

Evaluation of research projects by the Ethics Committee of the University of Wuppertal

Guidelines for applicants

The Ethics Committee of the University of Wuppertal (EBUW) examines and evaluates upon application research projects according to ethical criteria with regard to the protection of human dignity as well as the autonomy and self-determination of people involved in research projects and issues statements on individual research projects.

Members of the EBUW:

Prof. Dr. Stefan F. Kirsch, Vice-Rector for Research and Digital Affairs (Chair),

Prof. Dr. Claus Ahrens, Prof. Dr. Martin Ohst, Prof. Dr. Armin Seyfried,

Prof. Dr. Alexandra Martin, Prof. Dr. med. Johannes Jörg.

Deputy members:

Prof. Dr. Aleksandra Kaurin,

Prof. Dr. jur. Sebastian Kluckert

Applications must be submitted in digital form to the EBUW office:

E-mail: prorektorat@uni-wuppertal.de; Telephone: 0202-439-2342

Detailed information on the tasks of the EBUW and the application procedure can be found in the "Guidelines of the Ethics Commission of the University of Wuppertal" (Amtl. Mittl. 70/13) dated 09.12.2013 and the Rules of Procedure (Amtl. Mittl. 33/14) of 26.06.2014.

In this document you will find the most important information for applicants and instructions to make it easier for you to submit your application.

Which research projects can be reviewed?

Research with and on humans conducted at the University of Wuppertal will be reviewed. Medical or pharmacological (but not epidemiological or health science) research projects are excluded from the review.

Who is eligible to apply?

Researchers at the University of Wuppertal are eligible to apply, as are doctoral candidates and students for final theses or study-related research projects that are supervised by a member of the University of Wuppertal.

Students and doctoral candidates submit the application together with their supervisor.

Am I obliged to submit an application?

As researchers, we are of course always obliged to observe laws and ethical standards. However, there is no obligation to submit an application to the EBUW. The reason for an application are often requirements from third-party funding bodies or publishers that make an ethics review prerequisite for financial support or for the publication of research results. In cases such as these, but also in other cases, the EBUW provides the responsible researchers with support in the form of advice and an assessment of the ethical aspects of their research. This does not affect the responsibility of the researcher for his or her actions.

What criteria are used for assessment?

The EBUW evaluates applications in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and the joint ethical guidelines of the German Psychological Society (DGPs) and the Professional Association of German Psychologists (BdP) as standard - this is because these guidelines are comprehensive, detailed, clearly formulated and also recognized by third-party funding bodies and journals beyond the field of psychology. On request, however, the EBUW will also base its assessment on other guidelines preferred by the applicant. Applicants confirm that they are aware of the guidelines to be applied and have taken them into account in their planning. The EBUW's decision will state the guidelines used for the assessment.

What is the application procedure and how long does it take?

There are two types of application: routine applications and full applications. Routine applications allow a much simplified and accelerated procedure compared to full applications. Whether a full application is necessary is decided on the basis of a basic questionnaire, which must always be completed.

If you were able to answer “no” to all questions on the basic questionnaire, it is sufficient to submit the basic questionnaire (together with a cover letter, a project outline, the participants' declaration of consent and written information for test subjects) (= routine application). You will then receive a decision within two weeks confirming that your project is ethically unobjectionable.

If you have answered “yes” to one or more questions in the basic questionnaire, a full application is required. You then also answer the detailed questionnaire and enclose further documents that are necessary for an assessment of your project from an ethical point of view. This includes detailed information on the prior information of the participants and their consent to participate (“informed consent”) as well as information on the exact procedure of the study. You should only enclose extracts from the test material of your study if this is necessary for the assessment of the ethical safety of the study (e.g. it may be sufficient to provide only examples from a series of similar stimuli). In the detailed questionnaire, for each question answered “yes” in the basic questionnaire, explain why this aspect of the study is necessary and how you will ensure that the ethical guidelines are adhered to with regard to these points. Full proposals are handled by a member of the EBUW, who is in charge of the application and consults at least two reviewers. The reviewers are scientists who generally have subject-related experience in ethical issues. On the basis of the reviews and the recommendation of the lead member, the EBUW makes a decision on the application and sends a reasoned statement to the applicant. This procedure usually takes around four weeks from the time of application to the decision. The following outcomes are possible:

- Certificate of ethical clearance.
- Certification of ethical clearance subject to conditions, which are communicated in the statement.
- Request for resubmission following changes to aspects that were assessed as ethically questionable or following the addition of information whose absence did not permit a final assessment.
- Rejection as ethically questionable.

EBUW statements always refer to the study as described in the application. If there are significant changes in the course of implementation compared to the application, the EBUW must be consulted again.

Form of application

Applications must be accompanied by a cover letter stating the title and the projected period of the study and containing an informal, hand-signed declaration of completeness and accuracy of the information in the attached questionnaire.

The signed cover letter and the applications should preferably be submitted in electronic form. Please send an e-mail with the subject line "Ethics application" to prorektorat@uni-wuppertal.de and attach the entire application documents as a PDF document. (Routine application: the completed basic questionnaire, the consent form of the participants, a study description/project outline. Full application: basic questionnaire with the attachments as for the routine application, plus detailed questionnaire with attachments).

If it is necessary to submit documents that cannot be sent as a PDF (e.g. video material), please attach them separately in electronic form or hand them in to the EBUW office in triplicate and marked with the applicant's name.

EBUW does not normally return application documents to applicants. One copy will remain on file for 10 years; copies made for the purpose of the assessment will be destroyed after the assessment has been completed.

Information on frequently asked questions:

How should personal data be handled?

Personal data is any information relating to an identified or identifiable person. If personal data is processed (collection, evaluation, archiving, deletion, etc.), data protection law is applicable and the resulting obligations must be fulfilled. The data protection law covers all - but only those - processing activities in which personal data is processed. In particular, the lawfulness of the processing (legal basis) and the information about it (data protection information) must be ensured for these processing activities. Personal data may only be processed by you to the extent required for the research purpose. The information page data protection in research projects (internal) provides you with information on data protection in the context of research projects. Information on other data protection topics and contact persons in the area of data protection can be found via the data protection information page (internal). Please deal with the implementation of data protection obligations in good time before starting your project and before submitting your application to the EBUW.

Must consent always be obtained from the trial participants?

Does this have to be in written form?

If personal data is collected, written consent must always be obtained (see above). In the case of completely anonymous surveys, the guidelines of the DGPs and the BDP (C.III. Point 6.) allow informed consent to be waived under certain conditions. This is the case, for example, if it can be reasonably assumed "that participation in the research will not cause any harm or discomfort that goes beyond everyday experiences and if the research relates to anonymous questions/questionnaires."

Otherwise, participants can also give their consent verbally for anonymous surveys. If the data collection is anonymous and a signed consent form would be the only document used to collect personal data, we recommend not obtaining a signature and instead obtaining verbal consent and documenting this (e.g. by a note from the researcher in the anonymous survey protocol).

What should be considered in a study that involves deception of the participants?

Deception is only justified if a significant gain in knowledge can be achieved and no alternative procedures are available to achieve the purpose of the study. Even in a study involving deception, the participant information,

which forms the basis of the consent to participate, must be completely truthful. (The deception must therefore not be “included” in this information.)

In particular, promises made to participants in the participant information, for example regarding compensation for participation, must always be kept. No deception may be made about aspects of research work that can be assumed to cause serious physical and/or psychological stress. Any deception must be explained as early as possible. Participants must be allowed to withdraw their data once they have been informed.

Is a single application sufficient for a series of similar studies?

Yes, applications for research projects that are divided into individual studies can be submitted once for all studies. The prerequisite for this is that the studies can be meaningfully summarized in terms of their methodology (study design, data collection method, form of interaction between the investigator and participants, stimuli used, group of people to be studied, etc.).