Guide for Submitting Applications to the AHSS Research Ethics Committee
INTRODUCTION
All research involving human subjects within the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences must be approved by the AHSS Research Ethics Committee (REC). If your research will include human subjects in any way, you must complete the AHSS ethics application form and include any relevant supporting documentation in appendices. The form is compatible with Windows running Adobe Acrobat (includes all UL builds); however full compatibility with Apple Mac is not guaranteed.

Principal investigators are responsible for any ethics application submitted. In the case of a student submission, the application must be fully discussed with and reviewed by your supervisor.

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GENERAL INFORMATION FOR APPLICANTS

Application information required

Applications should include:

1. Application form with all sections completed, available at www.ul.ie/artsoc/content/ethics/forms. When writing the application, be aware that reviewers may not be specialist experts in the research that you are describing hence avoid use of overly technical language.

2. Appendices compiled into a single PDF entitled ‘Appendices’. Every application should include an information letter for your informants, and a consent form. Samples of these are available at www.ul.ie/artsoc/content/ethics/forms. Appendices may also include:
   - Signed agreement to UL’s child protection policy if the study involves participants under the age of 18. The Child Protection Guidelines document is available at www.ul.ie/research-ethics. If you have a general query related to child protection you can contact Philip Thornton, Safety Office, Human Resources Division at Philip.thornton@ul.ie.
   - Garda clearance form if the study involves participants under the age of 18.
   - Recruitment poster/email
   - Interview or focus questions/surveys etc
   - Any other item which may be of importance to your application. Please indicate these in Section Nine of your application.

Signatures

Before submitting an ethics application, ensure that the full submission is approved by your supervisor or Head of Department. Faculty must submit a hard copy with their signature and the signature of their Head of Department. Students must submit a copy with their signature and the signature of their supervisor. Hard copies without signatures of both the applicant and supervisor/Head of Department will not be accepted.

Where to submit your application

All applications plus appendices MUST be submitted in electronic copy to fahsethics@ul.ie, and one signed hard copy to the designated box outside C1078, Main Building, University of Limerick. Both copies must be submitted by the deadline – late applications will not be accepted.

Common reasons why an application is not accepted

- Required signatures in Section One not present
- Paper or electronic copy not submitted
- Application form not filled in correctly with required information
- No signature in Section Six
- No information letter and/or consent form in appendices
- Appendices not combined into one document
- No garda clearance form and/or child protection form included for those working with people under the age of 18
- The electronic and signed hard copy do not contain the same information
- Attachments are referred to but not attached
- ‘Copy and paste’ inclusions from old applications
- Wrong contact information on information sheet (i.e. chair of old ULREC committee, incorrect phone number of AHSS contact point)
- Recruitment documentation does not include PI contact details, incorrect UL logo, student personal phone number or email address.
• Insufficient information when describing what the participants will be doing in the study
• Numbers of participants/time commitment changes throughout the application and on information sheets

**Approval dates**
Please consider the following recommendations to promote timely and efficient management of the review of your research ethics application:

- Submit applications at least 2 months before planned start date
- Many applications require minor revisions, thus it is recommended that you build this into your project timeline
- There is typically a 2 week turn-around time for minor amendments

Once you have received full approval of your application, you must carry out the research project within 12 months of the approval date. Research carried out after this time requires a full resubmission to the Ethics Committee.

**Decisions by AHSS REC**
The Committee Chair will contact you within 2 weeks of the REC meeting to convey the Committee’s decision. Decisions include:

- **Approved**: The Committee has fully approved your proposal and you may now begin your research.
- **Provisionally approved**: The Committee approves your application in principal but requires small revisions before you can begin your research. When responding to minor revisions the applicant must provide a cover letter outlining where the specific changes were made to the document. Indicate changes in appendices using different font colour or highlighter to alert the reviewer.
- **Full resubmission required**: The Committee has decided that your application needs major revisions, which will be fully outlined to you. You will need to submit a completely revised copy of your submission to the next REC meeting.
- **Not approved**: In some cases, the Committee will decide that the application cannot be approved. These reasons will be fully explained to you.

**Appealing a Decision**
An appeal to a decision made by the AHSS REC should be made in writing to the Chair of ULREG and copied to the recording secretary, outlining the grounds of the appeal, within 10 working days of the decision being relayed to the applicant. The appeal will be heard at the next scheduled meeting of ULREG, unless an extra ordinary meeting is requested. The decision of the committee will be relayed to the Chair of the AHSS REC, and the applicant, within 5 working days of the meeting. The Decision of ULREG is final.

Contact details for ULREG can be found here: [http://www.ul.ie/research-ethics/](http://www.ul.ie/research-ethics/)
COMPLETING THE AHSS REC APPLICATION FORM

SECTION ONE: Application details

1.1 Applicant type
Indicate if you are faculty/staff member or a student.

1.2 Application type
Indicate if this is a new application or a resubmission.

1.3 Reference number
If this is a resubmission, please quote the application number (e.g. 2014_01_01_AHSS). If you are unsure of the application number, you can request it from fahssethics@ul.ie.

1.4 Title of Project
Ensure that title is clear and concise. The title should be as short a possible but still fully reflect the topic and scope of the project. Do not use abbreviated terms or acronyms in the title. Think carefully about whether the title will be readily understood by potential research participants.

1.5 Funding body
If you have received any funding for your research project, please add in brief details here.

1.6 Principal Investigator
The Principal Investigator (PI) is the person carrying out the research. If the PI is a faculty member, they are ultimately responsible for the research project. If the PI is a student, their supervisor is responsible for the project. State the name of the PI in 1.6.

1.7 Other Investigators
Details of students (undergraduate or postgraduate), research assistants, teaching assistants who are research investigators in the project must be listed in 'Other Investigators'. If any other investigators are not from UL their organisational affiliation must be indicated clearly in this section (e.g. Prof John Smith, University of Bristol, UK).

1.8 UL email address
Please type your UL email address. Please note that all correspondence with you will be via your UL email address.

1.9 Department
Please select the department in UL to which you or your supervisor belongs.

1.10 ID number
Type your student ID number here.

1.11 Programme of Study
Please indicate which course you are studying on. If you are a research student, please indicate if you are a PhD or MA by research student.
1.12 Supervisor’s name
Type your supervisor’s name. Please note that supervisors are responsible for ensuring their students fill in this form correctly and that all ethical areas have been considered.

Signatures
Please sign and date your application. Faculty must submit a hard copy with their signature and the signature of their Head of Department. Students must submit a copy with their signature and the signature of their supervisor. Hard copies without signatures of both the applicant and supervisor/Head of Department will not be accepted.

SECTION TWO: Description of research study

2.1 Purpose of research
State your main research question and include the aim(s) of the research clearly. The question and aims must relate directly to title of the project. Include reasons why you will need to use human participants on your study. Indicate what type of data will be collected.

2.2 Research methodology
This must detail how you will interact with your research subjects (focus groups/interviews/online surveys etc). Please be brief.

2.3 Sample questions
Sample questions for interviews/focus groups should be included. You may attach a separate document as part of your appendices file if necessary.

SECTION THREE: Ethical issues
This Section is designed to highlight potential ethical issues that may arise in research involving human subjects. Applicants are expected to carefully consider these ethical issues and prepare a clear rationale for any risks involved in research participation and present a cohesive strategy to safeguard participants.

For each question in Section Three, tick yes or no.
If you answer NO to all questions, you can skip Section Four and go straight to Section Five.
If you answer YES to any question, you must fill in Section Four.

SECTION FOUR: Ethical implications
Only fill in this section if you answered YES to ANY of the questions in Section THREE. Questions 4.2-4.5: you must answer at least one question, where relevant to your research study.

4.1. What are the ethical issues involved in your research?
Please indicate what you believe to be the ethical issues with your research. Indicate why you answered ‘yes’ to any question in Section Two.

4.2. How will you ensure that vulnerable research participants are protected?
You must answer this question if you have ticked “yes” to any question in the Human Participants section in SECTION THREE
Consider your participants who may be vulnerable – such as children, people with intellectual or learning disabilities, people under the care or protection of others, people who speak little English. Outline how you plan to ensure their protection during your research.

4.3. How will you protect participants if your research deals with sensitive issues?
You must answer this question if you have ticked “yes” to any question in the Subject Matter section in SECTION THREE

4.4. How will you protect participants if your research deals with sensitive research procedures?
You must answer this question if you have ticked “yes” to any question in the Research Procedures section in SECTION THREE

4.5. Outline how you intend to comply with any established procedures which have been approved by ULREG for your research.
You must answer this question if you have ticked “yes” to any question in either the Research Procedures and/or Areas other than human sections in SECTION THREE

SECTION FIVE: Research participants

5.1. Explain why the use of human participants is essential to your research project.
Please provide a rationale why you need to use human participants for your study, paying particular attention to the question you may have answered yes to in Section Two.

5.2 Who will your informants be?
Please do not give names except where an informant’s identity is impossible to conceal. Describe the population that participants will be recruited from.

- Indicate the age range of participants.
- If recruiting from more than one group of participants, clearly distinguish between groups in this section.
- State clearly the inclusion/exclusion criteria.

5.3 How do you plan to gain access to/contact/approach your potential informant(s)?
- Indicate how you will initially contact your informant(s). If this contact will be through a gatekeeper, indicate clearly who this person is and their relationship to the informants, plus any affiliation they may have.
- If you plan to recruit informants through the internet or email, state clearly how you will do this.
- If applicable, include the final version of the recruitment email/poster that will be used to advertise the research in your appendices.
- Indicate where the research will be carried out. If the location of research is a location that will be convenient to the participant, indicate the specific locations, e.g. UL, office, workplace, coffee shop, library). The specific address is not required. Do not recruit participants from a location where alcohol is present.
6.1 Information letter
You must submit an information letter for participants with this application, as part of your appendices document. A sample letter can be downloaded at: www.ul.ie/artsoc/content/ethics/forms. Please indicate in this section that your letter covers the points required.

The information sheet must include:

- A title of the study. If the title on the ethics application form is not suitable for the information sheet, a simplified title that links to the meaning of the title on the application form can be used.
- Include a brief description of what the research is about. The description should explain what a participant will be expected to do.
- State the time involved for the participant, where the research will take place, and any risks or benefits to the participant.
- Provide an explanation on the participant’s rights to anonymity. If anonymity cannot be guaranteed, then it should not be promised.
- Explain freedom to withdraw from the study at any time.
- Ensure that the language used suits the population you are recruiting from. Avoid technical language and jargon.
- Include the correct UL Logo must be included on all recruitment information and consent forms. UL brand specifications can be found here http://www2.ul.ie/pdf/567279072.pdf.
- Include the contact details (name and UL phone number) of the Principal Investigator and supervisor (if appropriate). Do not put personal mobile phone numbers as contact details on flyers, information sheets. Use UL email addresses only. Main contact is principal investigator; students can use their UL email addresses only. Student investigators can only provide their personal contact details (e.g. mobile phone number) to participants once they are recruited onto the study. This is for the protection of personal data of the investigator.
- Include the following AHSS REC contact point information on all recruitment documents including information letter and posters:

  This research study has received Ethics approval from the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (quote approval number when you have received it). If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent authority, you may contact:

  Chairperson Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
  AHSS Faculty Office
  University of Limerick
  Tel: +353 61 202286
  Email: FAHSSEthics@ul.ie

6.2 Consent
Informed consent is required for most research. In anonymous or on-line surveys signed consent is not required since completing the survey implies consent of participant. In all other research an information letter and signed consent are required. Please indicate in this section if you require signed consent from your participants.

- The consent form must include a title of the study. If the title on the ethics application form is not suitable for the consent form, a simplified title that links to the meaning of the title on the application form can be used.
- The consent form must provide a place for both participant and investigator to sign. Also provide space for participant to print name.
- The consent form must be dated.
• For research involving children a participant consent (or assent) form must be provided. Children must be provided with an opportunity to assent or dissent to the research themselves. This form must be written at a reading level to suit age of participants and may need to include images to support comprehension.
• If research involves children then an information sheet must be provided for the children and for their parents and for principals if research is based in schools.

6.3 How will you ensure that informed consent is freely given by participants?
In this section, describe how informed consent will be obtained and by whom (e.g. PI, student researcher, research assistant). The information sheet and consent form (where appropriate) must be included in appendices. Samples of these are available at http://www.ul.ie/artsoc/ethics.

• In the case of children (under 18) and adults who are unable to give consent, please explain how consent will be obtained and provide the documentation to be used to obtain parent or guardian consent.
• If your participants can't read or speak English (or Irish, if your research is aimed at Irish speakers), explain how you will obtain consent.
• In situations where obtaining free consent may be difficult (e.g. in prisons), explain how you will ensure that free consent is given.
• For research in schools, please provide a copy of the cover letter to the school principal in your appendices file.

Potential participants are typically given time to carefully consider whether or not they want to get involved in the study. This may involve time for potential participant to discuss the project with others including family, friends, teachers or a health professional. Many projects involve minimal risk to participants, thus decisions about participation can be made relatively quickly by potential participants. Other projects involve substantial risk. The greater the risk, the more time is required between providing information and participants signing consent.

For children or any participants who may be unable to give consent, the applicant must clearly indicate how the researcher will attend to assent or dissent of participants throughout the project. Information letters and consent forms must be aligned with expected reading levels of participants.

For vulnerable groups who may feel unable to decline participation, people with intellectual or learning disabilities, capacity to consent should be determined on a case-by-case basis. The PI must describe the consent process in these instances. Indicate whether any representative or advocate for the participant will be involved in the consent process. The Health Services Executive ethics committee advises that a person is unable to give informed consent if he/she is not able (1) understand the relevant information; or (2) to believe the information; or (3) to remember the information long enough to make a decision; or (4) to weigh the pros and cons of participation as part of the decision-making process; (5) to express his/her decision verbally, via sign language or an alternative communication approach.

If for any reason the PI is not planning to engage in the consent process (e.g. studies involving mild deception of participants) then this must be fully explained. Measures to address the deception must be incorporated as appendices (e.g. written or verbal debrief for participants after the study). A justification of why ‘deception’ is required must also be submitted. It should be clear that this research cannot be done any other way.

The option for participants to withdraw from research with no personal consequence is an integral aspect of consent. Indicate how participants can readily withdraw from the study. It is acknowledged that participants completing anonymous questionnaires are unable to withdraw from a study once the form is submitted. If a participant withdraws please describe how any data related to this person will be identified and destroyed. A clear description about how to withdraw from a study must be included in the information letter to potential participants.
Ensure that all materials are designed for the age of participants and that reading level is taken into account. It may be appropriate to use images or photos to help explain aspects of the project to younger participants and those who may have limited literacy skills.

If recruiting students, the applicant must clearly describe how the power relationship (adult/child; lecturer/student, professional/client) will be managed to ensure that potential participants are free to decline involvement or withdraw from a study.

If the proposed study involves audio or video recordings it is recommended that a separate statement is included on the consent form so that people can consent to participate in the study but can opt out of having the interview recorded (e.g. it is not uncommon for teens or people from vulnerable groups to prefer not to be recorded.)

6.4 What arrangements have you made for anonymity or confidentiality (if appropriate)?

Data should be anonymised as soon as possible. For example assign each participant a code on data entry sheet. Never store code sheet of names and codes in the same place as data. Once anonymised, data can be stored on password protected computers. Collected data must be anonymised and stored in a format whereby specific subject information cannot be identified. For example, participant names may be assigned codes and only the data linked to these codes will be stored electronically. Original files should typically be encrypted and stored electronically on principal investigator’s password protected laptop computer. Original video recordings should be encrypted and stored on the PI’s password protected laptop computer and locked in PI’s office when not being used for analysis by the investigators. Statistical data can be encrypted and stored temporarily on a password protected USB key for the duration of the study and on the PI’s password protected computer after the study.

SECTION SEVEN: Storage of materials

7.1. How do you propose to store the information, and for how long? How will you manage data protection issues?

• You need to include information about data storage in your completed form and ensure that the way in which data will be handled will comply with your obligations under the Data Protection Acts 1998 and 2003.
• Provide the names of ALL the individuals who will have access to the data collected from participants.
• If data may be analysed or accessed by other researchers in the future the consent form must indicate this. No existing data should be used outside of the scope or intent of the original project.
• Indicate whether participants will have access to their data as part of the research process (e.g. have a copy of audio or video recording, access to a transcription of interview). Please note that transcripts or recordings of focus groups would typically not be shared given that anonymity and confidentiality would be compromised. Recommend in this instance that an anonymised summary of the focus group be sent out if participants want to review the key points from the discussion.
• Note: an external examiner may not have access to the data from a research project. External examiners may only access the research project report, which will include anonymised data.
• State on what devices participant data will be stored. Immediately transfer and encrypt audio and video recordings to password protected device then delete original recording from recording device.
• State where recordings or hard copies of participant data will be stored. Typically audio recordings should be deleted immediately after transcription is complete since these cannot be anonymised. If researcher plans to keep the original recordings, then a clear justification must be provided. It is important not to retain personal information for longer than absolutely necessary to meet the aims of the study.

Data storage regulations:

• See http://www.ul.ie/dataprotection
• Data must be stored in a secure location for a period of seven years following completion of research and securely destroyed after that time. With regards anonymous data, it is the responsibility of the researcher to
ensure that coding lists, consent forms, and raw data are stored in a separate secure location for a period of seven years following completion of the research.

- Data in hard copy (paper) format must be stored in a secure location (e.g. a locked filing cabinet) for a period of seven years following completion of the research, after which time, it should be disposed of securely and confidentially. It is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that hard copy data is only accessible to authorised people at all times.
- Data in soft copy (electronic) format, including video, audio, and photographic material, must be password protected or encrypted and stored in accordance with the Data Protection Acts. It is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that soft copy data is only accessible to authorised people at all times. After the seven year period following completion, the soft copy data should be disposed of or deleted securely and confidentially.
- For detailed information on the University’s Records Management Policy, please see: www.ul.ie/recordsmanagement

7.2 Data storage guidelines.

Please indicate that you have read the guidelines on data storage and have made arrangements to comply by them. UL’s data storage guidelines can be found here: http://www.ul.ie/recordsmanagement.

SECTION EIGHT: Indemnity

In this section, the PI needs to confirm that the research proposal is covered by insurance. Insurance cover is required for all research carried out by UL employees. Principal Investigators/Supervisors should carefully view the University’s ‘Guidelines on Insurance Cover for Research’ document and the University’s Insurance cover to ascertain if their proposed research is covered. These documents are available at www.ul.ie/insurance. Where any query arises about whether or not proposed research is covered by insurance, the Principal Investigator/Supervisor must contact the University’s Insurance Administrator at cliona.donnellan@ul.ie to confirm that the required level of insurance cover is in place.

SECTION NINE: Document checklist

Please indicate in this section which documents have been attached to the application.

**NOTE:** Applicants must create a single electronic document (preferably PDF) to include all appendices. Multiple files will not be accepted.
GENERAL GUIDELINES

Guidelines for research involving children under the age of 18

- Indicate when and how children will be given an opportunity to assent or dissent to participating in the research.
- Parental consent must be obtained for the research.
- An information letter to the person in managerial role/responsible adult (e.g. coach, school principal, manager of service organisation) must be included as they must be informed of the proposed research. This information letter must be included in the appendices. Indicate how children from the school/club who do not meet the inclusion criteria will be excluded from the research study sensitively.
- The UL Child Protection Guidelines must be reviewed and the UL Child Protection Form must be signed by all research investigators in the study and submitted with the application. Guidelines and Acceptance Form can be accessed at http://www.ul.ie/research-ethics/application-guidelines-forms.
- Researchers must include a garda clearance form in their appendices if working with children under the age of 18.
- The researcher must identify an alternative activity for those not participating or opting out of the study. This would be relevant in research that involves children taking part in research during class time at school. What will the children who opt out of the research do while during this time?

Guidelines for research that involves recruiting children from schools

- For research done in schools, the school must give informed consent for the research being carried out.
- Once approval is received from a school principal (verbal or written) the researcher can approach children and parents/guardian with information about the study. The applicant must explain the process of recruitment providing details regarding when and how researcher will engage with potential participants.
- For this type of research, an ‘opt-out’ letter should be sent to parents.
- If the subject matter is particularly sensitive or contentious it is necessary to get the express permission of parents to conduct the research. In this case, an ‘opt-in’ letter should be sent to parents.
- Please refer to the guidelines above regarding research guidelines for those under the age of 18.

Guidelines for research that involves recruiting University students

- Students should always be made aware that they do not have to participate in the research.
- Students should be reminded that anonymity will be respected.
- Where possible an independent faculty member (a gatekeeper) should be involved in the first contact to recruit students so that a power relationship does not exist.
- Where the research involves the completion of a survey (e.g. evaluating teaching) an independent individual or external person should carry out the research so that only anonymised data is presented to the researcher.
- Consideration needs to be given to the age range of students being recruited. Students under the age of 18 will need parental guardian permission as well as their own permission.

Guidelines for research involving a survey or questionnaire

- If a survey or questionnaire is referred to in the application, a copy of the questions within must be submitted with the ethics application as an appendix.
- If the researcher is using an online survey tool (e.g. survey monkey) and have requested an email address please indicate how you will ensure that this personal information will be removed before the data is stored on research laptops.
- Whenever possible data should be anonymised before it is saved on a computer.
- If hard copies of surveys are to be used in a group setting, then applicant must explain how participants can opt in/out of the study. For example, if a survey is to be completed by students in a class at UL the
researcher might make arrangements with a lecturer to talk to students at the end of a classroom session. The researcher may distribute the surveys to students and leave the room while participants complete (or do not complete) the survey. Students can then place surveys in an envelope or container left in the classroom. Researcher collects the completed surveys once all students have left the room.

Guidelines for research involving interviews with participants

- Indicate what the interview procedure involves and provide a fully developed interview guide in the appendices.
- If asking participants to engage in more than one interview, the applicant must clearly justify the specific purpose and aims of the second interview. A fully developed interview guide for the second interview must be provided in the appendices.
- If the interview is to be recorded please detail how the data will be anonymised before storing, and where and how it will be stored.

Guidelines for research involving focus groups with participants

- Focus groups are a valuable research tool; however, it is impossible to guarantee anonymity and confidentiality of participants using this approach. Applicants must provide a clear rationale for compromising anonymity/confidentiality of research participants.
- If doing more than one focus group with the same participants explain clearly how the second focus group is unique.
- Fully developed focus group scripts must be provided in the appendices.

Guidelines for research that includes photos or video recordings

- Indicate the purpose of the photographs or video recordings.
- Indicate who in the research is taking the photos or video recordings (e.g. researcher, participants).
- If participants are taking photos or recording video, clear instructions need to be provided for participants regarding when, what, how, and who is to take photographs. This information must be provided in an appendix.
- If images will be analysed, provide details of analytical approach to be used. If any images are to be used in knowledge translation activities related to the research, then applicant must include a specific item on the consent form highlighting this.
- As with all material gathered for research, information must be given to participants on how confidentiality is to be preserved and how/when such material will be destroyed.

Guidelines for research that involves people who speak little or no English

- If you are fluent in the native language of your participants and plan to communicate with them through that language, please indicate this in your application.
- If you plan to use a translator at any stage during your research (including during interviews and/or data analysis) you must indicate clearly in your application how and when that translator will be used. You must ensure that the participant is aware of the translator’s presence in your information letter and consider any confidentiality implications the use of a translator might entail.
- You must ensure that you include in your appendices translations of any documents which will be seen by your participants, including information letters, consent forms and recruitment material.

Guidelines for research that involves international partners

- Provide details about the international partners in an appendix (current post held, university partner is affiliated with, brief summary of CV)
- Provide details about the role of partner(s) including how and when they will contribute to the project.
• Clearly describe how data will be shared (this can be addressed in Section Six of the application form).

**Guidelines on research which involves patients or employees of the HSE**

• Submission to the HSE Research Ethics Committee is necessary when the research involves patients in hospital (or a GP surgery) or employees of the HSE. Ethical approval should be sought from the HSE REC rather than the University. When the research is approved by the HSE, the PI must copy the approval confirmation from the HSE to EHSREC prior to starting the research.

**Power Relationships**

• Investigators should not recruit volunteers if a power relationship exists. Example, students should not recruit students from their own class or teachers in a school should not recruit students they grade.
• Use a ‘gatekeeper’ (neutral person) who will recruit on your behalf.
• Where appropriate and possible, the gatekeeper should render the data anonymous so you cannot identify who volunteered.