

Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences (AHSS)

Social History / Participant Recruitment

For Trainees

Why case studies?

A core function of the UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO) is to provide independent, expert, and confidential advice on the conduct of research, from promoting good practice to addressing allegations of misconduct. We have been doing this since 2006.

Each request for assistance received by UKRIO increases our body of knowledge. These 'lessons learned' not only inform our response to subsequent enquiries but also underpin our other activities, especially UKRIO's education and training work.

We have found that illustrative case studies are an excellent way to raise awareness of research integrity and research culture and to illustrate the complexities and 'grey areas' that can occur.

Case studies are not literal accounts of any enquiry to UKRIO. Instead, they are scenarios, based on real-life situations, which illustrate recurring or notable issues and problems that have been brought to our attention. While some case studies may mention a particular discipline or setting, they contain themes that are relevant across subjects.

Please note that this case study is fictitious. Any similarity to actual persons, organisations or events is coincidental.

Case study 11

Two *social historians* at your university have been conducting research into squatting, focussing on the large squatting movements involving ex-service personnel and their families following World War II. Their next piece of research will compare these movements with present-day squatting movements. Interviews with homeless families currently (illegally) occupying empty properties will be compared with oral histories of squatting in the years after World War II.

The researchers have submitted their research proposal for ethical approval and are **awaiting an ethical opinion from their Faculty's ethics committee**. The project does not involve any external funding.

The Head of the School of History becomes aware that the researchers have begun recruiting participants to their study before the ethics committee has given its ethical opinion – *i.e., the researchers have commenced the study without having a favourable ethical opinion for the research*. She discovered this when several members of the public contacted the university with questions about a consent form which they had signed for the study.

It appears that the researchers became aware that a rally was to be held in support of families occupying a large, disused local authority property in a nearby city. They felt that this would be a good opportunity to find participants for their study, so they attended the rally and began recruitment. All potential participants were provided with a detailed information sheet describing the research and everyone recruited to the study has completed and signed a consent form.

When approached by the Head of School, the researchers admitted that they had begun recruiting participants before the ethics committee had given its opinion on the research. *They defended their actions, saying that the rally was too good a recruitment opportunity to miss*. They also felt confident that the committee would grant a favourable ethical opinion for their work, and neither reject it nor request any changes. As the researchers are saying this to the Head of School, an email arrives in their inboxes with the decision of the ethics committee.



Please discuss and decide:

1. How should the university address this situation?
2. Does it make a difference on what the ethics committee decides at this stage?
3. Can the research project still go ahead and are there any particular actions the university should take?



Promoting integrity and high ethical standards in research
Providing confidential, independent, and expert support

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