MTC Guidelines for Research Ethics

1. Why does research require ethical approval?

As part of good research governance, research requires ethical review and approval. This is:

- to protect your and your participants rights and welfare and minimise the risk of physical and mental discomfort, harm and danger from research procedures
- because consideration of the ethical issues is likely to help you think about the stages of your research more carefully
- to avoid potential problems later on, by ensuring that the main foreseeable ethical issues are addressed before the research starts
- to protect your rights as a researcher to carry out legitimate investigations
- to protect the reputation of your organisation in respect of research conducted by its staff
- in order that you are insured to carry out your research
- to minimise the potential for claims of negligence made against you, and any participating collaborators/organisations.
- because refereed journals increasingly require evidence of ethical approval before they will publish your work.

Please note that ethical approval for research does not substitute for the need to obtain appropriate professional insurance in situations where this is required.

2. When should I start thinking about ethical approval?

You should start to consider ethical issues at the earliest possible stage in planning your research. A proper consideration of ethical principles is relevant to, and will almost certainly influence, fundamental aspects of the research design from research methods to sampling. Any ethics panel - for example public (IRAS), or within universities health care and educational settings - will want to be assured that you have thought about all aspects of your research and addressed potential risks and ethical issues. You must also allow sufficient time for necessary consultation as part of the ethical review process. Changes may be needed to your application, which may then need to be resubmitted to your ethics panel. Finally, some studies will need other permissions or approvals, which can also take time to obtain. For example, you may need a Disclosure and Barring Service Check (see https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service) and sometimes any permissions can take a while

3. Collaborative research

If you are engaged in collaborative research where another organisation is the Lead Organisation, you need to check that other collaborators have obtained ethical approval from their own institution if required and clarified their insurance arrangements. In your application for research ethics approval, normally you will be guided by your supervisor and by the organisation you work for.

4. Individual freelance workers/therapists

If you are in this category, it is strongly advised that you approach a university or make sure you have a supervisor or collaborator experienced in ethics guiding you. If you do not have previous experience of carrying out a research project at post MA level, it is advised that where possible, you contact a University where there is an established music therapy programme, see https://www.bamt.org/training/music-therapy-courses-hcpc-approved.

5. Research involving people who lack capacity and working with the NHS

University research ethics committees cannot legally approve any research with people aged 16 years and above, who do not have capacity to consent. Similarly, for any study involving participants in the NHS, it is likely you would need formal approval through the Integrated Research Application System (IRAS). https://www.myresearchproject.org.uk/Signin.aspx
For this, if you are new to applying in this way, you would need guidance from others who have made a previous application. This is another reason why making sure you have adequate supervision or support; guidance is essential.

6. Pilot studies

If you intend to carry out a pilot study, you must obtain ethical approval for it first. Any research to follow up the pilot study will also require ethical approval.

7. Reuse of previous research data

You may be able to reuse data obtained from previous research. You will need to check that ethical approval was obtained and that participants gave appropriate permission for the data to be reused in the way that you intend. There may also be copyright and/or intellectual property issues to consider. If you wish to reuse data, you are advised to seek guidance from your supervisors and colleagues in the organisations you are working with.
This link to the Concordat on Open Research Data may also be helpful
https://www.ukri.org/files/legacy/documents/concordatonopenresearchdata-pdf/

8. Conflicts of interest

If there are any conflicts of interest, these must be declared in any ethics application. This includes a conflict of interest arising from the funding for the research.

9. Research design and measures/materials to be used in the research for gathering data

For any ethics application you will need all your materials prepared and ready, this will include participant information sheets and consent forms. Universities provide guidance on this, so this is another reason to carry out your research in collaboration with a university, or with an organisation where there is guidance available for this.

10. Compliance with ethics procedures

Researchers are required to fully participate in an ethical review process. Failure to comply could lead to withdrawal of funding or in funding not being agreed at the outset, so to protect your participants and you, it is important to address this in any application.

NB These are guidelines drawn up through the MTC; however, please note that your ethics procedures cannot be agreed by the charity. It is your responsibility to ensure that you comply with the procedures as outlined above, relevant to your particular situation, population, participants, and organisation.

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