Research Ethics Policy and Procedures

Version 1.3

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1 Introduction

1.1. The mission of the Institute for Education (IfE) is to advocate the ideals of discovery, to encourage and support research into new ways of acquiring, investigating and developing knowledge for the good of society, and to ensure that all research is conducted in accordance with fundamental ethical standards. The main principle governing all the IfE's research involving human subjects and personal data is respect for the participants' welfare, dignity and rights.

2 Objectives

2.1. The IfE's Research Ethics Policy and Procedures is intended to:

- Protect the dignity, rights, safety, and well-being of human subjects.
- Codify the IfE's position on research ethics for research involving human subjects, and personal data.
- Establish a commitment to high quality, transparent and accountable research throughout the IfE.
- Provide support on research ethics for all staff and learners.
- Encourage an organisational research culture based upon robust standards of research practice.
- Reduce risks to the IfE, and to the human subjects or to individual researchers.
- Consolidate the eligibility and quality of the IfE research funding applications.
- See that the requirements of data protection legislation are observed.
- Enhance the IfE's reputation with the general public and wider society, within the academic professions, and with funding bodies and external auditors.

3 General Principles

3.1. Any research involving humans or non-human participants requires ethics approval in accordance with this Policy before the research can be carried out.

3.2. The necessity to obtain ethics clearance is based on the need to protect the welfare and rights of participants in research, the researcher(s), the IfE and the community in general.

3.3. No research project at the IfE is to be commenced by a researcher until the required ethics approval in accordance with this Policy has been obtained.

3.4. Research involving humans, for the purposes of this Policy, is research conducted with or about people, or their data. Human participation in research includes, but is not limited to, the involvement of human subjects through:

- Participation in surveys, one-to one interviews or focus groups.
- Undergoing psychological, physiological, or medical testing.
- Being observed by researchers.
- Permitting researchers access to their personal documents or other materials.
- Consenting access to their information (in individually identifiable, reidentifiable or non-identifiable form) as part of an existing or unpublished source or database.

3.5. Researchers shall obtain the consent, which has to be specific, from the data subjects prior to processing their personal data. In obtaining the consent, the researcher shall inform the data subjects about the purpose of processing, and about their rights under the General Data Protection Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (GDPR), the Data Protection Act (Cap 586), and the Data Protection Policy of the IfE, namely the right to access, rectify, and where applicable erase the data concerning them.

3.6. Research that does not directly involve humans but can impact upon them also requires ethics approval. Examples of this may include research involving:

- Sites of community, cultural, historical, or religious significance to a definable group of humans.
- Findings which have a direct and significant impact upon the personal or professional affairs of a definable group of humans.

4 Researchers' obligations

4.1. Researchers at the IfE have an obligation to ensure that their research is conducted with:

- Honesty.
- Integrity.
- Minimal possible risk to participants and to themselves.
- Cultural, gender and ethnic sensitivity.

4.2. Guidance on the interpretation and application of these principles, including circumstances where a departure from these principles may be ethically justified, is detailed in this Policy document.

4.3. These essential principles of research ethics are established in international agreements, as well as national laws. Violation of these principles may, in some occasions, be a civil or criminal offence. The principles and requirements outlined in this Policy reflect the fundamental principles but do not replace a researcher's legal obligations. Ethical research conduct does not require the avoidance of potentially high-risk research. An ethical approach to research involves, rather, proper recognition of, and preparation for, risks, and their responsible management. Ethical research is therefore a matter of being risk aware, not risk averse.

5 The Research Ethics Board

5.1. The Research Ethics Board must have at least three (3) members, with varying backgrounds to promote complete and adequate review of commonly conducted research activities.

5.2. The members will serve for a period of three (3) years which can be renewed. The committee shall meet as required to discharge its responsibilities.

5.3. The Research Ethics Board is responsible for:

- Reviewing ethics approval requests.
- Providing guidance on and periodically reviewing the Research Ethics Policy and Procedures.
- Providing guidance on research meeting the requirements of data protection in consultation with the Data Protection Officer of the IfE.
- Promoting awareness of research ethics within the IfE.
- Providing advice on any ethical matters relating to research carried out by students and staff at the IfE.

6 Research Ethics Office

6.1. The Research Ethics Office falls within the remit of the Research and Development Department.

6.2. The Research Ethics Offices supports the work of the Research Ethics Board in discharging its duties.

6.3. The Research Ethics Office serves as point of contact for students and staff at the IfE on matters related to research ethics.

6.4. The Research Ethics Office serves as the link between students and staff of at the IfE and the Research Ethics Board.

6.5. The Research Ethics Office undertakes research ethics reviews delegated to it by the Research Ethics Board in line with point 7.3 of this policy.

7 Criteria for ethical review by the Research Ethics Board

7.1. All research involving human subjects should be evaluated by the Research Ethics Board against the criteria listed below before commencing the research. Research will be reviewed generally as a whole. However, in justified cases submissions may be made for each individual stage or phase separately.

7.2. A full review by the Research Ethics Board is required for projects meeting one or more of the following criteria:

- Projects that involve the inducement of more than minimal stress such as:
  - Procedures involving any risk to a participant's health or well-being (for example intrusive physiological or psychological procedures).
  - Surveys, questionnaires and any research, the nature of which might be offensive, distressing or deeply personal for the particular target group, even if individuals are not identifiable. This may include questions on sensitive data, i.e. ethnicity, political views, religion, physical or mental health/condition, sexual life/orientation and alleged offences.
- Protocols involving children under the age of 16 or other vulnerable groups, or those who may feel under pressure to take part due to their connection with the researcher.
- Research concerning prisoners and young offenders.
- Research involving the access of and/or collection of records of personal confidential data, concerning identifiable individuals as defined by data protection legislation. Personal data means data which relates to a living individual who can be identified. These personal data include but are not limited to sensitive personal data as well as academic and career information and some protected characteristics according to the Equal Opportunities Act of 2000, e.g., disability, marriage and pregnancy.
- Studies that link or share personal data or confidential information beyond the initial consent given, for example where the research topic or data gathering involves a risk of information being disclosed that would require the researchers to breach confidentiality conditions agreed with participants.
- Research involving collection of or access to audio/video recordings, photographs, or quotations within which participants are identifiable and with the intention to be disseminated beyond the research team. This will include publicly available information for example on social media and participants recruited or identified through the internet, if the understanding of privacy in these settings is contentious, where sensitive issues are discussed, or where visual images are used.

- Research protocols which require participants to take part in the study without their knowledge and/or consent at the time (e.g., covert observation, emergency research).
- Research which involves deception other than withholding information about the aims of the research until the interview.
- Research where the safety or well-being of the researcher may be in question. Anyone who either works or studies at the IfE must adhere to the relevant IfE Health and Safety policies and other local procedures.
- Research where for any other reason the researcher feels significant ethical concerns may arise.

7.3. In order for an application to qualify for delegated review delegated to the Research Ethics Office by the Research Ethics Board the research must not fall into any of the categories mentioned above. Low risk research should, therefore, be characterised by the absence of any of the above components. It should be noted that no category of research (e.g., undergraduate research dissertations) will always meet the low-risk criteria.

8 Procedures

8.1. Applications to the Research Ethics Board should provide sufficient information for a judgment to be reached by the Board. In particular, data should include the following:

- Details of applicant(s).
- The title of the investigation/consultancy.
- The place and dates during which the work is planned to be done.
- The aims and objectives of the proposal.
- Time frame.
- The methodology to be used.
- Age range of participants
- Proposed participant information sheets.
- Proposed participant consent/assent forms.
- Draft data collection tools (questionnaire, interview guide, observation protocol etc.)
- A consideration of safety and ethical issues, e.g. how a participant will be informed about the work and give their consent, whether the participant will receive payment or other reward for participation, whether there are risks to the physical and psychological health and safety of the participant and what risk minimisation strategies will be in place, how participant anonymity will be achieved, how the participant may withdraw from the research without

prejudice, what will be the method of keeping records secure and what will be the ultimate fate of the raw data collected, and how the data will be disseminated and published. The researcher/s shall make provisions for the adequate protection of the rights and welfare of prospective research subjects and ensure that pertinent laws and regulations are observed.

- Aftercare of the participants.

8.2. The Research Ethics Office will register the application and refer it to the Research Ethics Board.

8.3. The Research Ethics Board will form a collective judgment on whether or not to approve the application or seek further information from the applicant.

8.4. Research ethics requests shall be reviewed and decided upon within 20 working days for delegated reviews and within 40 working days for full reviews as defined in this policy. Reviews requiring iterative cycles of feedback might be subject to longer review times.

8.5. Feedback from the Research Ethics Board will be notified to the applicant at the address on the application. Generally, feedback from the Research Ethics Board will be made available to the applicant.

8.6. Applicants are encouraged to regard the comments and feedback from a Research Ethics Board as helpful and to respond constructively, especially where further work is required for the Research Ethics Board to be able to recommend ethical approval.

9 Research carried out in external entities

9.1. Students and staff intending to carry out research in external entities are responsible to seek access or ethics approval from these external entities where they wish to carry out their work.

9.2. Such approval is to be obtained prior to submission of the research ethics approval request to the Research Ethics Board. Where this is not possible, evidence of this must be submitted along with the research ethics approval request to the Research Ethics Board.

10 Conditions of ethics approval

10.1. Ethics approval is granted on the basis of a number of conditions. It is important that researchers at the IfE are familiar with, and abide by, these conditions:

- Any serious or unexpected adverse effects on research participants must be reported immediately to the Research Ethics Board.

- Any unforeseen events which might affect the continued ethical acceptability of the research project must be reported immediately to the Research Ethics Board.
- The Research Ethics Board must be notified of, and approve, any amendments to the original protocol, including but not limited to, changes to the membership of the research team, the research design or methodology, research tools, or research participants' recruitment method.
- The General Data Protection Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (GDPR) and the Data Protection Policy must be always adhered to.

11 Related documents

- Data Protection Act (Cap. 586)
- Data Protection Policy
- Equal Opportunities Act (2000)
- General Data Protection Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (GDPR)
- Research Ethics Approval Form

12 Version history

Originator	Version	Date	Changes Done
QA Dept.	1.0	19/12/2018	Initial Release
Research and Development Dept.	1.1	02/07/2020	Changed title into Research Ethics Board; revision of responsibilities of Research Ethics Board; Inclusion of Research Ethics Office; Roles and responsibilities of the Research Ethics Office; Revision of research carried out in external entities.
Research and Development Dept.	1.2	02/03/2023	Updated link to Research Ethics Approval Form, updated article 11 and hyperlinked all documentation referred to in the policy.
QA Dept.	1.3	26/04/2024	Updated links