



**UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK**  
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

**FACULTY OF SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING  
RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE**

**Guidelines for Research on Human Persons by Faculty or Students**

**Introduction**

These guidelines relate to all research activities across the Faculty of Science & Engineering, including research by faculty, students and others. The fundamental principle underlying the guidelines is that all research activities involving the use of human beings participating in research must be reviewed and approved by the Faculty Research Ethics Committee (FREC). Researchers may not solicit participation or begin data collection until they have received ethical approval from the REC. What follows are guidelines, not rules, and they can be adapted according to the research requirements of individuals.

All research must be performed “as written”, that is, that the investigators do not make substantive changes in the research design, the selection of participants, the informed consent process, or the instrumentation during the course of the study. If substantive changes are necessary, re-application is required.

**Application Procedure**

**Forms must be submitted by the Principal Investigator (ie Supervisor) only.**

All applicants must complete the checklist attached. The purpose of this checklist is to establish if the applicant needs to submit the full Science & Engineering application form, or the shorter Science and Engineering Expedited application form.

If the answer to all questions is “No” then the Science and Engineering Expedited Application Form should be completed and submitted. If the answer to any question is “Yes” then the Science & Engineering Full Application Form should be completed and submitted, along with an Information Sheet and a Consent Form (see Appendices). These forms should be submitted both electronically, as one pdf document, to [SciEngEthics@ul.ie](mailto:SciEngEthics@ul.ie) and in hard copy (with all relevant signatures) to the Faculty Office, Science & Engineering, Lonsdale Building.

Where the research involves patients in hospital or employees of the HSE, ethical approval must be sought from the HSE REC rather than the Faculty. Primary

supervisors/Principal Investigators must inform the Science & Engineering Research Ethics Committee of applications that have been approved by the HSE Research Ethics committee.

All applications must be typed: handwritten applications will not be accepted. Please ensure that all relevant signatures and accompanying documentation are included with the application: the application will be returned without consideration if it is not complete.

Upon applying for FREC approval, your application will be reviewed at the next Science & Engineering Ethics meeting. These are held once every month, except for the month of August.

You can contact your faculty representative for your department for advice on completing this form. These are:

- Jean Saunders, Chair
- Ronan Courtney, Biological Sciences
- Kieran McCourty, Chemical Sciences
- Anthony Comer, School of Engineering
- John Mulvihill, School of Engineering
- Vincent Casey, Physics
- James Patten, CSIS
- Hussain Mahdi, ECE
- Eoin White, School of Design

#### *Faculty, PhD, Research Masters and Research Associates*

It is the duty of all faculty, PhD students, Research Masters students and Research Associates to ensure that their project is ethically sound. Where the research involves human participants, researchers must fill in the relevant application depending on their answers to the checklist (ie, if they answer “No” to all questions, the Science & Engineering Expedited Form is completed, if they answer “Yes” to any question, the Science & Engineering Full Application Form should be completed). Once the form is completed, one signed hard copy and an email copy should be forwarded to the Science & Engineering REC Administrator, ([SciEngEthics@ul.ie](mailto:SciEngEthics@ul.ie)) and it will be considered at the next Science & Engineering REC meeting.

#### *FYP and Taught Masters Research*

It is the duty of all students and their supervisor(s) to ensure that their project is ethically sound. Where the research does not involve human participants, this will be done as part of the Author’s Declaration in the thesis, which should include a statement to the effect that “I understand the ethical implications of my research, and this work meets the requirements of the Faculty of Science and Engineering Research Ethics Committee.”

Where the research involves human participants, FYP and Taught Masters students may fill in the Science & Engineering REC Application form, with their supervisor, and make the relevant application depending on their answers to the checklist (ie, if they answer “No” to all questions, the Science & Engineering Expedited Form is completed, if they answer “Yes” to any question, the Science & Engineering Full Application Form should be completed). Applicants should consult with the Science

& Engineering REC representative in their department for clarification on any aspect of the application process prior to the application being submitted. **Supervisors** must submit the application to the Science & Engineering Ethics Administrator, Faculty Office ([SciEngEthics@ul.ie](mailto:SciEngEthics@ul.ie)) for consideration at the next Science & Engineering REC meeting. Where students have sought and received ethical approval, they should include evidence of this (such as an email from the Committee) in their thesis.

If any student conducts research on human participants without ethical approval, this could be a disciplinary matter, and may have an impact on the grade received. The actual decision will be made on a case by case basis and decided by the relevant course board.

### **Guidelines for Applicants**

The main principle of the research ethics policy of the University of Limerick is that informants participating in any research are provided with information on the project they may be participating in, (including details of what is expected of them, arrangements for confidentiality, how the information collected will be used and their rights as informants) and give their consent to participate by signing a consent form or by providing an indication of consent on the questionnaire itself.

What follows are some brief guidelines on particular aspects of research. It is important to note that these are guidelines: the Committee will in fact deal with each application on a case by case basis.

### ***Research involving participants under the age of 18***

There are three tiers of research that can be carried out on participants under the age of 18:

- Research in schools related to schooling
- Research in schools not related to schooling
- Research on under 18s which is not carried out in a school environment.

For research carried out in schools it is vital that informed consent be given by the School Principal, the Teacher involved, the Parent/Guardian of the participant and the participant.

In all cases involving research on participants under the age of 18, the Child Protection Form must be signed and submitted with the application. The University of Limerick Child Protection Guidelines and Form are available at [www.ul.ie/researchethics](http://www.ul.ie/researchethics)

### ***Guidelines for research involving University Students***

Surveys are often carried out on students for the purposes of evaluating teaching. Students should always be made aware that they do not have to participate in the research, and anonymity should always be respected. It is suggested that, where possible, an external individual should conduct the research (such as the Centre for Teaching and Learning, or an independent faculty member) and that the anonymised data should be presented to the researcher. These are general guidelines, however, and it is accepted that there may be exceptions to these general principles. Where a researcher intends to depart from these general principles, reasons should be given

why. Where there are students under the age of 18 in the class and parental consent has not been attained then these students should be excluded.

### ***Guidelines on the re-use of State or University Data***

Data can be collected by the University or a State Department for one purpose, and re-analysed by a researcher for a completely different research question (for example, data on Sulis, Online Student Records etc). Where a researcher proposes to do this, informed consent should be obtained from the body who has ownership of the data. The data received should be made anonymous where appropriate, and the research cannot go beyond the boundaries of the consent agreement. Researchers should always be aware of the terms of the Data Protection Act 2003 when conducting this type of research.

### ***Guidelines where identity is being revealed***

On occasion, it will be impossible to produce meaningful research while protecting the identity of the research participant(s). Where this is the case, interviewees should be told about the general purpose of the research before the interview begins, which is best done through a preliminary, independent contact so that the interviewee has time to reflect on any concerns they may have about the topic under investigation.

If guarantees of anonymity are given these should always be respected (ideally, though, key research findings should not be supported only by non-attributable anonymous interviews - at the very least permission should be sought to identify informant's position, occupation, or whatever other descriptive information might give their testimony authority).

Permission for direct quotation needs to be obtained (such permission should indicate the context of quotation - whether it is for publication or merely for inclusion in an unpublished dissertation). The researcher should establish whether the permission for quotation has a time limit.

The informant should be offered the opportunity to review the transcript; if the interview has not been tape recorded but instead the researcher has reconstructed the conversation from notes or shorthand then the review of the transcript is essential. If the interview is used extensively for a published work the informant should be sent a copy of the final publication (or at least a photocopy of the sections in which their own words appear).

Generally speaking interview testimony should not be used to discredit the participant or in a way that might cause them embarrassment; this is an issue for judgement - well known personalities in public life who are used to journalistic commentary may constitute an exception to this rule. If information is given by the informant for background only, and not for attribution, this should be respected. The same moral ethics about confidentiality apply to academic researchers as those which apply to journalists.

The researcher should establish whether they can make the transcript available to other researchers, and if so what any conditions of access and use may be.

### ***Guidelines regarding email surveys and consent***

Oftentimes, surveys will be sent out by email, where participants are asked to click a link and fill in the survey at an online resource, such as surveymonkey or similar. Where this is the case, it can be counter-productive to ask for a signed consent form. If this is the case, along with the Information Sheet contained in the email, the issues relating to Consent should also be included, along with a statement to the effect that by clicking the link, the participant is deemed to consent, though he or she can withdraw at any time.

### ***Guidelines regarding the storage of information***

Information should be stored in a secure place, such as a locked cabinet in an office, and on password protected/encrypted files. All data must be kept for seven years after collection.

### ***Guidelines regarding Information Sheets and Consent Forms***

All information sheets and consent forms should have the official UL logo at the top of the page. They should also include contact details of the primary investigator, the researcher and the Chairperson of the Science & Engineering Research Ethics Committee.

### ***Guidelines regarding Eligibility for Chair's Action***

A PI/Supervisor may submit a further application (through a Chair's Action) for ethical approval for a research project which has previously been granted full approval at any stage up to the date of expiry of the original application's ethical approval if minor changes are needed. A Chair's Action Form can be used if the following minor changes have been made:

- Changes to the researchers involved,
- differences in the number of subjects involved,
- extending the original dates of approval,
- modifying recruitment strategy
- small alterations to the procedures being used,
- change in the location of the research.

If the application is being submitted for Chair's Action, then you need to provide the name and S&EREC number of the previous application. If deemed necessary the Chair may request that a full application be submitted.

## Checklist

### Human Participants

Does the research proposal involve:

- Working with participants over 65 years of age? Yes  No
- Any person under the age of 18? Yes  No
- Adult patients? Yes  No
- Adults with psychological impairments? Yes  No
- Adults with learning difficulties? Yes  No
- Adults under the protection/  
control/influence of others (e.g. in care/prison)? Yes  No
- Relatives of ill people (e.g. parents of sick children) Yes  No
- People who may only have a basic knowledge of English? Yes  No
- Hospital or GP patients (or HSE members of staff)  
recruited in medical facility Yes  No

### Subject Matter

Does the research proposal involve:

- Sensitive personal issues? (e.g. suicide, bereavement, gender  
identity, sexuality, fertility, abortion, gambling)? Yes  No
- Illegal activities, illicit drug taking, substance abuse or the  
self reporting of criminal behaviour? Yes  No
- Any act that might diminish self-respect or cause shame,  
embarrassment or regret? Yes  No
- Research into politically and/or racially/ethnically and/or  
commercially sensitive areas? Yes  No

### Procedures

Does the research proposal involve:

- Use of personal records without consent? Yes  No
- Deception of participants? Yes  No
- The offer of large inducements to participate? Yes  No
- Audio or visual recording without consent? Yes  No
- Invasive physical interventions or treatments? Yes  No
- Research that might put researchers or participants at risk? Yes  No

If you have answered **Yes** to any of these questions above, you will need to fill in the Science & Engineering Full Application Form and submit to the Faculty Ethics Committee for review. However, if the research is to be conducted during teaching practice, and within the Department of Education subject syllabus outline, and provided the student has the permission of the class teacher and the school principal and that parent/guardians consent to participation, the expedited form can also be used. Please note that if the Faculty Ethics Committee deems it necessary you may be asked to fill in the full application form.



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## INFORMATION SHEET

**The Information Sheet to be provided to School Principal, Teacher, Parent/Guardian, Participants should include the following:**

1. Brief description of topic and method – interview/group discussion etc. The description should briefly explain what a participant will be expected to do.
2. Amount of time involved for participant.
3. Where the research will take place- will participant have any say in this?
4. Any risks or benefits to participant.
5. Explanation of participant's right to anonymity. (Do not promise anonymity unless it can be guaranteed)
6. Rights of participant not to answer questions and withdraw at any time. Also right to contact Chair of the Science & Engineering Research Ethics Committee if they have any concerns about participating in the research.
7. Contact information: name of researcher/supervisor and Chair of Science & Engineering Research Ethics Committee Include e-mail addresses for researcher and supervisor and phone number for Chair of S&E REC.



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**CONSENT FORM**

**Consent Section:**

I, the undersigned, declare that I am willing to take part in research for the project entitled “**Insert Name of Research Project**”.

- I declare that I have been fully briefed on the nature of this study and my role in it and have been given the opportunity to ask questions before agreeing to participate.
- The nature of my participation has been explained to me and I have full knowledge of how the information collected will be used.
- I am also aware that my participation in this study may be recorded (video/audio) and I agree to this. However, should I feel uncomfortable at any time I can request that the recording equipment be switched off. The recordings will be destroyed once they have been transcribed. **(Remove this bullet point if participation is not being recorded)**
- I fully understand that there is no obligation on me to participate in this study
- I fully understand that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time without having to explain or give a reason
- I am also entitled to full confidentiality in terms of my participation and personal details
- I declare that I am between the ages of 18 and 65 **(for expedited form only)**

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Signature of participant

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Date

**In all cases involving research on participants under the age of 18, the Child Protection Form must be signed by all researchers involved in the project and submitted with the application.**



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**Acceptance of the University of Limerick Child Protection Guidelines**

I have read the University of Limerick Child Protection Guidelines and agree to abide by its contents. There is no reason why I would be considered unsuitable to work with children or young people.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Print name: \_\_\_\_\_

Department: \_\_\_\_\_