

**An Overview and Summary of the Ethical Codes of the Learned Society
Members of the UK's Academy of Social Sciences.**

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Generic Ethics Principles in Social Science Research

<http://www.acss.org.uk/Ethics/AcademyGenericEthicsProject2013home.htm>

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Preamble:

This document offers summaries of a number of the codes and statements concerning research ethics offered by the Learned Society (LS) Members of the Academy of Social Sciences of the United Kingdom. It was written on behalf of the Academy's Research Ethics Working Group and, specifically, as part of the project 'Generic Ethics Principles in Social Science Research' being run by the Academy of Social Sciences with funding and support from the Open University, the British Sociological Association, the British Psychological Society and the ESRC. The codes were retrieved from LS websites in January 2013 and the author, Nathan Emmerich, wrote the summaries presented here without recourse to the LS. They are, therefore, impressionistic and necessarily partial accounts of the more comprehensive discussion offered in the original documents. Readers are advised not to rely on these summaries when seeking guidance on the ethical standards of discipline but to refer to the original documents as appropriate.

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Introduction:

The UK's Academy of Social Sciences (AcSS) has 43 Learned Society (LS) members all of whom have an Internet presence, usually their own website but for some it is a few pages on the website of a larger organization, such as a university. These websites, or the relevant pages, were examined for a statement on the ethical aspects of conducting research in the discipline or domain of the Learned Society. 23 of the LS websites did not feature any such statement. 2 contained a statement on the professional ethics of members (See: Appendix 1: Professional Ethics). 5 documents explicitly concerned both professional and research ethics¹ and 12 were explicitly concerned with research ethics but, nevertheless, often included matters considered as matters of the professional ethics of researchers and/ or academics. 2 contained statements about ethics that were not concerned with either professional or research ethics (see Appendix 2: Other). This information is set out in table 1.

There is a discrepancy between the number of LS (43) and my classification of statements (44). This is because the website of the British Psychological Society contained two statements, one a statement on both professional and research ethics, the other being restricted to further guidelines on the ethics of research. Some webpages of other LS contained multiple statements (BERA; BSG; GSR). However all of these statements were of the same type ('research', 'professional' or 'research and professional' ethics).

As mentioned some statements presented as, and therefore classified as, being concerned with research ethics also contained elements of professional ethics. For example the ASA statement contains discussion of the researchers relationship with sponsors, funders, employers, colleagues, the discipline of anthropology and wider society. It may be that the distinction between a professional ethics and a research ethics is invidious. After all, the professional ethics of a researcher should include the ethical dimensions of conducting the main activity of professional researchers, i.e. research. In this view professional ethics subsumes research ethics. Nevertheless in what follows I focus on research ethics and not on the professional ethics of researchers and academics.

¹ All of these LS are for professional occupations such as Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP); Psychology (BPS), the British Academy of Management (BAM), Government Social and Economic Research (GSR & GES) and Evaluators (UKES).

Table 1: Types of Ethical Codes for AcSS Learned Societies

Society	Code Type	No.
Association for Learning Technology (ALT)	X	
Association of Social Anthropologists (ASA) ²	RE	1
Association for Tourism in Higher Education (ATHE)	X	
British Accounting & Finance Association (BAFA)	X	
British Association of Applied Linguistics (BAAL) ³	RE	1
British Association for American Studies (BAAS)	X	
British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) ⁴	PE/RE	3
British Association International & Comparative Education (BAICE)	X	
British Academy of Management (BAM) ⁶	RE/PE	1
British Association for Slavonic & East European Studies (BASEES)	X	
British Educational Research Association (BERA) ⁷	RE	4
British International Studies Association (BISA)	X	
British Psychological Society (BPS) ¹⁰	PE/RE & RE	2
British Sociological Association (BSA) ¹²	RE	1
British Society of Criminology (BSC) ¹³	RE	1
British Society of Gerontology (BSG) ¹⁴	RE	2
British Society for Population Studies (BSPS)	X	
Council for Hospitality Management in Education (CHME)	X	
Development Studies Association (DSA)	X	
Economic History Society (EHS)	X	
Government Economic Service (GES) ¹⁵	X (GSR)	
Government Social Research (GSR) ¹⁵	PE/RE	2
Housing Studies Association (HSA)	X	
Joint University Council (JUC) ¹⁶	RE	1
Leisure Studies Association (LSA)	X	
Media, Communications & Cultural Studies Assoc. (MECCSA) ¹⁸	RE	1
Political Studies Association (PSA) ²³	PE	1
Royal Geographical Society (incl. IGB) (RGS-IGB) ²⁶	O	1
Regional Studies Association (RSA)	X	
Regional Science Association International [British & Irish] (RSAI)	X	
Royal Statistical Society (RSS)	X	
Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) ²⁴	PE	1
Society for the Advancement of Management Studies (SAMS)	X	
Scottish Economic Society (SES)	X	
Society of Legal Scholars (SLS)	X	
Socio-Legal Studies Association (SLSA) ¹⁹	RE	1
Social Policy Association (SPA) ²⁰	RE	1
Social Research Association (SRA) ²¹	RE	1
Social Services Research Group (SSRG) ²⁵	O	1
Society for Research into Higher Education (SRHE)	X	
Society for Studies in Organizing for Healthcare (SHOC)	X	
University Association for Contemporary European Studies (UACES)	X	
The UK Evaluation Society (UKES) ²²	PE/RE	1

Key: X: No Code. PE: Professional Ethics RE: Research Ethics
PE/RE: Professional & Research Ethics O: Other

Summaries of Learned Society Statements on Research Ethics:

The Association of Social Anthropologists (ASA):²

Anthropology has a long history of engagement with the ethical dimension of research. The ASA guideline is no exception. It is 11 pages long and closely typed. The statement is centered on a concern for the ethics of the method - participant observation - and methodology – ethnography – that is central to the discipline of anthropology. Two ‘key ethical principles’ are identified. First, making participants aware of the researchers presence and purpose in an appropriate manner and, second, maintaining the ‘private nature’ of field notes, original records and personal data in order to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of subjects. Subsequent publication should not permit the identification of individuals in such a way that their welfare or security is put at risk.

Following these statements consideration is given to the question of advanced consent. It notes the difficulty in fully specifying the potential research participants to RECs and the fact that the public nature of research can render soliciting the informed consent of every individual present impossible. The document advises openness about being a researcher and sensitivity to local cultural norms. The guidance notes some communities can be suspicious of official documentation such as that often relied upon for informed consent. The advice is to repeatedly check with individuals encountered over an extended period. The need to pass through gatekeepers is acknowledged by researchers who are advised this does not constitute the consent of all. The researcher using photography and film is advised to do so in an overt manner.

The document notes responsibility lies with the research, that RECs need to ‘recognize the diversity of methods of ethnographic research’ and that the ethics of representation is a major concern for anthropologists. Some guidelines are offered, with discussion, often in a number of subsections, in the following structure:

I. Relations with and responsibilities towards research participants

- 1) Protecting research participants and honoring trust:
- 2) Anticipating harms:
- 3) Avoiding undue intrusion
- 4) Negotiating informed consent
- 5) Rights to confidentiality and anonymity
- 6) Fair return for assistance
- 7) Participants' intellectual property rights

II. Relations with and responsibilities towards sponsors, funders and employers

- 1) Clarifying roles, rights and obligations
- 2) Obligations to sponsors, funders and employers
- 3) Negotiating 'research space'
- 4) Relations with gatekeepers

III. Relations with, and responsibilities towards, colleagues and the discipline

² <http://www.theasa.org/ethics.shtml>

- 1) Individual responsibility
- 2) Conflicts of interest and consideration for colleagues
- 3) Sharing research materials
- 4) Collaborative and team research
- 5) Responsibilities towards research students and field assistants

IV. Relations with own and host governments

- 1) Conditions of access
- 2) Cross-national research:
- 3) Open research
- 4) Legal and administrative constraints

V. Responsibilities to the wider society

- 1) Widening the scope of social research
- 2) Considering conflicting interests:
- 3) Maintaining professional and scholarly integrity

This is followed by a short Epilogue and an Acknowledgements section. The most relevant section (I) is characterized by tone of engagement. Rather than offering ethical requirements the statement stresses the need to communicate with participants about the process of doing research both whilst the researcher is present in the community and regarding what is to be done once the researcher leaves, analyses and publishes the research.

British Association of Applied Linguistics (BAAL):³

The BAAL produces a 17 page document titled ‘Recommendations on Good Practice in Applied Linguistics’ that provides members with guidance on matters of research ethics. The document is structured around ‘relationships in research’ which is broken down into the following headings, the majority of which concern matters of professional ethics:

Responsibilities to Informants
 Responsibilities to Colleagues
 Responsibilities to Students
 Responsibilities to Applied Linguistics
 Relationships with Sponsors
 The Relationship between Applied Linguists and their Institutions
 Responsibilities to the Public

The relationship between linguists and informants is acknowledged to vary with the type of research being conducted. In some cases informants are better termed co-researchers or participants. Researchers have a general responsibility to respect the rights, interests, sensitivities and privacy of informants as well as to anticipate and avoid harmful effects, disruption to life and environment, stress, intrusion or exploitation. Relationships should be founded on trust and openness and, therefore, informed consent. However informed consent is understood to be complex as the

³ http://www.baal.org.uk/dox/goodpractice_full.pdf

nature of linguistic research, analysis, dissemination and publication may not be fully realized by the informant. Nevertheless research should endeavor to provide sufficient information about the research to informants, particularly where such information may affect their willingness to participate. 'Social, cultural, religious and other practices which might affect relationships and the willingness to participate' should be taken into account. Over the course of research informed consent might need to be renewed or renegotiated. Linguists should take care not to pressure informants to participate. Researchers should respect the confidentiality and anonymity of informants and make clear the limits of their ability to conceal their identity.

Covert research and deliberate deception are held to be unacceptable due to a violation of informed consent and privacy. However justification may be found to: withhold specific objectives of the research; ask informants permission for deception; and, in the last resort, solicit retrospective consent. The document distinguishes between deception and distraction. Informants should be consulted on completion of the research and the final reports/ other outputs should be made accessible to them for comment. The ethical issues attached to conducting research with children are briefly discussed as are those attached to conducting internet research.

The document closes with an afterword that details the authors/ contributors and reveals that it was first published in 1994 and revised 2006. It also suggests that the revised document aims to provide 'a checklist of recommendations rather than a definitive code of prescriptions' and to 'facilitate discussion about ethics rather than to draw up legislation.' The need for periodic revision is highlighted. A bibliography of material drawn on in the construction of the document is provided in the final section.

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP):⁴

BACP publishes a 15 page Ethical Framework for Good Practice in Counselling. A one-page extract is published as a Statement of ethical practice. Accompanying these documents is a Professional Conduct Procedure. These documents are primarily concerned with the professional practices of Counselling and Psychotherapy. BACP also produces a document entitled Ethical Guidelines for Researching Counselling and Psychotherapy. The ethics of practice and research are centred on Trust and its central role in the client-practitioner relationship. An active sense of ethical responsibility and a commitment to openness and accountability is required. The potential risks of any research should be carefully attended to whilst considering the individuals potentially affected and the integrity of the scientific and counselling work undertaken. Consulting individuals who are independent of the research and competent to identify potential risks and whether they have been adequately taken into account is considered important. Relationships with research participants can turn on whether the researcher is positioned as a detached and impartial observer or as an involved and value-committed participant.⁵ Care should be taken when the researcher is also involved in the provision of services to the client/ research participant. Over and above trust, relationships should be maintained on the basis of prior (adequately-

⁴ http://www.bacp.co.uk/ethical_framework/

⁵ One might point out that such an observer is committed to the values of detachment and impartiality and is, therefore, 'value-committed.' Nevertheless the point is well made.

informed, full and freely given) consent. This will normally involve the provision of written material and a written record. In case of complaint an independent body should be appointed and their contact details provided to the research participant. Issues of capacity to consent should be carefully considered, as should the appropriateness of proxy-consent provided by a primary carer. Best practice indicates consent should be seen as an ongoing process and reviewed at key-points.

Researchers should ensure that personally sensitive information is protected. Confidentiality is central to practitioner and researcher trustworthiness in counselling and psychotherapy. Any limits on confidentiality should be made explicit and repeated at relevant points. The document notes that in this field researchers should “expect to encounter dilemmas over the protection of personally sensitive information” and that “resolving these dilemmas may require innovative ways of approaching the dissemination and publication of research.” The document notes vulnerability and cultural/ social diversity as issues with ethical dimensions. Full consideration should be given to issues raised by these facets of research participant’s lives and the research design developed or altered accordingly.

The document provides a section on the integrity and governance of research that is primarily focused on issues of the professional conduct of social scientific research and the bureaucratic practicalities of ethical research. Further references and sources are provided at the end of the document as is a bullet-pointed ‘Summary of key ethical issues to be addressed during the research process.’

British Academy of Management (BAM):⁶

The BAM produces a Code of Ethics and Best Practice for its membership. The document details the nature of the Academy and its aims, responsibilities and membership. The Code of Ethics is organized around a number of principles, these being:

Responsibility and Accountability:
Integrity and Honesty
Respect and Fairness
Privacy and Confidentiality
Avoidance of Personal Gain
Conflict of Interest
Collegiality

There is little substantive guidance on matters of research ethics and the specification of these principles reveals the mixed professional / research ethics nature of this code of good practice. The bibliography directs members of the BAM to further material including the Academy of Management’s Code of Ethics, amongst others.

British Educational Research Association (BERA):⁷

⁶ <http://www.bam.ac.uk/news/bam-publishes-code-ethics-and-best-practice-policy-members>

⁷ <http://bera.dialsolutions.net/system/files/3/BERA-Ethical-Guidelines-2011.pdf>

<http://www.bera.ac.uk/resources/ethics-and-educational-research>

<http://www.bera.ac.uk/resources/ethical-issues-online-research>

<http://www.bera.ac.uk/resources/researching-powerful>

The documents concerning the ethical aspects of research available on the BERA website are:

- 1: A 12 page statement entitled 'Ethical Guidelines for Education Research' dated 2011. This builds on and revises guidelines published by BERA in 2004 and 1992.⁸
- 2: A 40 page document on 'Ethics and Education Research' written by Hammersley and Traianou and published online by BERA in 2012.⁹
- 3: A 7 page document on 'Ethical Issues in Online Research' written by Jones and published online by BERA in 2011.

For the most part the following summary is restricted to 1 which, unlike the others, is held to be a binding responsibility on all members, or at least "deliberation on these guidelines, and compliance where appropriate" is. The 'Principles Underpinning the Guidelines' are clustered around an 'ethic of respect' (for persons; knowledge; democratic values; the quality of research; and academic freedom) which are subsequently expressed under the following structure of 'responsibilities' (including subheadings):

Responsibilities to participants

- Voluntary Informed Consent
- Openness and Disclosure
- Right to Withdraw
- Children, Vulnerable Young People and Vulnerable Adults
- Incentives
- Detriment Arising from Participation in Research
- Privacy
- Disclosure

Responsibilities to sponsors of research

- Methods
- Publication

Responsibilities to the community of educational researchers

- Misconduct
- Authorship

Responsibilities to educational professionals, policy makers and the general public

Again we might distinguish between the ethics of professional researchers and 'research ethics.' The majority of the document concerns the latter whilst the majority of major headings concern the former. Discussion of 'voluntary informed consent' covers the usual facets of the principle but also considers the dual role of teacher/researcher; cultural sensitivity; gatekeepers; vulnerable adults; and child protection (UK standard). The issue of conducting research with children, vulnerable young people and vulnerable adults noting the relevance of the UN Convention on the rights of the child, the need to collaborate with the guardians of children of vulnerable

⁸ In a historical note the document is traced back to a 1988 BERA seminar which called for a 'code of practice.' The note then notes subsequent debate about the scope and application of the code leading to subsequent updating and revision.

⁹ Note: In 2012 Hammersley and Traianou co-authored 'Ethics in Qualitative Research' published by Sage.

(young) adults (parents, social workers, teachers) and to desist from conducting research if emotional or other harm is being caused. The need to take care when incentivizing research participants and to minimize any detrimental consequences of, for example, not being in the intervention wing of an experimental research design, as well as being open about them. Alongside maintaining confidentiality and anonymity, respect for privacy is considered to be the norm. However the right of participants to be identified if they so choose is noted as are their rights under the Data Protection Act (DPA 1998). The limits of confidentiality are also noted and the need for open discussion of concerns with the relevant parties if disclosure is to be pursued.

The document by Hammersley and Traianou, most of which is bibliographic appendices, consider minimizing harm, respecting autonomy, protecting privacy, offering reciprocity and treating people equitably, to be the ethical principles of educational research. They note the potential for conflict and differing interpretation. They also note the difficulty of dealing ethically with multiple individuals and the importance of situated ethical judgment. They question how ‘voluntary,’ ‘free’ and ‘fully’ informed consent can be, the legitimacy of ethical regulation and the regularity and seriousness of the ethical issues that arise in educational research.

The document on internet research notes the degree to which it blurs the boundary between public and private and complicates anonymity and confidentiality. It also notes that informed consent may be difficult to obtain online and the changing nature of the field.

British Psychological Society (BPS):¹⁰

The BPS publishes two documents concerning ethics. The first, titled ‘Code of Ethics and Conduct’ focuses primarily on ethical aspects of the professional practice of psychology and psychologists. Nevertheless the definition of ‘psychologist’ includes ‘researcher’; ‘research participants’ are included in the definition of ‘client’; the discussion of psychology’s guiding ethical principles (Respect, Competence, Responsibility and Integrity) consistently includes reference to research; and points 3.3 and 3.4, made under the rubric of Responsibility, concerns the ‘Standard Protection of Research Participants’ and the ‘Standard of debriefing of research participants’. However the BPS Code of Human Research Ethics is a larger and more comprehensive document and, whilst it often references the Code of Ethics and Conduct, I take it as my focus here.

The Code of Human Research Ethics defines ‘Research ethics’ as the “moral principles guiding research from its inception through to completion and publication of results” (p.5). The guiding principles are:

- Respect for the Autonomy and Dignity of Persons.
- Scientific Value.
- Social Responsibility.

¹⁰ <http://www.bps.org.uk/what-we-do/ethics-standards/ethics-standards>
<http://www.bps.org.uk/publications-old/policy-guidelines/research-guidelines-policy-documents/research-guidelines-policy-docum>

- Maximizing Benefit and Minimizing Harm.

Each of these is afforded a brief discussion encompassing a 'Value Statement' and 'Ethics Standard.' The idea of 'moral rights' - including rights to privacy, self determination, personal liberty and natural justice - is claimed as a necessary component of respect for dignity. As such psychologists are required to 'develop and follow procedures for valid consent, confidentiality, anonymity, fair treatment and due process' (p.8). Respect for privacy, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw from research are all discussed in section 2.1.¹¹ Section 2.2 renders scientific standards an ethical matter. However, in the rubric I have adopted here such matters are a function of the professional ethics of researchers. Nevertheless this code recommends that the ethical approval of a research protocol should be withheld if there are questions regarding its scientific merit. Section 2.3 suggests that psychology is a part of the society it studies and that it should develop a sense of its social responsibility. Section 2.4 concerns the maximization of benefit and the minimization of harm, whilst this may be considered related to the previous point. the focus here is primarily with individual research participants. Nevertheless these may be weighed against 'potential societal benefits' (p.12).

Section 3 concerns 'Risk' and notes that the level of ethical review should be proportionate to the potential risks of any proposed research. A number of factors are identified as increasing the risk of research, these include: the vulnerability of the participants; a focus on sensitive topics; the inclusion of deception; accessing personal, confidential or otherwise sensitive information; research involving stress, anxiety or pain (including repetitive or prolonged testing); invasive interventions or collection of biological samples; potential for adverse impact on employment or social standing; and research with the potential to 'label' subjects. The potential for risk should be weighed against the potential benefit of the research and the interests of other stakeholders.

Section 4 covers 'Valid Consent' and seven pages are devoted to discussion and specification of the term. The importance of providing full information to research participants is noted as is the need to seek consent in a manner consistent with the research topic and design. That additional information might need to be required where video or audio recording takes place and that further consent may be required for subsequent use of these materials. Also noted is the need for participant information to be informed by the assessment of risks posed by the research. A 19 point list, which follows a discussion of who can consent (a topic also addressed in section 10), provides further specification of the information that might need to be provided to participants. Discussion of the appropriate documentation of consent and the circumstances which might require the renewal of consent complete this section.

¹¹ There is an interesting aspect to the presentation and language used in this document. Rather than discussing what psychologists *ought* to do the text refers to what psychologist actually do. For example 'Psychologists have respect for the autonomy'; 'psychologists are naturally willing to explain the nature of the research;' and 'psychologists will seek to ensure that people's rights are respected.' This is an unusual way to present a normative code or a set of standards that psychologists are required to live up to.

Section 5 covers the principle of Confidentiality and the limitations to any guarantee of anonymity that may be inherent in the design of research or may result from legal obligations with greater priority, such as the duty to protect individuals from harm. Section 6 covers the giving of advice, presumably ‘psychological’ advice, to research participants. The document counsels caution in offering advice and referral where appropriate. Section 7 covers deception in psychological research and notes its problematic nature, the difference between withholding some details of the research and falsely informing participants about the nature of the research. It notes that providing full information may not be possible for methodological reasons, that observations in natural settings should respect the privacy and psychological wellbeing of the individuals studied and that individuals who are observed ‘in public’ may still consider their privacy to have been intruded upon if observed by a researcher. Section 8 covers the need to debrief participants in psychological research, especially where deception has taken place. Section 9 sets out some principles of best practice in ethics review including Independence, Competence, Facilitation, Transparency and Accountability. It also discusses the role and constitution of a REC and the training and development of members; the need for institutions to monitor the conduct of research; and the proper conduct of a ‘devolved’ or departmental level REC.

The two concluding sections offers further guidance on a variety of points previously discussed including working with vulnerable populations (children, those lacking capacity; individuals in dependent or unequal relationships); research conducted within the NHS; independent practitioners; and Student Research.

The British Sociological Association (BSA):¹²

The BSA publishes a fifteen page ‘Statement on Research Ethics’ dated 2002. Appended are eight pages of resources and bibliographic material that was last revised in 2004. The statement acknowledges the codes of the Social Research Association, the American Sociological Association and the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth. The preamble positions the statement as drawing attention to the ethical issues of research, denies that it provides a recipe for ethical choices, the diversity of sociological research, the potential for conflicting and competing obligations and interests, and as offering advice and basic ethical principles that nevertheless, on the basis of proper deliberation, may need to be departed from. The document consists of 61 numbered statements and they are clustered under the following headings:

1. Professional Integrity (5 points)
2. Relations with and responsibilities towards research participants (3 points)
3. Relationships with research participants (18 points)
4. Covert Research
5. Anonymity, Privacy and Confidentiality
6. Relations with and responsibilities towards Sponsors and/ or Funders
7. Clarifying Obligations, Roles and Rights
8. Pre-empting Outcomes and Negotiations about Research

¹² <http://www.britisoc.co.uk/about/equality/statement-of-ethical-practice.aspx>

9. Guarding Privileged Information and Negotiating Problematic Sponsorship
10. Obligations to Sponsors and/ or Funders During the Research process

Clusters 1, 2, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 are predominantly matters of professional ethics and good research governance/ practice, although section 9 does indicate the ethical relevance of the sponsor who is also a gatekeeper and the significance of their relationship to the research participants for conducting research.

The first points made regarding research participants are that sociologists ‘enter into personal and moral relationships with those they study’ (p.2); that the desire to advance knowledge does not override the rights of others; and that researchers have some responsibility for the use to which their data may be put. Sociologists are charged with ensuring the physical, social and psychological well-being of research participants and to protect their rights, interests, sensitivity and privacy. The document recognizes the difficulty of balancing these potentially conflicting factors. The potential for a positive and negative differential in power between the researcher and the researched is noted and suggests relationships should be based on ‘trust and integrity’ (p.3). The potential for public interest to override researcher’s obligations to participants is noted as is the importance of freely given informed consent and the right to withdraw from research. Sociologists should not give unrealistic guarantees of confidentiality and not share or show research data, including visual data, to unauthorized audiences. The research participants access to data, rights to remove, add or otherwise amend it and their right to review work prior to publication should be discussed. Consent may be a multiple person and ongoing process. It is noted that individuals are also members of groups or cultures and the sociologist should take care not to adversely affect this membership. The final points in this section refer to issues of consent when dealing with the vulnerable or children.

The issue of covert research and the ethical challenges it raises is discussed in three points. Whilst the potential for covert methods to be necessary in some instances is noted researchers should remain aware of legal requirements and consider obtaining post-hoc consent. The following section discusses anonymity, privacy and confidentiality and questions the need to record certain kinds of personal data, data security, the practical, legal and ethical limitations of confidentiality, confidentiality in relation to groups and the challenges of conducting research in the internet.

British Criminological Society (BSC):¹³

The BSC offers a 6 page ‘Code of Ethics for Researchers in the Field of Criminology.’ The text also refers to itself as a Code of Practice. The document has the following structure:

1. General Responsibilities
2. Responsibilities of Researchers Towards the Discipline of Criminology
3. Researchers' Responsibilities to Colleagues
4. Researchers' Responsibilities towards Research Participants
5. Relationships with Sponsors

¹³ <http://www.britsoccrim.org/codeofethics.htm>

- 6. Further Information
- 7. Frequently Asked Questions

The majority of these headings (1, 2, 3, 5 and 6) cover issues of professional ethics. Section 4 covers the responsibility of researchers ‘to ensure that the physical, social and psychological well-being’ (p.2) of research participants whilst also stressing the need to ‘minimize’ any ‘disturbance’ the research might cause participants. Researchers should protect the rights, ‘interests, sensitivities and privacy’ (p.3) of research participants. They should consider their vulnerabilities and whether or not any offer of support or information should be offered. Researchers should also be aware of the constraints organizations may face when participating in or facilitating research and the need not to burden them unnecessarily. The need for informed consent, excepting exceptional circumstances (which pertain to the topic’s importance rather than difficulty of access), is highlighted, as is the need to explain fully all aspects of the research and in a manner that is meaningful to participants. The right to withdraw is noted, as is the need to be clear about the limits to anonymity and confidentiality. The need for particular care to be taken when participants are young or otherwise vulnerable is noted. As is the need to seek the consent of institutions responsible for children but not to assume this abnegates the need to seek the child’s assent.

The importance of discussing the uses of research data with research participants, especially if such data or such uses may result in their identification, is highlighted. As is the relevant legislation covering data, and the challenges of conducted research on the internet, or research that is comparative, or cross national, where there may be conflicting codes of practice or jurisdictions. The FAQ section covers a number of dilemmas native to criminological research.

British Society of Gerontology (BSG):¹⁴

The BSG Guidelines on ethical research with human participants is 8 pages and the preamble (Background and Preliminary questions) begins with a discussion of the scope of gerontology and the possibility that it might focus on personal and private aspects of older peoples lives such as health, housing and social care. It highlights the importance of fully considering what it might be like to participate in the proposed research and how researchers might respond to any unmet needs of those being researched that become apparent in the course of conducting the research. The structure of the remainder of the document is as follows:

- Undertaking ethical research
 - Basic principles
- Ethical research practice
 - Teamwork
- Piloting research methods
 - Interpersonal fieldwork
- Procedure (including a link to a model ‘agreement to participate’)
- New ways of working

¹⁴ <http://www.britishgerontology.org/ageing-studies/bsg-ethical-guidelines.html>

Ethical Clearance and the NHS
Social Care Research Ethics Committee
Integrated Research Application System (IRAS)
ESRC – Framework for Research Ethics (FRE)
The RESPECT Code Of Practice
Other ethical guidelines

The basic principles guiding the BSG code are: respect for human rights; participants ‘should be given full details of what will be asked of them’ (p.2); the researcher should be CRB checked where necessary; inform prospective participants about the known and possible consequences; respect for the privacy and psychological well-being of individuals, accounting for cultural issues; researchers should offer something in return (a thank you note, a copy of report, acknowledgement of input); the use of incentives should encourage the prioritization of participation rather than participation itself; avenues for complaint should be provided. Full information should be given in written form as participants may wish to consult others regarding their participation. Assurances about levels of confidentiality and anonymity should be made. Accessibility, presentation, dissemination and archiving of data should be discussed with participants (reference is made to the Oral History Society).

Teamwork, and the possibility of an advisory group overseeing a research project, is positioned as a way to increase the likelihood of research being of high quality and ethical. As is the piloting of research methods. The section on interpersonal fieldwork lists the ethical principles: do not harm; be prepared; respect the agency of participants; adopt non-oppressive strategies free of prejudice and discrimination; abide by the law (data protection, copyright); respect the assurances given; and honesty and integrity. The final section covers obtaining ethical approval, including approval in the context of NHS and social care settings, as well as other resources to draw upon.

Government Social Research (GSR): Incl. Government Economic Service (GES)¹⁵

GSR and GES are separate members of AcSS. However both are professional services within the UK civil service. The GSR publishes a number of Professional Guidance documents concerning aspects of research practice including; a study of research participant’s views regarding the ethics of social research; a document about setting up and managing social research Framework Agreements in government; the publication of government research and the recruitment of *researchers*. These documents are not discussed here. What follows is a summary of the GSR’s ‘Ethical Assurance for Social Research in Government.’

This 24-page document draws on the ESRC’s REF (now FRE), the SRA’s ethical guidelines; and the Market Research Society’s Code of conduct. It is also held to be ‘consistent with the values’ of the Civil Service Code. The introduction to the document sets out the departmental responsibility to ensure appropriate ethical standards are met in all research they conduct or commission whilst the substantive

¹⁵ <http://www.civilservice.gov.uk/networks/gsr/publications>
<http://www.civilservice.gov.uk/networks/gsr/gsr-code>

guidance is organized around 5 principles that constitute the 'Ethical Responsibilities' of Government researchers. These as:

- 1: Sound application and conduct of social research methods, and interpretation of the findings
- 2: Participation based on informed consent
- 3: Enabling participation
- 4: Avoidance of personal and social harm
- 5: Non disclosure of identity

Principle 1 can be considered a matter of the professional ethics of researchers and is obviously directly related to the values embedded within the Civil Service Code as well as the norms of scientific research. Principle 2 details a strong requirement for the consent of research participants to be sought, unless the law compels participation (as is the case with the Census). It should be made clear participation is voluntary and that participants can refuse to answer certain questions and may withdraw entirely. They must be given sufficient information to enable them to make an informed decision. Recording methods should be agreed in advance, further consent may be required after data collection has taken place if, for example, raw data is to be presented at a conference or if the use of the data will differ to that originally detailed. Consent may have to be renegotiated and special considerations are attached to children and vulnerable adults. Researchers 'must ensure they can demonstrate' that participants are fully informed about the study, that their consent is voluntary and that they can withdraw. Data should be stored in a manner consistent with the Data Protection Act that may also give participants the right to have their data destroyed. Secondary data analysis should be consistent with the original consent.

Principle 3 is the enablement of participation and it is, one assumes, meant to directly reference the role research conducted or commissioned by civil servants plays in government and, therefore, the need to ensure the democratic representation of interests. Consideration should be given to: the potential costs of participating in research; provision of services to facilitate participation (e.g. interpretation); methods of data collection (e.g. providing assistance completing questionnaires); sample design (e.g. ensuring the inclusion of rural as well as urban citizens); and user involvement e.g. consulting with hard-to-reach groups on how to ensure access/participation.

Principle 4 charges researchers with the responsibility to avoid causing their participants personal or social harm. This is taken to mean the physical, social and psychological well-being of the individual and the wider social groups or organizations to which they belong. Research should not: be inappropriately intrusive; raise false hopes; adversely affect reputation; provoke avoidable distress; or violate participant's privacy. Where there is a risk of distress the provision of support should be considered. Principle 5 covers the non-disclosure of identity and it should be maintained even where the participant is unconcerned about disclosure. Steps should be taken to protect the identity of those recruited through third parties. Data should not be used for purposes other than research and care should be taken with small and/or localized samples, particularly data of a qualitative type. Legal advice should be sought where appropriate and/ or necessary.

The discussion conducted in section 3, departmental governance arrangements, gives further information about who might be considered vulnerable or at risk and regarding what might be considered a sensitive topic. Departments may wish to nominate a member and an ‘ethics sponsor,’ someone who is competent to serve as a source of advice and information for those conducting research.

Joint Universities Council: (Social Work Education Committee)¹⁶

The JUC is comprised of three committees: Social Work Education Committee; the Public Administration Committee; and the Social Policy Committee. Only the Social Work Education Committee produces a statement on ethics, in this case it is a ‘Code of Ethics for Social Work and Social Care Research.’ The statement is comprised of 15 points and was produced as part of an ESRC seminar series ‘Theorising Social Work Research.’¹⁷ It is claimed that social work/ care research (and the uses of its findings) “should be congruent with the aims and values of social work practice and, where possible, seek to empower service users, promote their welfare” and wider equality. Researchers should work together with the disempowered and conduct research that is emancipatory, that respects human rights and that aims towards social justice. Such ‘research ethics’ indicate that social work/ care research is, like social work/ care itself, constructed as a fundamentally ethical project. This orientation should be considered an aspect of the professional ethics of social work/ care researchers albeit one that is closer to a ‘research ethics’ than has been the case in other instances I have discussed.

The code requires researchers to maintain a primary concern for the welfare of their research participants and to “actively protect participants from physical and mental harm, discomfort, danger and unreasonable disruption in their daily lives or unwarranted intrusions into their privacy.” They should not discriminate and ‘where appropriate’ “predicate their work on the perspective and lived experiences of the research subject.” A high level of justification is required for research based on deception, and the right of individuals to withdraw from research is to be respected. Consent is to be sought, and effort should be made to solicit the consent from those who are impaired (appropriate language etc.) whilst also seeking the consent of appropriate third parties.

Media, Communication and Cultural Studies Association (MeCCSA):¹⁸

The website of the MeCCSA contains a Statement of Research Ethics Guidelines. This is not ‘a detailed code of research practice’ because of the ‘diversity of disciplinary orientation, methodological approach, and conceptual foundation’ of research in this field. They also distinguish between “a code designed to provide ethical guidelines for the conduct of empirical research, and one which addresses

¹⁶ <http://www.juc.ac.uk/swec-res-code.aspx>

¹⁷ This seminar series also produced the British Association of Social Work’s code of ethics published as: Butler, I. “A Code of Ethics for Social Work and Social Care Research.” *British Journal of Social Work* 32, no. 2 (2002): 239–248. The JUC code draws on this document and I am led to understand that social work/ social care researchers, who may or may not be members of the JUC-SWEC, are likely to refer to this broader document for guidance on the ethical aspects of their research.

¹⁸ <http://www.meccsa.org.uk/resources/meccsa-statement-of-research-ethics-guidelines/>

wider issues of the purpose, social implications, or policy application of research” i.e. between specifically research ethics and a broader professional ethics. Nevertheless the statement includes principles of both research and professional ethics, including:

A commitment to ethical research (reference is made to codes of other relevant bodies and associations)

Research should, to the greatest extent possible, be made available to the public and policy-makers.

The design of research should be guided by researchers and not the commissioners or funders of research.

Research should be interpreted by researchers and be aimed at creating new knowledge.

An appendix refers members to other codes and information including that of the ‘International Communication Association’ that, like MeCCSA, has not established a comprehensive code but offers a similarly constructed guidance.

Socio-Legal Studies Association (SLSA):¹⁹

The SLSA publishes a 9 page documents that aims to alert members, funders and institutions to ethical concerns and potential conflicts of interest that may arise in research. It recognizes the diversity of Socio-legal studies and so does not set out to be comprehensive. It recognizes the need to balance competing principles, values and interests. The document is organized around 10 ‘principles,’ some of which have been edited for presentation here:

1: Members should consider the SLSA’s Principles of Ethical Research Practice when commissioning, supervising, designing, conducting, writing and publishing or presenting research.

2: Socio-legal researchers bear responsibility for maintaining the reputation of the discipline/ subject area.

3: Principal socio-legal researchers should ensure colleagues are aware of this Statement.

4: Socio-legal scholars should credit appropriately contributions in research collaboration.

5: Socio-legal researchers have responsibilities for the safety and well-being of themselves and their research teams.

6: Foundations of research relationships.

7: Based on full knowledge of all material matters researchers normally should obtain the consent of participants,

8: Socio-legal researchers should respect anonymity, privacy, confidentiality and protect data.

9: Socio-legal researchers should be aware of their wider social responsibilities.

10: Socio-legal researchers should strive to ensure that funded research and consultancy retains intellectual and ethical integrity and that their limitations and those of the research produced are made clear both in submitting tenders and in publishing results.

¹⁹ <http://www.slsa.ac.uk/research-area>

Numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 9 and 10 are primarily matters of professional ethics and research governance. Principle 6 grounds research ethics in the personal and moral relationships that are formed between researchers and research participants in the course of research. Trust should be the basis for these relationships wherever possible. Public interest and the abuse of power may lessen the obligation of trust and protection. Researchers should protect the rights, interests, sensitivities and privacy of those they study. Due consideration should be paid to the diversity and inclusivity of research projects.

The Principle of ‘informed consent’ (7) offers a consideration of issues surrounding: obtaining consent; consent by proxy; obtaining data from proxies; longitudinal research; gatekeepers; and covert research. Whilst a written record of consent might be preferred, verbal consent is acceptable where the circumstance recommend it. In some instances, such as conducting research in public settings, there may be no expectation of privacy and no need for consent. Researchers should ensure research participants are aware they can refuse to participate. Proxies are recommended for those who do not have capacity. Data should not be sought from proxies if there is reason to think the subject might object. Consent may need to be reaffirmed and renegotiated during longitudinal research. Gatekeeper consent does not obviate the need for the consent of the research participant and care should be taken not to adversely affect the relationship between gatekeepers and research participants. Covert research should be justified in the public interest and it is vital to safeguard the anonymity of research participants. Retrospective consent should be sought if identifying material may be disclosed.

Discussion of principle 8 takes place under sub-headings: Confidentiality preserving the anonymity of data; legal obligations; institutional context; and shared data. Guarantees of confidentiality should not be made where it is unrealistic that it can be maintained and some research objectives may require *participants* to waive their right to confidentiality. Researchers should be aware of any potential legal requirements to break confidentiality, as in the case of serious offences being committed. Appropriate steps should be taken to ensure the confidentiality of data, including altering identifying information, the conditions under which it is stored.

Social Policy Association (SPA):²⁰

The SPA offers a set of guidelines that provide a framework within which members can ‘identify and address the different kinds of ethical issues which may arise in the conduct of social policy research.’ The SPA affirms the need for dialogue, training, and debate as well as the need for formal ethical review and approval where necessary. The guidelines are not intended to be prescriptive and reference is made to other codes, including the SRA’s (see below). The guidelines identify four overlapping constituencies towards which social policy researchers have ethical responsibilities, these being: society in general; research participants; research sponsors and funders; and colleagues and the profession. The constituencies are used

²⁰ http://www.social-policy.org.uk/downloads/SPA_code_ethics_jan09.pdf

to structure the remainder of the document and, in what follows, I focus on what is said about the responsibilities of social policy researchers to research participants.

The listed obligations to research participants are:

The protection of research participants from (social, psychological and physical) harm.

The protection of research participants' rights, interests, sensitivities and privacy.

To consider the needs of vulnerable groups.

To solicit the informed consent of participants.

To protect the confidentiality of participants.

The provision of information about support services

To share research findings with participants

To store data securely.

To archive data (for no less than 7 years)

The guidance also briefly mentions internet research, the virtues of involving users in the design of research, and the advisability of convening an advisory panel to address complex ethical issues. In order for informed consent to be valid, participants must be given information in terms that are meaningful to them. This should include details on the nature of the research, what their participation involves, any potential harm that may result from their participation, who is funding the research, and the uses to which the results may be put. Researchers should also anticipate the potential future uses of the anonymized data for secondary analysis. Consent should be regarded as an ongoing process and participants should be made aware of their rights to withdraw. Further information should be provided as necessary and particular care should be taken to protect subjects from harm and their anonymity when conducting covert research or secondary analysis. In all cases steps should be taken to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of research participants, particularly those whose social position may make them potentially identifiable. The document notes the limits of confidentiality where the researcher has a legal or moral duty to report incidents of harm.

Researchers are charged with being aware of any (actual and potential) conflicts of interest in the conduct of their research, and should be reflexive about their research, and transparent with peers, public and funders about the process of conducting research. The appendix lists a number of other codes and sources.

Social Research Association (SRA):²¹

The SRA publishes a comprehensive 66-page document on research ethics which recognizes the diversity of research methods and the contexts in which they are used. Last updated in 2003 the document seeks to guide the work of members, to document widely held principles and identify 'factors which obstruct their implementation' including potential conflicts between ethical principles that researchers must resolve. The code is positioned as flexible, informative and educational. The code is predicated on 4 overarching obligations: to society; to funders and employers; to

²¹ http://the-sra.org.uk/sra_resources/research-ethics/ethics-guidelines/

colleagues; and to subjects (research participants). A short specification of these obligations is presented as Level A of the document whilst a more in depth discussion of or commentary on their meaning is 'Level B,' which also offers a discussion of Ethics Committees (IRBs). Level C provides further bibliographic references, both to academic publications and other codes of ethics, a standard protocol for framing ethical reflections on research and contact details for SRA officers who can consider matters of research ethics and offer advice and discussion.

As obligations to society, funders, employers and colleagues are primarily matters of professional ethics, in the following I focus on the section that discusses the obligations of social researchers to their 'subjects' or research participants.

The section on obligations to subjects has the following structure:

- Avoiding undue intrusion
- Obtaining informed consent
- Modifications to informed consent
 - Respecting rights in observation studies
 - Dealing with proxies
 - Secondary use of records
 - Misleading potential subjects
- Protecting the interests of subjects
- Enabling participation
- Maintaining confidentiality of records
- Preventing disclosure of identities

Social researchers should not unduly intrude into the lives of subjects and should bear in mind that they are not entitled to study all phenomena. Researchers can intrude into people's lives in a variety of ways including the way in which their enquiries are made. The document notes that people can be wronged without being harmed. Expressing the Kantian idea that people should be treated as ends in themselves and not as mere means, researchers are warned not to treat subjects as, simply, the object of their research. In addition research should not be overly demanding, or collect too much information.

Informed consent, and obtaining it, should be based on the provision of full disclosure of information including the voluntary nature of their participation and any details of the research that might affect their willingness to participate. The document notes that the boundary between persuading a subject to participate in research and placing them under duress is a fine one and researchers should take care when recruiting subjects to ensure their consent is adequate. The issues associated with negotiating consent and access via gatekeepers is discussed, as are those associated with the informed consent of vulnerable subjects. Written records of informed consent are positioned as common but not always necessary or desirable. The following sections discuss more general limitations on informed consent including in studies where disclosure may modify observed behavior (in such cases post-hoc consent can be sought), the use of proxies, the analysis of official records, and the use of deception. The importance of subject's and public trust in social science is highlighted as essential to the ongoing project of social research.

The requirement for researchers to protect the interests of subjects is not obviated by informed consent. Subjects may be harmed by stress and other psychological factors, by impacts on their relationships with others, including social groups, or via harm to social groups as a whole. Potential harms need to be weighed against the benefits of research and, in cases where the balance is a fine one or the potential harms are large, external advice should be sought. The document notes the potential relevance of the Human Rights Act but that its relevance for social research is, in 2003 as now, not fully clear. The SRA's document charges social researchers with enabling the participation of those who may be otherwise excluded for reasons of communication, disability, comprehension or expense. Confidentiality should be maintained but, equally, any potential limitations on confidentiality should be made clear to research participants as part of informed consent. Researchers should also make efforts to ensure the identity of research participants remains undisclosed. The right of research participants to have their identities disclosed is also noted.

The UK Evaluation Society (UKES):²²

The UK Evaluation Society publishes a set of Good Practice Guidelines that is not publically available but provided to members when they join.

Appendix 1: LS Statements solely concerned with Professional Ethics

Political Studies Association (PSA):²³ A code of academic professional conduct, largely relating to collegiality.

Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI):²⁴ Code of professional conduct for town planners.

Appendix 2: Other

The webpages of the following societies contained statements on ethics that did not focus on research or professional practice and so were excluded from the above discussion.

Social Services Research Group (SSRG):²⁵ The Social Services Research Group publishes a 120 page Research Governance Framework which was in response to the Research Governance Framework for Health and Social Care (Dept of Health, 2005). However it is not a 'research ethics' code or set of guidelines but a 'Resource Pack for Social Care.' This document is designed to assist those local authorities who have Social Services Responsibilities to fulfil their role in ensuring that research involving their adult clients with social care needs or their staff is carried out in an ethical and

²² <http://www.evaluation.org.uk/about-us/publications>

²³

<http://www.psa.ac.uk/sites/default/files/GUIDELINES%20FOR%20GOOD%20PROFESSIONAL%20CONDUCT.pdf>

²⁴ <http://www.rtpi.org.uk/membership/professional-standards/>

²⁵ <http://ssrg.org.uk/governance/>

sound way. It contains guidance for “those involved in setting up and running governance systems in local authorities or for people who take part in the review of relevant research.” Local authorities are required to ‘review’ any research before it can take place in arenas for which they have statutory responsibility. This document offers instruction on how such review can be institutionalized as is required by law. Its presentation conflates the governance of research by a ‘gatekeeping’ organization and the ethics of research conducted by researchers who may or may not be members of that organization.

This governance procedure involves the ethical evaluation of research proposals but can also be seen as a gatekeeping process — a process that researchers must negotiate to gain permission to access the ‘population’ to be researched. As councils have built in the negotiation of access to social care populations into a governance procedure called ‘ethics’ it difficult for external researchers to avoid double review. It is interesting to note that it is, at least in part, built on an ‘Ethics Approval Route Map’ agreed by Economic and Social Research Council, the National Research Ethics Service, the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services and the Association of Research Ethics Committees. Members of the SSRG and other social care and social policy academics and researchers had some involvement with and influence on its development.

Whilst chapter five of the document does detail the ethical aspects of conducting research in this context it is presented for the use of those with responsibility to approve research rather than for the use of those designing and doing research. Thus, whilst it is not overly different to a statement of research ethics for researchers and, indeed, some researchers may draw upon it, it is omitted from the summaries provided in the main part of this document. This chapter also appears to suggest that the governance procedures of Councils should review the scientific merit of research proposals. It also includes a statement on including research users and carers in the *governance* of research i.e. as lay members.

Royal Geographical Society including the Institute of British Geographers (RGS-IBG):²⁶

The RGS-IGB publishes a three page Research Ethics and Code of Practice based on the principles of equity, integrity and confidentiality. Whilst the document contains some detail about the ethical conduct of research it is primarily concerned with the process surrounding applying to the RGS-IGB for funding and the responsibilities of those assessing applications. It is a code, labelled ‘ethics’ but is primarily for the assessment of grants/ awards even if it suggests ethical issues should be noted in applications. The ‘Ethics Policy’ includes a good deal of professional ethics (accurate conduct of research, collegiate behavior). However it also requires researchers to be honest about the purpose, methods, intended and possible uses of research and any attendant risks. They should maintain the confidentiality and, unless otherwise agreed, anonymity of research participants. Ethical considerations should be paid to: human participants; non-human animals; historical artifacts; any potential damage to natural

²⁶ <http://www.rgs.org/NR/rdonlyres/CBD85FFC-9B56-4C2F-A615-7B41DD02C6B8/0/NewResearchEthicsandaCodeofPractice.pdf>

or historic environment; and the uses of sensitive social, economic or political data. Research should be reviewed in proportion to likely risk and “Wherever necessary, appropriate consent should be obtained.”