

# Teaching Research Ethics: A New Resource for an Old Need

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Project Snapshot  
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## Project Overview

This project aimed to provide online learning materials in research ethics which can be used both by students at the University of Leeds, and outside.

All Leeds students do a final year project, and so many of them need to have some understanding of research ethics. However, it can be difficult to find time in the curriculum for this. An online course which students can do flexibly is therefore a way of providing them with the information they need, but without having to compromise other curriculum content.

In conjunction with the Digital Education Service, a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) was created, using the FutureLearn platform.

This course equips students to: understand the history of the development of research ethics principles; recognise and evaluate key principles of ethical research, and reflect on the ethics of their own research.

The digital learning objects from the MOOC are available to be used to create online learning materials on the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) more specifically for Leeds students. Bespoke materials for different schools can be created based on their specific needs.

## Project Objectives

- To create a flexible, online course on research ethics, which can be used by students based at University of Leeds and outside of Leeds.

## Methodology

Meetings were held with Directors of Student Education and an online survey was conducted with students. This research helped to identify what the needs were and what kind of course would be most appropriate.

A steering group was set up to advise on the project. This group included teaching staff from different faculties involved in teaching research ethics, members of LITE and the Digital Education Service, the Senior Research Ethics Administrator from Research Innovation Services, and the Research Ethics Training and Development Officer from Organisation Development and Professional Learning. The group met three times.

A Course Design Manager at the Digital Education Service helped to create a detailed course outline. This was then discussed with the steering group and then taken to the digital programme approval group (DPAG), who approved it.

Some of the LITE funding available for the project was used to hire two postgraduate researchers from the IDEA Centre to help write the course material and advise on the content and look of the course.

## Outcomes

A free, flexible, online course has been provided which can be taken by University of Leeds students external learners.



The course is a six-hour MOOC on Futurelearn, and can be found [here](#).

In addition, some of the materials from the MOOC have been transferred onto the VLE. These can be used flexibly by any school who would rather their students access the materials on the VLE. This year they have been uploaded onto a module in the Management School to be used as an extra resource for students to consult.

As of 17th May 2019, there have been 3,152 people join the course, of which a total of 2,399 have actually taken part in the course. The majority of learners have been European, but a sizable proportion come from Asia and Africa too and there have also been learners from North and South America and Australia.

Of those surveyed so far, 98.34% said the course met or exceeded their expectations, and there have been many positive comments from learners, for example:

“This was an excellent course that exceeded my expectations. The offline activities were particularly valuable in helping me develop and think through issues related to my research, and prompting me to create material I will use for my own ethical review forms.

“This course has had a genuine impact on my understanding of the subject and will have a lasting impact on my conduct as a researcher.”

One of the planned outcomes of the project was to raise the profile of the University of Leeds by making this MOOC widely available on Futurelearn. We hope that this is being achieved.

## Challenges

One challenge was writing a course to fit how Futurelearn looks and works. However, the Course Design Managers at the Digital Education Service were extremely good at advising on how to make the course more interactive and about the different types of activities we could do.

A second challenge was making the course suitable for such a diverse audience. As the course had to be appropriate for students from any country in the world, this meant that we had to make sure it wasn't too UK-focussed. We also couldn't assume that the students would be researchers, as they could just be taking it out of interest.

The final challenge is how best to promote the course and use it with Leeds students.

There were some initial reservations about hosting the course on Futurelearn, as I was concerned that tutors would not be able to monitor whether their students had done the course, and that the start dates would not be flexible enough for students. These concerns were alleviated by the steering group and we are continuing to work on promoting the course and develop ways that it can be used with students at Leeds.



### Next Steps

We will continue to promote, monitor and review the MOOC.

At IDEA we provide research ethics teaching in several schools, so we will continue to work with them to find the best ways of meeting the needs of their students.

**For more information about this project please contact Natasha McKeever at [n.mckeever@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:n.mckeever@leeds.ac.uk).**

