

MODULE LEVEL APPROVAL PROCESS INFORMATION AND GUIDANCE

This process applies to undergraduate and postgraduate taught students whose research projects would normally require proportionate ethical review.

Projects that require full ethical review must be submitted for individual review via the Ethics Online System (EOS), even if the student is studying on an MLA-covered module.

This process covers generic study methods/designs that can be applied across a range of scenarios (e.g. surveys and questionnaires).

Module Tutors are required to manage internal student applications in-house, independent of the EOS.

What is Module Level Approval?

MLA is an approval process that can be used to manage large cohorts of undergraduate and postgraduate taught projects. Projects should be managed within the scope of one approval, and supervisors are responsible for ensuring student projects remain within this scope. In practice this means that students on the module do not submit individual ethics applications. Instead, their project is covered by the scope of the module level approval application.

Using Module Level Approval is appropriate when students on the module will all be conducting the same type of activity which would normally only require proportionate review and will be using the same broad methods and procedures. Common aspects could include:

- Research methods and procedures (e.g. conducting interviews, surveys)
- Target populations
- The nature of the participants (N.B. no children or vulnerable adults)
- The type of method chosen to recruit and consent participants
- The template for the participant information sheet (PINS), consent form, and any debrief sheets, covering letters, written scripts if applicable.
- Copies of data collection tools (e.g. questionnaire (ideally pre-validated, or adapted), interview schedule, observation tools etc.)

Students can still opt to undertake a project that require full review, with the agreement of their supervisor, and they must make an individual ethics application.

How does MLA approval work?

The module tutor needs to write the project brief for students, ensuring potential ethical issues are addressed by specifying:

- Range of primary data collection methods that can be used (e.g. interviews, questionnaires, street surveys etc.)
- Target populations from which students can sample
- Target sample size
- Risk assessments linked to the methods available to students
- The legal basis for processing data for Module Level Approval is consent-based processing

The module tutor needs to submit an ethical approval form on the EOS. Please use this guide to ensure you submit under the 'Staff MLA Application' form. The application should contain:

- The framework noted above which outlines the scope of the research activities in the module
- The approximate number of individual or group research projects involved in the module
- The relevant participant information documentation (if relevant to the activity)

The relevant Associate Head of School for Research and Knowledge Exchange (AHoS RKE) is then assigned to review the MLA application and attached documentation. The Ethics and Integrity team in Research and Innovation Services (RIS) maintain a record of which modules have been approved in the EOS, and then review and approve any student applications which are submitted to the EOS and are noted as being linked to an MLA module.

The Module Tutor needs to ensure that all staff working on the module have completed the mandatory university ethics training module on NU People and Finance (NUPF). Whilst the module is running, the module tutor needs to ensure the below:

- That the module tutor introduces students to the importance of ethical research practices
- That the module tutor and supervisors guide students to design their methodologies/data collection activities to work within the approved MLA framework
- That students complete an internal ethics approval form
- That the module tutor keeps a record of these completed and approved ethics approval forms until after the projects are completed
- That the supervisors monitor student projects to ensure that activity remains within the scope of the MLA application
- That students who want to undertake research beyond the scope of the application submit an independent ethical approval application form to the Ethics Online System
- That the students destroy data they've collected at the end of the project

After the module is up and running, it is the responsibility of the Module Tutor to ensure that the application accurately reflects the activity of the module by reviewing the application annually. If there are any changes, the MLA is to be resubmitted as

an entirely new application. Every three years, the MLA approval will expire and will need to be resubmitted for approval.

Any queries or requests to see exemplar documentation, can be directed to the Ethics and Integrity team at ethicssupport@northumbria.ac.uk, or to the relevant AHoS RKE ([details can be found here](#)).

MODULE LEVEL APPROVAL ETHICS ONLINE SYSTEM APPLICATION USER GUIDE

This part of the guide will show you how to create, complete, and submit an MLA application to the EOS.

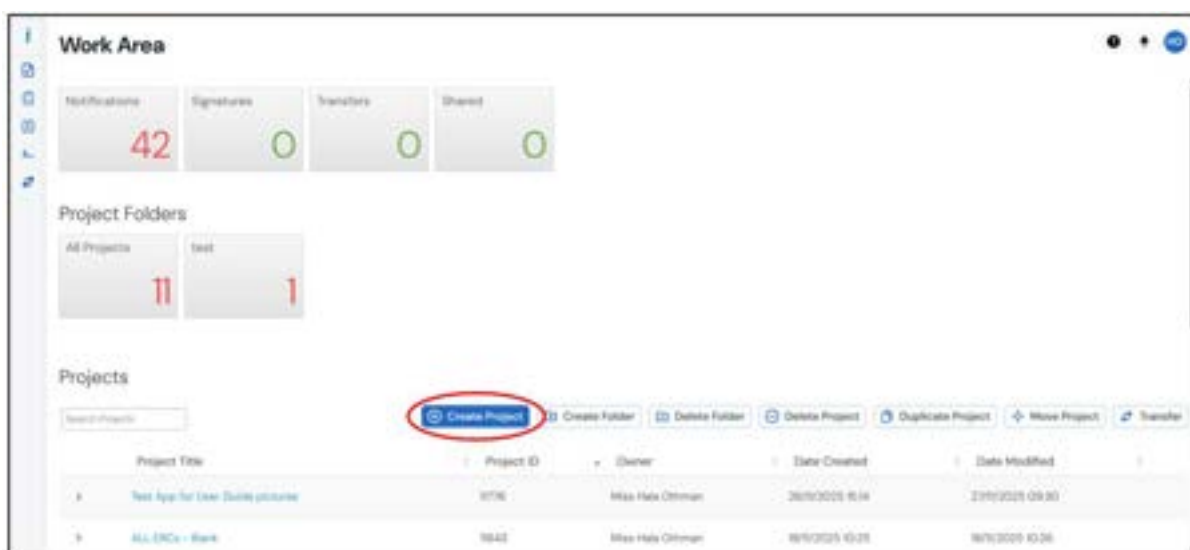
Step 1: Log into the Ethics Online System

Follow this link to access the [Ethics Online System](#) – or navigate to the Application portal from the [Ethics and Integrity webpages](#).

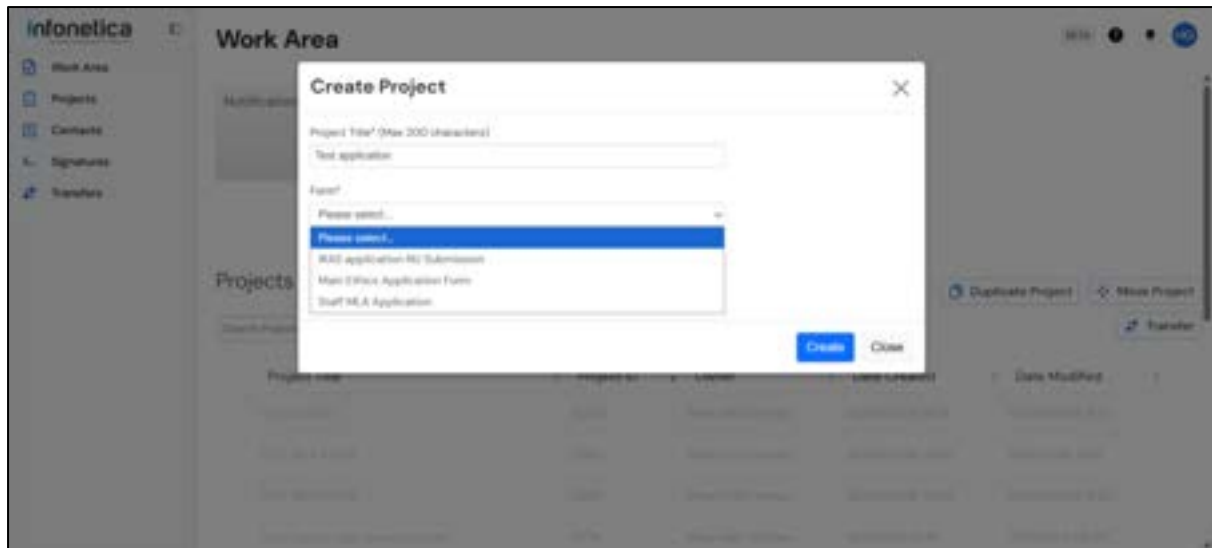
This will take you straight into your Work Area as the system uses your university details and single sign on.

Step 2: Creating an application

In your Work area, click on 'Create Project' in the Actions Bar in the centre of the page.

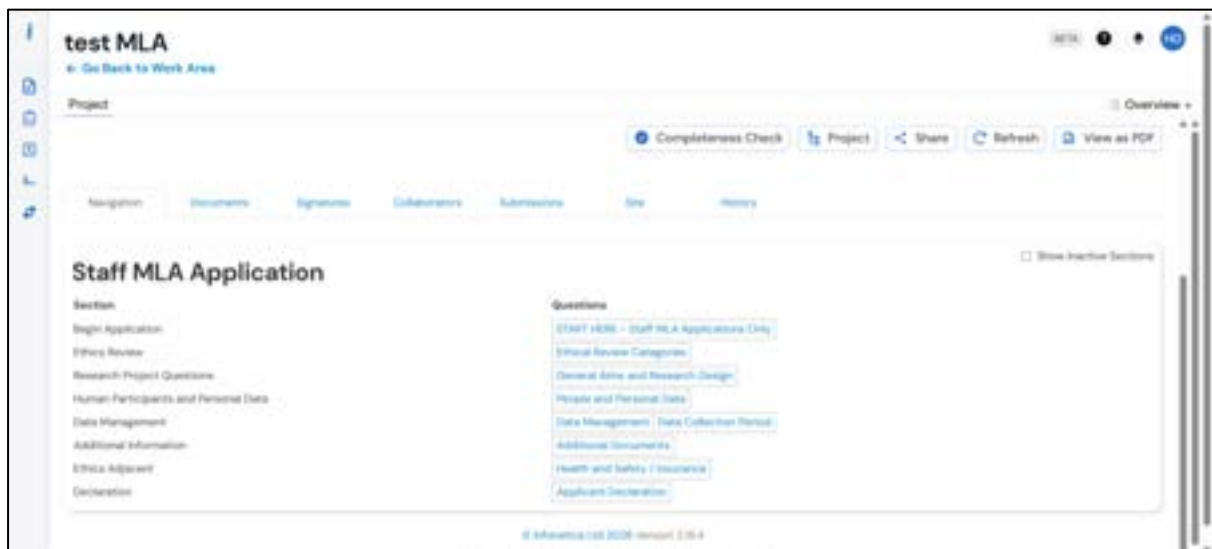


In the pop up, input the title of the project you wish to create. Please include the module code within the title of the application.

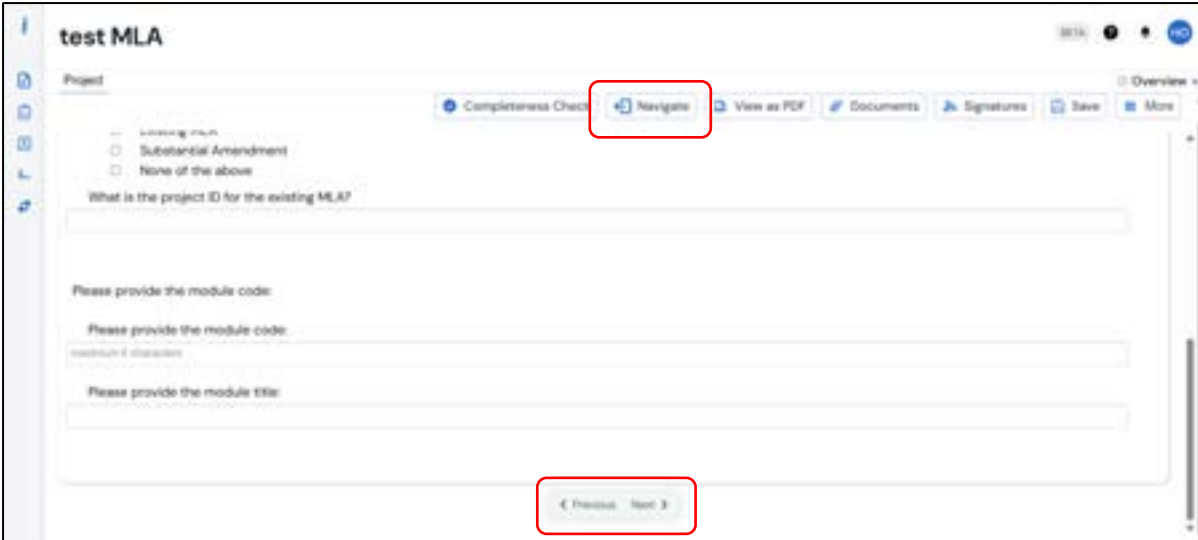


Step 3: Navigating your application

When you create the application, you will start on the 'Navigation' page. These are the mandatory pages of the form, but new pages may be added after you indicate the type of activity the students will be doing on the 'Ethical Review Categories' page. From here, you can click on any of the blue page titles to fill out your responses.



Once inside the form, you can use the 'Previous' and 'Next' buttons at the bottom of the page, to flip through the pages. Alternatively, you can click on 'Navigate' in the Actions Bar and this will take you back to the list of page titles.



Step 4: Completing the application

This step will detail guidance for just the mandatory pages of the form (except for 'People and Personal Data'). New pages may be added depending on the type of research the students will be undertaking on the 'Ethical Review Categories' page.

If you need further guidance on how to answer any of the questions not covered in this guide, please click on the grey 'i' to the right of the questions or contact ethicssupport@northumbria.ac.uk.

'Start Here' page

On this page indicate that you are a member of staff, input your faculty and school, and what kind of MLA application this is. Please input the project ID for the existing MLA if relevant, or the new module code if this is new MLA module.

Ethical Review Categories

On this page, read all the categories in full and tick any of the boxes that are relevant to the student projects. New pages may be added to your form based on these responses and will populate your form with the relevant questions to your study. These options are limited to activity which only requires proportionate review as any student research activities that require full review should be submitted as an independent application.

General Aims and Research Design

In these two boxes, please outline the general aims and research objectives, and then detail the research activity/methodology and any ethical considerations that are relevant to the activity.

People and Personal Data

This is not a mandatory page, but it is a very common page relevant to lots of projects. This page covers different aspects of working ethically with human

participants and the questions will prompt you to comprehensively consider different factors and mitigations.

For support on questions relating to consent, remuneration, best practices, and templates for consent documentation, visit the '[Documentation and Guidance](#)' webpage. For information relating to Safeguarding, visit the '[Policies and Procedures](#)' page.

At the bottom of this page in the form, upload copies of the provided consent documentation: this includes a Participant Information Sheet (PINS), Consent Form/s, and a Debrief Sheet where needed. You can also access copies of the documentation by clicking on the '?' icon at the top of your screen, and then 'Templates'. These templates have a top sheet with supporting information and boilerplate text to help you fill out these sheets.

Data Management

The university OneDrive is the required location for data storage as it is secure and backed up. If you need to store your data elsewhere – e.g. sharing it with other collaborators – then please tick both boxes and add further details in the relevant box.

Considerations around the collection of special category data are needed to ensure the participant anonymity is upheld, and this data need only be collected when it is relevant to the project. For information relating to Data Management and GDPR (General Data Protection Regulations), visit the '[Policies and Procedures](#)' page.

Data Collection Period

Please input the start date for the module. The scope of the application is to be annually reviewed and if there are any changes to the module, please submit an entirely new application. If there are no changes in three years from the start date and the module is still running, a new application is to be submitted to the EOS to renew the ethical approval for the module.

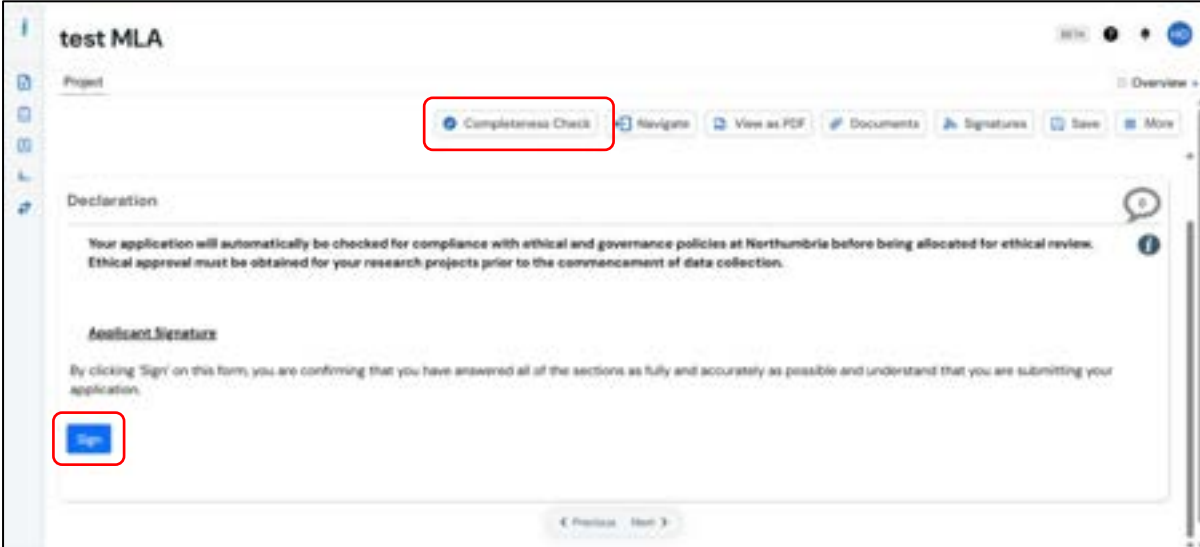
Health and Safety and Insurance

On this page, confirm that you have read the Health and Safety Policy and have considered if you need a risk assessment/s for the activity students on the module will be undertaking. If you are proposing any activity that poses any physical risks to the researcher, any participants, or others involved in your research; you will need to upload a risk assessment that has been approved by your Head of School, or a technical manager.

Please also confirm that the activity falls within the university Insurance policy. All activities fall under the low ethical risk category (a.k.a. only requires proportionate review) and therefore should be covered by university Insurance.

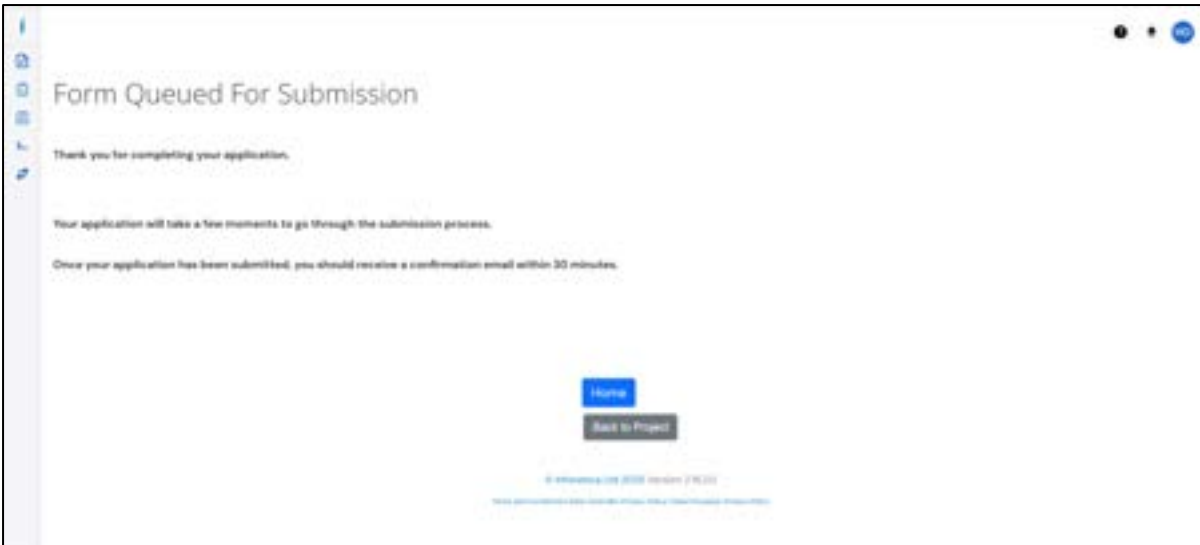
Step 5: Submitting your application

When you have completed the application form and are ready to submit, on the last page, it is good practice to click the 'Completeness Check' button in the Actions Bar. This will check your application for completeness and will flag any questions that you have missed. You can click on the text and jump to the questions to finish your form.



The screenshot shows the 'test MLA' application form. At the top, there is a navigation bar with buttons for 'Completeness Check', 'Navigate', 'View as PDF', 'Documents', 'Signatures', 'Save', and 'More'. The 'Completeness Check' button is highlighted with a red box. Below the navigation bar, there is a 'Declaration' section with text: 'Your application will automatically be checked for compliance with ethical and governance policies at Northumbria before being allocated for ethical review. Ethical approval must be obtained for your research projects prior to the commencement of data collection.' Below the declaration, there is a 'Applicant Signature' section with text: 'By clicking 'Sign' on this form, you are confirming that you have answered all of the sections as fully and accurately as possible and understand that you are submitting your application.' A blue 'Sign' button is highlighted with a red box at the bottom left. At the bottom center, there are 'Previous' and 'Next' buttons.

Once you click the blue 'Sign' button, your application will automatically be submitted for a triage review by the Ethics and Integrity team in Research and Innovation Services (RIS), and then by the AHoS RKE from your School. You should see the below screen after a successful submission.



The screenshot shows the 'Form Queued For Submission' confirmation page. The title is 'Form Queued For Submission'. Below the title, there is a message: 'Thank you for completing your application.' followed by 'Your application will take a few moments to go through the submission process.' and 'Once your application has been submitted, you should receive a confirmation email within 30 minutes.' At the bottom, there are two buttons: 'Home' and 'Back to Project'. At the very bottom, there is a small copyright notice: '© 2020 Infonetica Ltd. All rights reserved. Version 2.0.0.0'.

The Ethics and Integrity team have 3 working days to triage and review your application. Then, the AHoS RKE has 20 working days to review and return a decision to you. If either of them sends you revision requests, this timeline is paused. In total, the review process should take no longer than 25 working days (5 calendar weeks), so please allow enough time for the review process to take place before you would like your MLA to begin. Any notifications regarding applications will be emailed to you from Infonetica (the system provider). If you are not receiving these emails,

please first check your junk/spam inbox. You can also check the 'Notifications' tile in your Work Area.

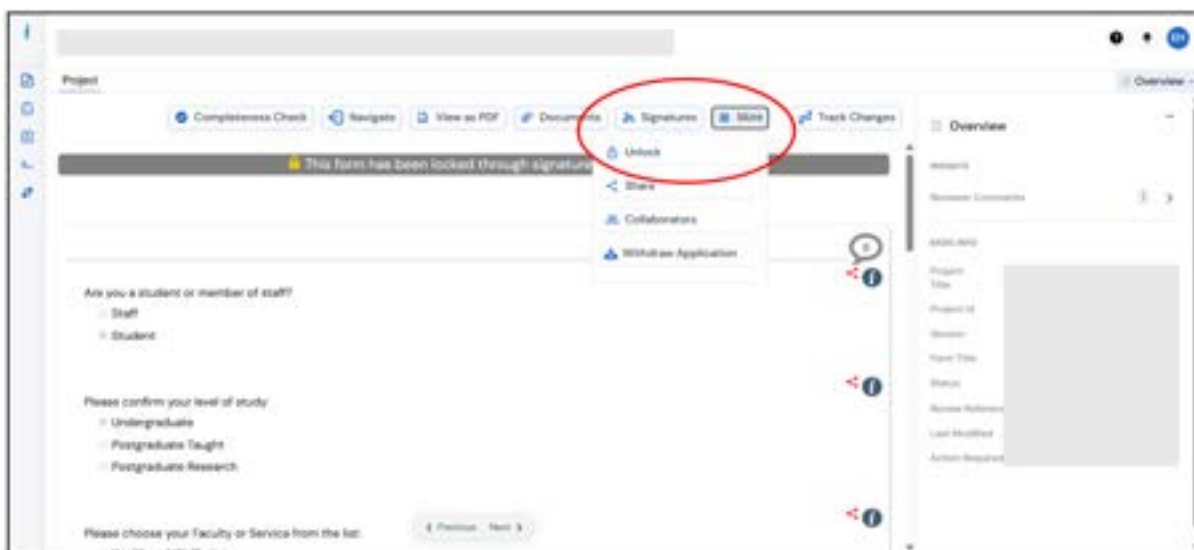
Step 6: Revision Requests

It is a normal, iterative part of the reviewing process to receive revision requests from either the Ethics and Integrity team or the reviewers in your school.

You will receive an email notification detailing the changes that have been requested. If you receive a blank email, please contact the Ethics and Integrity team at ethicssupport@northumbria.ac.uk and include the 4 or 5 digit project ID number.

To re-enter the system, you can either click on the system link in your notification email, or go via the same way as detailed in Step 1.

To make changes to your application form, you may be required to unlock your application. To do this, you need to open the application, navigate to any page, and click 'More' in the centre of the page, and then 'Unlock' (padlock icon).



This will then remove signatures and allow you to make revisions in line with the above comments.

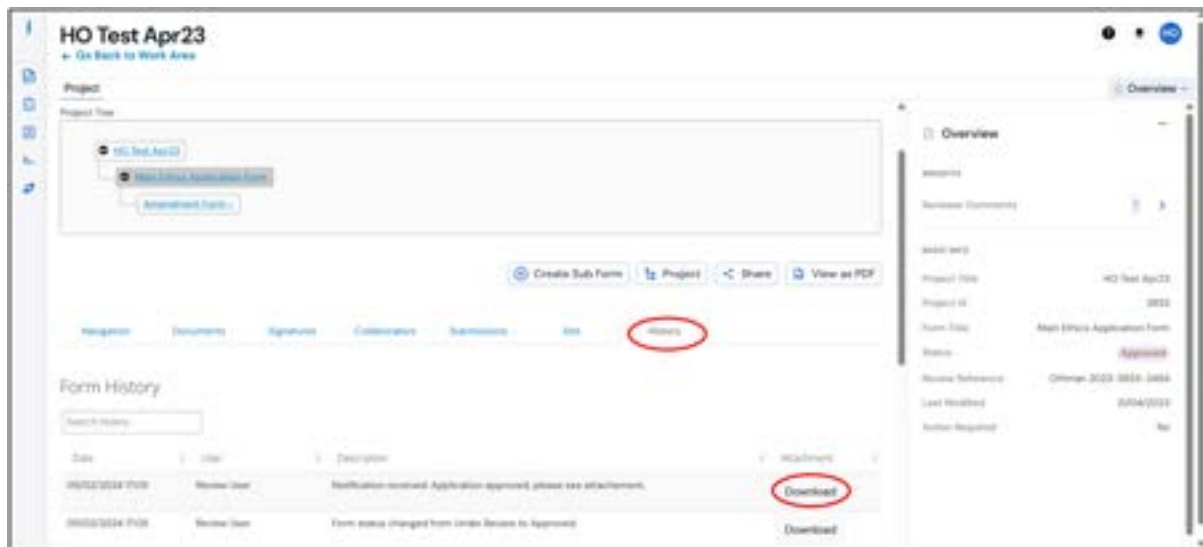
If you need further support with completing the revisions, please consult your [AHoS RKE](#) or you can contact the Ethics and Integrity team at ethicssupport@northumbria.ac.uk.

To resubmit, complete the 'Declaration' page again (as detailed in step 5) and your application will be resubmitted automatically.

Step 7: Managing your approved application

Once your application has been approved, you will receive an email with the approval letter attached.

You can also find a copy of your approval letter within the Ethics Online System. If you open your approved application and click the 'History' tab, you will see the "Notification received: Application approved, please see attachment" line. The attachment which you can download here is a copy of your approval letter.



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For further support, please consult the [Ethics and Integrity webpages](#) which include contact information, other user guides, and answers to frequently asked questions.