Ethics Committee

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

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Do I have to submit every project application to the Ethics Committee?

- **No**. There is no obligation on the part of the BOKU to submit research projects for a statement by the Ethics Committee. Submissions to the Ethics Committee are always voluntary.
- Usually, applications are submitted for research projects (1) for which the funding agency requests a statement from the Ethics Committee, or (2) the results of which are intended to be published in a scientific journal that requires an ethics statement.
- The Ethics Committee is not in charge of animal experiments (see information sheet about the difference between animal experiments and research on and with animals on the website of the Ethics Committee).

The data has already been collected and analysed. The journal to which I want to submit the manuscript requests a statement from the Ethics Committee. Is that still possible?

- **Yes**. The Ethics Committee at BOKU been installed in October 2020. An application can be submitted 'in retrospect' for all **data collected up to December 2022**.
- **No**. For all **data that has been collected after December 2022**, the application must be submitted before the start of data collection.

I will use a (written) questionnaire in my research. Do I have to wait until I have the final version of the questionnaire before submitting an application to the Ethics Committee?

- **No**. The application should include the (almost) final version of the questionnaire. However, it might be opportune to conduct the pre-test while the Ethics Committee reviews the application. It may also be necessary to adapt the questionnaire at a later time in the research process. However, the Ethics Committee needs to have the final questionnaire on file.
- The Ethics Committee must thus be informed about every change in the questionnaire (a brief explanation what was changed and why). The Ethics Committee will review the changes and assess whether they are ethically relevant and whether the changed questionnaire is covered by the issued Ethics Statement. If the changes lead to new

ethically relevant questions, the applicants will be requested to submit a revised application.

I will submit a project proposal for funding, do I have to submit the final version of the research proposal?

- **No**. The research proposal submitted to the funding agency does not have to be submitted. It contains a lot of information that is not relevant to the Ethics Committee.
- The application to the Ethics Committee can be submitted independently of the research proposal, which is often still being finalized. The application to the Ethics Committee should briefly describe the overall project and address the ethical aspects in more detail.

For a project proposal that will be submitted to a funding agency, not all details (e.g. test design, questionnaire) are known. Is this a problem?

- **No**. If the details of the research design have not yet been determined or documents such as questionnaires, form for informed consent, etc. are not yet available, they do not have to be submitted. However, the research project and in particular the planned data collection must be described in sufficient details. In addition, the ethically sensitive aspects must be clearly identified (see checklists on the website) and the application must include a detailed description of how they will be taken into account.
- From the researchers' point of view, it is advisable to submit a new application to the Ethics Committee after the project has been approved, but before the start of data collection. This is particularly relevant if the results are intended to be published in a journal that requests a statement from the Ethics Committee.

Are there standard texts to cover the ethical aspects or good practice recommendations?

- **No**. Each research proposal must be assessed on individually. Different ethical questions arise, and each ethically relevant issue can be addressed in different ways. An awareness of ethical aspects and an ethically sensitive approach that is adapted to the respective project is essential.
- To support the applicant, checklists on the website help to identify the ethically sensitive aspects of a research project. The collection of links refers to further literature that shows ways of taking these ethical aspects into account.

Does the Ethics Committee advise on ethical aspects?

- **No**. The members of the Ethics Committee only get involved after an application has been formally submitted.

- To support the applicants, there are checklists that help to identify the ethically sensitive aspects of the project. The collection of links refers to further literature that shows ways of taking these ethical aspects into account.
- Note that project managers and supervisors of master theses and dissertations are familiar with ethical questions in research and can provide support when writing the application to the Ethics Committee.
- The office of the Ethics Committee is happy to provide information regarding formal questions or questions about the application process.

Is there a submission form?

- **No**. You are free to format the application as you see fit.
- However, you need to answer all questions of the checklist and include both the numbering and the wording of the question in your application.
- Submit your application on-line via the website.

How long does it take from submission to receiving the initial statement?

- **If the application is complete**: a minimum of 3 weeks, a maximum of 4 weeks.
- An application must be submitted at least 2 weeks before a meeting of the Ethics Committee. The dates of the monthly meetings can be found on the website. After a meeting, the Ethics Committee has a maximum of two weeks to send the statement to the applicant by email (see process description on the website). However, this is usually done within a week.
- Take into account that this is the initial statement, which often includes a request for further information. A final statement can only be issued once the application contains all the necessary information and the appropriate ethical reflections (see checklists).
- Note that there are no meetings of the Ethics Committee in February, July and August. During these periods, the timeframe from submission to receiving the initial statement is extended accordingly.

I have submitted an application and would like to start collecting data straight away - is that possible?

- **No**. Data collection may only start as per the date of the final statement ('ethics statement').

I will be collecting data as part of my bachelor's thesis. Can I submit an application to the Ethics Committee?

- **No**. Bachelor's theses are part of teaching. They are intended to support the learning and application of scientific methods, and to demonstrate that students are able to work independently on a topic. They therefore do not constitute research in the strict sense, as research projects are aimed at generating new knowledge that contributes to the academic discourse through publications. As stated in the Statutes of BOKU University, the Ethics Committee only accepts applications related to research projects.

For further information

Website of the Ethics Committee: https://short.boku.ac.at/ethics
Office of the Ethics Committee: ethikkommission@boku.ac.at