Towards a Code of Practice for the School of Education Research Ethics Committee, Trinity College Dublin

Draft document prepared by Dr Noel Ó Murchadha, and approved by the School of Education’s Research Ethics Committee on 24.1.17

Revised following input from staff participants at School of Education research half-day on 26.1.17 by Dr Stephen James Minton

Revised following change to submission process for PME and M Ed and approved by the School of Education’s Research Ethics Committee on 19/9/2017

1. Submission

(i) All applications must be typed.

(ii) For M.Ed and PME students: Applications must be submitted via Blackboard following the defined submission and sign-off procedure.

(iii) For research students (M.Litt, Ph.D.) and staff, both an electronic copy of all application materials (sent as one single PDF file to phdrsrch@tcd.ie, or submitted via Blackboard) and a signed hard copy (submitted to Fiona McKibben, Room 3087) is required for all applications. All hard copies of applications require original signatures. Research student applications must contain an original signature from the supervisor;

2. Information sheets and consent forms

(i) All research with human participants requires information sheets and consent forms, whether approval is sought at Level 1 or at Level 2;

(ii) As per College’s Policy on Good Research Practice, consent forms should be designed on an opt-in basis;

Opt-out designs are not acceptable for research participants, for their parents/guardians, or for school management;

Research with minors or vulnerable adults requires signed parental/guardian consent. This should be sought on an opt-in basis;

Research with minors or vulnerable adults which is carried out in a pre-school, primary school, secondary school, or equivalents, requires the written consent of the principal/management. This should be sought on an opt-in basis;

(iii) As per College’s Policy on Good Research Practice, consent is usually indicated by participants with an original signature;

It should be clear from the application form, and information sheets, that participation is voluntary, that consent can be withdrawn at any time without giving a reason and without prejudice.

3. Research instruments

(i) The research instruments/methodology employed by the applicant should be described in
precise detail in Section 1 of the application form;
(ii) The research instrument/methodology should also be described for potential participants (and their parents, guardians or principals) in accompanying information sheets;
(iii) The nature and duration of participation should be described clearly in Section 1 of the application form;
(iv) Furthermore, the accompanying information sheet(s) should describe the nature and duration of participation. This should be done in language that is accessible to the target audience;
(v) It is the policy of the School of Education Research Ethics Committee that applicants are not ordinarily required to submit research instruments for review;
It should be noted in light of this, however, that the description of the research instruments and/or the methodological approach in Section 1 should be highly detailed;
In certain circumstances (e.g., level two applications that involve research of a sensitive nature, conducted with children or vulnerable adults), the Research Ethics Committee may request that (at least advanced draft) copies of research instruments (e.g., questionnaires, interview schedules, introductory and debriefing materials) be submitted for consideration as part of the application for approval.

4. Location of data collection
   (i) Where known, application forms for ethical approval should name the locations at which data will be collected (i.e. name the school, or the youth centre, or the area). This information will be dealt with in strictest confidence;
   (ii) Where known, the number of participants, their ages, year group etc. should be described in the application form.

5. Data storage and destruction
   (i) In line with College’s Policy on Good Research Practice and with Irish Data Protection Legislation, applicants should describe in detail the process for data storage (including encryption, if applicable) and destruction;
   (ii) The application should indicate who will have access to the data i.e. the research team and, potentially, the examiners;
   (iii) Application forms, and the information sheets, should detail what plans there are for dissemination of the research, if any;
   (iv) As per Irish Data Protection Legislation and College’s Policy on Good Research Practice, a timeframe for when data will be destroyed must be provided. This refers to all copies, electronic and ‘hard’ copies alike;
A description of how data, in both electronic and ‘hard’ copies, will be destroyed should be provided in the application form.

6. Submission and approval process
   (i) Deadlines are set annually for P.M.E. and M.Ed. students and these deadlines are strictly adhered to. The review of student applications that are received after the advertised
deadlines may be delayed and the student will not be able to proceed with their research until ethical approval has been granted;

(ii) Staff applications and applications from research students are reviewed as they are submitted and, as a courtesy, can be dealt with as a matter of priority;

(iii) For applications from P.M.E. and M.Ed. students, notification dates will be advertised in advance;

(iv) All applications at Level 2, from all applicants, will be fully reviewed by two members of the Research Ethics Committee;

(v) All applications from members of the School of Education Research Ethics Committee will be fully reviewed by 2 other members of the Committee, no matter the Level at which approval is sought;

(vi) Applications from students being supervised by a member of the School of Education Research Ethics Committee will be reviewed by another member (or members) of the Committee;

(vii) In the case of P.M.E./M.Ed. applications for which ethical approval has not been granted following initial review, the Chair of the REC will review the justification for rejection along with the P.M.E. and M.Ed. Coordinators (as appropriate) before announcing the results of the review to students;

(viii) If an application is unsuccessful, required changes will be outlined for the applicant in a timely manner. For PME and M.Ed. students, feedback and a deadline for resubmission will be provided to students through Blackboard on a feedback rubric. For research student and staff applications, feedback will be provided by email;

(ix) Resubmissions should address all points outlined in the feedback provided by the reviewer(s);

(x) Electronic copies of ethics forms and supplementary materials are accepted for resubmissions, provided original signatures have been provided in the original submission. Original signatures are not required for resubmissions;

(xi) Ethical approval is not granted until a formal response has been issued to the researcher by the School of Education Research Ethics Committee. For PME and M.Ed. students this will be issued as a pass grade for the ethics submission in Blackboard. For all other applications, a letter of approval will be issued. Data collection on the project can only proceed following receipt of this formal response;

(xii) If the Committee cannot reach a consensus in relation to a decision on an application, the application will be referred to the Faculty Research Ethics Committee.

7. Appendices


8. Keeping track of progress (Guidelines for the Committee)

i) For P.M.E. applications, supervisors have visibility of the submission and subsequent response and feedback to the student;

ii) For M.Ed. applications, supervisors and strand leaders have visibility of the submission and subsequent response and feedback to the student;

iii) For Masters by research and doctoral applications, supervisors are copied on all correspondence relating to the result of the review process;

iv) The ethics committee will have visibility and oversight of all PME and M.Ed. applications through the Blackboard grade centre;

v) For research students (Masters by research and doctoral students) and staff applications a list of applications and application status will be maintained by the ethics administrator.