

## Research involving Sensitive Information

Section 8 “Prevent Duty” outlines one kind of sensitive information that University researchers may work with. However, it is acknowledged that researchers may work with other types of sensitive information, either online or in paper format, that could be misconstrued by observers as dubious, suspicious or even illegal and could therefore attract allegations of possible wrongdoing (e.g. where a researcher needs to view pornography, details of child abuse and other crimes etc.).

Furthermore, the University’s web filters may restrict access to materials that are linked to such research involving sensitive information e.g. webpages relating to pornography or illegal terrorist groups (called “proscribed organisations”), gambling, hate speech/crime and other illegal activities. However, the University supports legitimate research into these issues.

It is therefore important that the Research Ethics Online process identifies, at the earliest opportunity, that the research may require access to this kind of material so that this is logged officially and that arrangements can be made, via the University’s Website Filtering Policy and Review Process (sometimes known as a “whitelisting procedure”), for individuals who have received ethical approval for their research, to access otherwise restricted materials.

### Emotionally Sensitive Research

Although engaging in emotionally or socially sensitive research themes can be worthwhile and meaningful, it is crucial to be aware that the welfare and wellbeing of researchers may be affected by engaging in such challenging research. The onus of ethical management of research is normally placed on the researcher to ensure that research participants are not harmed, often missing necessary considerations for the wellbeing of the researcher. Researchers who are in sustained contact with socially sensitive research themes are exposed to greater risk, meaning that special attention should be paid to the wellbeing of postgraduate researchers who are normally researching a single project.

If your research involves socially or emotionally sensitive or demanding features, it is important to reflect from the beginning of the project on what kinds of subjects you, and any other researchers in the team, may come across and how you can mitigate and prepare for these. Researchers can engage with a range of practices to mitigate and manage any risks to their wellbeing, which can be included in methodological protocols. For example, these could include:

- Setting a suitable research schedule with built in breaks to limit exposure to socially sensitive or upsetting research materials.
- Role boundary setting during any qualitative data collection, e.g. making the role of researcher clear to research participants, and where participants can seek further support.
- Debriefing following interviews or data analysis (between peers, or with a Tutor, Supervisor or Principal Investigator).
- Peer-support to share experiences and coping strategies and using small peer groups within Departments.
- If you are a student, use of the University’s Counselling and Mental Health Support, or if you are a member of staff, use of the services offered by the Human Resources via MyHR.

### Secure Storage of Sensitive Research Information

Researchers using sensitive information should adhere to the guidance outlined in Section 13: Secure Storage of Data.