

1 **Research involving more than minimal risk that potentially requires a Central** 2 **University Research Ethics review**

3 The University of Liverpool, in facilitating innovative and high-quality research,
4 expects that such research is carried out to a high ethical standard. Research ethics
5 reviews assess the likelihood and magnitude of risks, considering both the minimal
6 risk of serious harm, and moderate risk of minimal harm, as ethical considerations
7 are different in each situation.

8 The University's two-tiered research ethics review process

9 The University operates a two-tiered system of research ethics review based on
10 potential ethical risks: with one tier comprising of research posing 'minimal risk', and
11 the other of research posing 'more than minimal risk'.

- 12 ▪ **Minimal risk research** is reviewed within a pool of reviewers at a Research
13 Ethics Committee within a Faculty (without the need for formal committee
14 meetings).
- 15 ▪ **More than minimal risk** research is reviewed at Central University Research
16 Ethics Committee meetings.

17 The online research ethics application form contains filters which alert the central
18 ethics team to research which may pose more than minimal risk. These applications
19 are then screened by the Chair of a Central University Research Ethics Committee
20 to determine the appropriate review route.

21 *Key points*

- 22 ▪ If the research may involve ‘more than minimal ethical risk’, then applicants
23 should plan the timelines for the research accordingly, taking into account the
24 [Central University Research Ethics Committee dates](#).
25 ▪ ‘Minimal risk’ does not imply lower standards of ethical review - only that the
26 applications so determined can often be reviewed by fewer people than a full
27 committee, and therefore be reviewed without having to wait for a forthcoming
28 Committee meeting. The fact that the research is perceived to involve minimal
29 risk should not be used as an excuse for a poor quality research ethics
30 application.

31 Research potentially requiring a central ethics review

32 The following section lists examples that constitute more than minimal risk to
33 participants in research. Research involving ‘more than minimal risk’ could include:

- 34 ▪ Potentially **vulnerable people**, for example: children and young people; those
35 with a learning disability or cognitive impairment; individuals where the
36 permission of a gatekeeper is required; potentially vulnerable individuals in a
37 dependent or unequal relationship etc.
- 38 ▪ Potentially **sensitive, embarrassing, or distressing topics**, for example
39 participants’ sexual behaviour, illegal or political behaviour, experience of
40 violence, abuse or exploitation, mental health, their personal or family lives, or
41 their gender or ethnic status. Elite interviews may also fall into this category.
- 42 ▪ Research involving **human material and invasive interventions**
- 43 ▪ **Deception, covert observation, or research conducted without participants’**
44 **valid and informed consent.**

- 45 ▪ Access to ***records of personal or sensitive confidential information***, or when
46 working with ***sensitive administrative or controlled data***.
- 47 ▪ ***Intrusive interventions*** or data collection methods, for example the
48 administration of substances; physical exercise, asking participants to wear
49 devices.
- 50 ▪ Potential harms for the participants, such as ***pain, psychological stress,***
51 ***anxiety or distress***.
- 52 ▪ ***Risk to the safety of the researcher***, for example researchers working in the field
53 and international research assistants working outside the UK in their own
54 community.
- 55 ▪ ***Social media and participants recruited or identified through the internet***, in
56 particular ***when the understanding of privacy in these settings is***
57 ***contentious where sensitive issues are discussed*** - for example in 'closed'
58 discussion groups, where there is potential for quotes to be identifiable, where
59 visual images are used etc.
- 60 ▪ Discussion of ***topics which raises considerations over whether there will be***
61 ***a duty to disclose*** the information provided during the research.

62 Examples of studies that involve minimal risk

- 63 ▪ Surveys of the general population involving non-sensitive subjects
- 64 ▪ Interviews involving professionals discussing their area of expertise
- 65 ▪ Secondary analysis of data gathered through the internet where there are no
66 issues of consent, identifiability or privacy