

School of Social Sciences and Philosophy
Research Ethics Policy
15 September 2014

1. Context and Scope of Policy

In line with Trinity College Dublin's *Policy on Good Research Practice*, it is imperative that research activity in the School of Social Sciences and Philosophy is conducted to the highest standards of integrity, professional conduct and probity. As College's *Policy on Good Research Practice* states: 'In all research, in addition to the Law of the Land, the over-arching ethical principles for Trinity College can be summarized as: **respect** for the individual subject or population, **beneficence & the absence of maleficence** (research should have the maximum benefit with minimal harm) and **justice** (all research subjects and populations should be treated fairly and equally).'

This document sets out the principles and procedures of the Research Ethics Policy of the School of Social Sciences and Philosophy.

1.1 For the purposes of this document, the term 'researcher' encompasses:

- Any member of the School who conducts research (which includes staff, postgraduate students and unpaid research associates);
- Any individual who is not a member of the School but is undertaking research using the School's premises and facilities and/or under the name of the School (including visiting academics and students). Such a researcher should follow the guidelines for Staff or Students, as appropriate.

1.2 Research involving human participants is defined as any of the following:

- research that directly involves people through their physical participation (active or passive) in research activities. Such activities may include, but are not limited to, interviews, questionnaires, discussions, physical experiments and observational research;
- research that indirectly involves people (living or recently deceased, particularly where there are likely to be living relatives) through the provision of access to personal data;
- research that involves people speaking on behalf of others, such as parents/guardians of children or vulnerable adults, and supervisors of people in controlled environments.

2.

Principles

2.1 The following key principles inform the School's stance on ethical issues in research involving human participants:

2.1.1 Diversity of approach: Given the diversity of academic activity within the School, which is home to the disciplines of Political Science, Philosophy, Economics and Sociology, the nature and significance of ethical issues arising in research will vary across the disciplines and between projects.

2.1.2 Independent scrutiny: The ethical conduct of research is a matter of judgment. Scrutiny of research proposals, independent of the researcher, is intended to create the conditions for an explicit discussion of the judgments guiding the conduct of research projects. Dialogue is thus seen as a central part of ethical practice in research.

2.1.3 Informed consent: Research involving human participants should, wherever possible, be conducted only with the fully informed, and freely given, consent of participants. In line with College's policy, potential participants should be informed of the nature and purpose of the research, and any potential benefits, risks, obligations or inconvenience associated with the research that may influence their decision to participate. The researcher (or lead researcher, in the case of collaborative work) is responsible for ensuring that all participants have given their consent prior to participating in the research. Such consent should be given voluntarily and without coercion. Wherever possible, and proportional to the nature of the research, evidence of consent (either written consent, or oral consent witnessed by another) should be obtained. Participants should be informed that they are free to withdraw their consent at any time without adverse consequences, and that any data provided by them will be destroyed should they request it. Consent forms signed by participants must be retained by the researcher. A sample of the informed consent form is available at the following link: <http://www.tcd.ie/ssp/research/ethics/>

It is particularly noteworthy to mention those cases where vulnerable populations are involved in research: extra care is needed to ensure that the rights of participants are upheld and that their consent to participate in the research is freely given. For research involving children, where appropriate and feasible, the informed consent of the child and of their parent/legal guardian should be obtained. In the case of research in educational settings, the researcher should follow any special policies or procedures of the school. However, when access to participants is controlled by a 'gatekeeper' of any form, researchers should adhere to the principle of gaining informed consent from the participants themselves, whilst respecting the legitimate interests of the gatekeeper. In exceptional circumstances, where the nature of research design requires that research is undertaken without informed consent, the need for this should be considered carefully and justified fully.

2.1.4 Protection from harm: Researchers should endeavour to minimize the risk of physical or psychological harm arising to any person or organization as a result of their research, and to minimize the risk of harm to the environment. At a minimum, participants should be fully informed, free to volunteer without inducement, free to opt out at any time without redress, and be fully protected with regards to safety, to the limits of best practice for the nature of the research

being undertaken. It is advisable that researchers inform participants of the contact details of a person whom they may contact in the event of any issues arising from the research that cannot be resolved with the researcher.

2.1.5 Confidentiality: Except where explicit written consent is obtained, researchers should protect the confidentiality of all participants and their data at all times. Researchers should be aware of the risks to anonymity, confidentiality, privacy and security posed by the data they collect and store, and take measures to prevent accidental breaches of confidentiality. The collection, storage, use and disclosure of data must comply with the Data Protection Acts of 1988 and 2003.

2.1.6 Openness, honesty and integrity: Researchers should be open and honest about the purpose and content of their research at all times, and conduct the research in such a way as to ensure the professional integrity of its design, the generation and analysis of data, and the publication of results. Deception or covert data collection should be used only where essential to the research design. Any personal, academic or commercial conflicts of interest in the research should be declared. Direct and indirect contributions of colleagues, collaborators and others should be acknowledged. Participants should be given the opportunity to access the outcomes of research, and be debriefed if appropriate.

2.1.7 Professional codes of practice and guidance: Researchers should ensure that their research accords with any professional codes of practice and/or ethical guidelines relevant to the subject domain of their research. For research projects that fall within the domain of Funding Agencies, such as IRC, researchers must ensure that they conform to their requirements and protocols as necessary.

2.1.8 Approval: Retrospective approval will not be given. This requirement applies to studies to be undertaken by staff, postgraduate and undergraduate students. In the case of collaborative projects involving researchers from outside the School, ethical approval obtained from an external research ethics body may suffice – evidence of same must be submitted to the Research Ethics Committee prior to the commencement of the study

3. Procedures

The following outlines the procedures to be followed by Staff (§3.1) and Postgraduate students (§3.2).

3.1. STAFF

For all members of staff and unpaid research associates: Independent scrutiny of research proposals is provided by the Department within which the researcher is located and by the School's Research Ethics Committee, if necessary, using the procedures outlined below:

3.1.1 In the first instance, researchers should self-certify the ethical propriety of their research by completing a Research Ethics Checklist (Appendix 1). This should be undertaken in the early stages of the project, prior to any data collection or, where appropriate, during each phase of the research.

3.1.2 Where the Research Ethics Checklist of Appendix 1 indicates 'ethics release', the researcher should submit the completed form to the Director of Research and the Departmental Ethics Officer, who is the person nominated by the Head of Discipline to sit on the School's Research Ethics Committee. If the Director of Research and the Departmental Ethics Officer are satisfied that the research poses minimal potential risk of harm to participants and others, he/she should sign the Research Ethics Checklist and forward a copy of the signed document to the Secretary of the School's Research Ethics Committee (for the time being the School Administrator).

3.1.3 Where the Research Ethics Checklist indicates that an actual Certificate of Ethical Approval *is* required, the researcher should apply for Ethical Approval from the Faculty's Research Ethics Committee. All documentation necessary for submitting an application to the FAHSS Research Ethics Committee is available at <http://ahss.tcd.ie>

The School's Research Ethics Committee, or part thereof, may meet with the researcher to discuss any ethical issues associated with the research plan. On decision by the panel to grant ethical approval, the Chair of the School's Research Ethics Committee will issue the signed Certificate of Ethical Approval.

3.2 POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS

For students: Independent scrutiny of research proposals is provided by the first-named supervisor in the first instance, using the procedures outlined below. In all cases, the first-named supervisor has a responsibility to encourage among students an awareness of ethical issues in research.

3.2.1 For taught programmes, the Director of the Programme should determine if a given project raises ethical issues. If it does not raise ethical issues, Appendix 1 should be completed and the form should be signed by the Departmental Ethics Officer. If it does raise ethical issues, an application for Ethical approval must be submitted to the Faculty's Research Ethics Committee. All documentation necessary for submitting an application to the FAHSS Research Ethics Committee is available at <http://ahss.tcd.ie>

No work should be undertaken before approval has been granted.

3.2.2 For routine research undertaken within taught modules, where all students undertake largely the same research each year and the ethical issues arising can be anticipated, the Module Leader must ensure that a Research Ethics Checklist is completed for the activity and that a record of this is signed by both the Module Leader and the Departmental Ethics Officer before being sent to the Secretary of the School's Research Ethics Committee. Where the Research Ethics Checklist indicates that a Certificate of Ethical Approval is required, the Module Leader must ensure that an application for Ethical approval is submitted to the Faculty's Research Ethics Committee. For individual research projects the procedures in §3.2.3—3.2.5 should be followed.

3.2.3 For individual research projects at postgraduate level, students should normally self-certify the ethical propriety of their research with assistance from their first-named supervisor by completing a Research Ethics Checklist (Appendix 1). This should be undertaken in the early stages of the project and prior to any data collection or, where appropriate, during each phase of the research.

3.2.4 Where the Research Ethics Checklist indicates 'ethics release', the first-named supervisor should sign a copy of Appendix 1, have it signed by the Departmental Ethics Officer and Director of Research and forward same to the Secretary of the School's Ethics Committee.

3.2.5 Where the Research Ethics Checklist indicates that a Certificate of Ethical Approval is required, the student (assisted by the first-named supervisor) should submit the Ethics application to the Faculty's Research Ethics Committee, following consultation with the Departmental Ethics Officer.

3.2.6 Data collected for a research project prior to ethical approval must not be used in a student's dissertation or thesis.

3.3 All Researchers, particularly those seeking ethics approval as per §3.1.3 and §3.2.5 above, should note that:

3.3.1 A Certificate of Ethical Approval is granted for the research activity described by the researcher on the proforma at the time of application. If the research departs significantly from that indicated on the original proforma (e.g. in terms of its aims and/or methods), the researcher should ensure that ethical issues are reconsidered using the procedures specified in §3.1 or §3.2, as appropriate.

3.3.2 Where uncertainty over any aspect of a proposed research project exists, the researcher and/or the Departmental Ethics Officer may request that the proposal be discussed by the School's Research Ethics Committee, even where this is not a formal requirement under the procedures stated in §3.1 or §3.2.

3.3.3 Research that requires the scrutiny of another recognized School's Research Ethics Committee in College, and that attains ethical approval from such a body, should not normally require additional scrutiny by the School's Ethics Committee. Further, research that has received ethical approval from another third-level institute that is internationally recognized should not normally require additional scrutiny. Consistent with College's Ethics policy, in such cases the Chair and the Secretary of the School's Ethics Committee should be notified of such research and a copy of the ethical approval documentation for the project should be sent to the Secretary of the School's Ethics Committee. Applicants seeking ethical reciprocity consideration will be expected to furnish a letter not only detailing the ethical approval granted in the collaborating institution, but also explaining how that approval is in keeping with the School's Ethics policy. Once this has been received, and providing that this is deemed satisfactory by the Chair, the Secretary will issue a letter to the researcher stating that ethics approval has been reciprocally recognized and that the researcher can thus start their research project. If not deemed satisfactory by the Chair, the researcher will be informed that he or she must seek ethical approval following the above procedures.

3.3.4 End of project report: Every application given consent will be required to submit a short end-of-project report within 4 weeks of completion. Reports are available for download from the School's website. Reports should be submitted to the School's Administrator.

3.4 Membership of the School's Research Ethics Committee (Level 1):

Membership of the School's Research Ethics Committee (Level 1) will be as follows:

- The Director of Research (Chair, designated by the Head of School)
- One Ethics Officer from each department, nominated by the Head of Discipline
- One independent member of TCD nominated by the Chair
- The School Administrator, who shall act as Secretary

All decisions of the School's Research Ethics Committee must be agreed by consensus.

3.4.1 Conflict of interest: In the event that a member of the Committee has a conflict of interest, they must declare that to the Administrator. The member will be excused from reviewing the application and will be replaced by another Research Ethics Committee member.

3.4.2 Appeals process: Applicants whose projects are rejected will receive feedback from the Director of Research. An amended project may be submitted to the Director of Research and Department Representative. .

Where a dispute cannot be resolved, the input of Faculty's Research Ethics Committee will be sought.

3.4.3 Annual Report : The Research Ethics Committee will produce an annual report in September each year (to cover the previous academic year), to include:

1. Total number of applications
2. Total number of consents
3. No of applications processed within timeframe
4. Summary table showing reasons for rejections
5. Summary table showing any changes in process / procedures of the Research Ethics Committee

3.4.4 Registration and archiving: Every application received by the Administrator will be logged on a spreadsheet database, showing the following as a minimum:

- Project Title
- Name of Lead Researcher (student in case of project work)
- Name of Supervisor
- TCD Email address
- Contact Telephone Number
- Course Name and Code (if applicable)
- Estimated start date of survey / research
- Date received by Administrator
- Committee Decision
- Date of Committee Decision

The database will be available for download from the Ethics section of the School's website.

Any further details will be subject to a Freedom of Information (FOI) request. FOI requests will be addressed using standard FOI procedures.

All documentation (hard and soft copy) will be held for a minimum of 5 years before being destroyed in a confidential manner.

3.

Further guidance

For further guidance on research ethics, the following sources may be of use:

- Anthropological Association of Ireland - <http://www.anthropologyireland.org/>
- Association of Research Ethics Committees - <http://www.arec.org.uk/>
- British Association of Social Workers - <http://www.basw.co.uk/>
- British Educational Research Association - <http://www.bera.ac.uk/>
- British Psychological Society - <http://www.bps.org.uk/>
- British Sociological Association - <http://www.britisoc.co.uk/>
- Committee on Publication Ethics - <http://publicationethics.org/>
- Ethics Research Information Catalogue - <http://www.eric-on-line.co.uk/index.php>
- NHS National Research Ethics Service - <http://www.nres.nhs.uk/>
- Oral History Society - <http://www.ohs.org.uk/>
- Sociological Association of Ireland - <http://www.sociology.ie>
- Social Research Association - <http://the-sra.org.uk>
- Trinity College Dublin - Policy on Good Research Practice - <https://www.tcd.ie/about/policies/assets/pdf/TCDGoodResearchPractice.pdf>
- Trinity College Dublin – Research Ethics <https://www.tcd.ie/research/dean/ethics>
- World Commission on Ethics of Science & Technology - http://www.unesco.org/new/en/unesco/events/all-events/?tx_browser_pi1%5BshowUid%5D=15105&cHash=79405ceee9

There are also excellent relevant resources, such as:

- Eckstein, S (ed) (2003) *Manual for Research Ethics Committees*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Israel, M (2006) *Research Ethics for Social Scientists: Between Ethical Conduct and Regulatory Compliance*. London: Sage.
- MacFarlane, B (2008) *Researching With Integrity: The Ethics of Academic Research*. Oxford: Routledge.
- McNamee, M; Olivier, S & Wainwright, P (2007) *Research Ethics in Exercise, Health & Sport Sciences*. London: Routledge.
- Pitts, M & Smith, A (2007) *Researching the Margins: Strategies for Ethical and Rigorous Research with Marginalised Communities*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Simons, H & Usher, R (2000) *Situated Ethics in Educational Research*. London: Routledge.