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, 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 Ethics Online System.

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. 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. 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 partisans
- The template for the information sheet, consent form, debrief sheet, covering letters (if applicable), written scripts (if applicable)
- Copies of data collection tools (e.g. questionnaire (ideally pre-validated, or adapted), interview schedule, observation tools etc.)

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 complete an ethical approval application on the Ethics Online System. Guidance on submitting an application can be found on the Training and Guidance webpage. 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 Department Ethics Lead (DEL) is then assigned to review the MLA application and the documentation. Once approved, the Module Tutor needs to email the module code and the ethics application ID number to ethicssupport@northumbria.ac.uk. This ensures that colleagues in the Ethics and Integrity team in Research and Innovation Services (RIS) have a record of which modules have MLA sign off, and can approve any student applications which come through the ethics system which 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 with 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

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