**Confidentiality**

The current research project abides by the Data Protection Act (2018) and General Data Protection Regulation (2016) guidelines ensuring participant information will be maintained confidential. No personal data or identifiable information will be collected in this study. The questionnaire responses will be held indefinitely.

**Withdrawal/premature completion**

Participants are free to withdraw from the study at any point by closing the browser window. No explanation is required for withdrawal, this is a right that all participants have within social research. Should participants abandon the study mid-survey, their data will be withdrawn and will not be utilised in the research. As no personal information is collected, it is not possible to delete responses after the completion of the study, however you will have the opportunity to withdraw and refrain from upload of data before the study end after you are debriefed.

# Appendix 3. Example of consent form

The information above outlines all potential risks and ethical considerations associated with the current research. It also informs you about the study's purpose and procedure. By ticking the following boxes, you are giving consent to take part in this research project.

| | |
|---|---|
| I am aware that my participation is entirely voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any point and without giving any reason and without my legal rights being affected | ☐ YES☐ NO |
| I have been made aware of any potential risks associated with the current research | ☐ YES☐ NO |
| I am aware that my responses during the study will be recorded for analysis by the researcher | ☐ YES☐ NO |
| I confirm that I have read the information for the above project. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily | ☐ YES☐ NO |
| I agree to the data I provide being stored, used, and analysed, as regulated by the principles of the General Data Protection Regulation 2016 and Data Protection Act 2018 | ☐ YES☐ NO |
| I agree to take part in the current study | ☐ YES☐ NO |

Signature: ............................................................... Date: ............................

Name in block letters: ..........................................................................

# Appendix 4. Example of participant information sheet (debriefing)

**Purpose of study**
Thank you for taking part in this psychological research, your support is much appreciated. This study is investigating moral reasoning people use in thinking about dilemmas in land use. Specifically, it investigated when people find one natural environment or ecosystem to be 'substitutable' for another. It is not uncommon, when valuable natural environments and ecosystems are built upon, for replacements to be proposed to compensate for their loss. For example, if a railway is going to be built over forest land, authorities will often propose that new forest land is planted and often this is greater in size than the land being lost. This study investigated when and why people think this is morally acceptable.

**Why your participation was necessary**
Your participation was necessary to help pinpoint whether land use changes are morally acceptable to people depending upon what benefits they provide and the size of the land.

**What will happen to your data**
Your data will be kept is anonymous. Within four months of completion your data will be analysed and incorporated into the results and discussion sections of a dissertation and may be included in future scientific publications.

**Right to withdraw data**
These data are anonymous and contain no personal information, so it is not possible to link requests to withdraw data with study responses.

**Potential concerns**
It is our duty to inform you that deception was not employed in this study and that no ethical issues were apparent from the onset. Nevertheless, if any feelings of psychological harm arose due to the study you just completed, please do not hesitate to contact the research team of [*insert research team members and contacts here*] or the University of Exeter's Ethics Committee [*insert relevant research committee and contact here*] If you wish to read a copy of the completed research project research team of [*insert research team members and contacts here*].

**Further reading**
If you are interested in reading more into the topic of moral psychology and the environment, some useful resources have been included below.

- Kortenkamp, K. V., & Moore, C. F. (2001). Ecocentrism and anthropocentrism: Moral reasoning about ecological commons dilemmas. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 21(3), 261-272.

- Khachatryan, H., Joireman, J., & Casavant, K. (2013). Relating values and consideration of future and immediate consequences to consumer preference for biofuels: A three-dimensional social dilemma analysis. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 34, 97-108.

Forest Research

Alice Holt Lodge
Farnham
Surrey GU10 4LH, UK

Tel: 0300 067 5600

Fax: 01420 23653

Email: info@forestresearch.gov.uk

**www.forestresearch.gov.uk**

Northern Research Station
Roslin
Midlothian EH25 9SY, UK

Tel: 0300 067 5900

Fax: 0 131 445 5124

Forest Research in Wales
Environment Centre Wales
Deiniol Road
Bangor
Gwynedd
LL57 2UW

Tel: 0300 067 5774

Email:
Wales@forestresearch.gov.uk

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