School of Languages, Literatures and Cultures
University College Cork

Application for Ethical Approval

Initial Considerations

Institutional ethical approval is required for research involving human participants. The major areas of ethical consideration for such research include 1) your own integrity as an honest, objective and accurate researcher, 2) your respect for the rights and dignity of your research participants, 3) your responsible and ethical management and storage of research data, and 4) and your ethical dissemination of that data.

This document will provide you with some basic information about what to consider when preparing your research and completing your *Ethics Approval Form*. While this document offers a brief guide, you can also consult the UCC [Code of Ethics](#) for more detailed information.

1) Integrity

Integrity is about your own adherence to moral and ethical principles when conducting research. This includes characteristics such as honesty, openness, proactiveness, accuracy, and objectivity. For example, you must be honest and open about the way you represent yourself and your research to others (i.e. don't tell people you are world-leading expert in astrophysics unless you really are one!). Integrity also includes not plagiarising the work of others or fabricating research results, being open in acknowledging the contributions made by others to your research and reporting your research findings correctly and accurately. For more detail on researcher integrity, see pages 12-14 of the UCC Code of Ethics.

2) The rights and dignity of research participants

As a researcher, you must have the appropriate regard for your participants' rights, their moral and cultural values and their health and safety. This is particularly the case if you are working with vulnerable individuals or groups (see below section on vulnerable groups). All research must adhere to current safety practices and legal requirements.

Once your research project is fully prepared and has received ethical approval, you should identify the relevant participants and approach them in an appropriate way (you can discuss this in more detail with your supervisor). There are three key principles you must respect when recruiting participants: a) *informed consent*, b) *voluntary participation*, and c) *anonymity*:

a) **Informed consent** means providing participants with the full details of your study in language they can understand in advance of their participation, so that they are informed about what to expect. This information is usually presented via a written *Information Sheet* but you might also want to explain the information on the sheet to the participants. Informed consent must be sought in writing using a *Consent Form*, unless alternative means have been approved by the appropriate Ethics Committee. *

b) The *Information Sheet* should make it clear that participation in your study is **voluntary** and that participants may withdraw from your study without having to explain their reasons for doing so. Some research projects may require that you debrief participants at the end of the study where you again offer participants the opportunity to withdraw should they choose to.

c) The data provided by participants must remain anonymous so that, even if you publish the data, it will not be possible to link the information back to the participants. This is the principle of **anonymity**.

Please read pages 14-16 of the UCC Code of Ethics for more detailed information about informed consent, voluntary participation and anonymity.

*Sample *Information Sheets* and *Consent Forms* can be found on the website of the School of Languages, Literatures and Cultures. You can use these as templates, but you should customize them to suit your own study. Prior to submitting your Ethics Application to the School Research Officer, you will need to show your draft *Information Sheet* and *Consent Form* to your tutor/supervisor. These documents will need to be stored securely upon completion of your research (see section 3 on Data management and storage).

3) Data management and storage

Data and records can come in many different forms but there are some principles you must adhere to with regards the ethical management and storage of data. For example, all UCC researchers working with data have a responsibility to comply with the [UCC Research Data Management Policy](#) and the [General Data Protection Regulation](#) (the "GDPR").

Data and records generated in the course of research (including *Consent Forms*) must be kept securely in paper (e.g. in a locked filing cabinet) or electronic form (e.g. in a password protected folder on a UCC secure server), as appropriate, for a minimum of ten years following the completion of your project.

4. Dissemination

The University supports the freedom to publish research findings. Research of suitable quality should be published and/or made available in a form that is appropriate to your discipline and target audience. Most academic journals give detailed guidance to authors on format and any house rules concerning issues such as redundant or secondary publication. Where research participants have been involved, it may be appropriate to inform them of the outcome of the study.

Developments in educational technology mean that more of our work ends up online than ever before, such as on institutional thesis repositories or via our personal websites or social media pages. Such online activities can further blur the distinction between submitting a thesis or reporting internally and actually publishing it. The researcher should consider the potential consequences of this dynamic well in advance, not least with regards to the inclusion of any material that may raise copyright or GDPR issues.

Further considerations

Respecting Privacy vs. Acknowledgements Due

A great deal of research involving human participants is focused on investigating potentially private or contentious matters and, therefore, incorporates personal information on sensitive topics, such as an individual's political values, sexuality, or medical history. In these cases, it is usual to aggregate responses quantitively and/or to mention individual cases only after effective anonymisation. Data that identifies individuals should be stored safely and confidentially maintained.

However, in other studies – for example, biographical interviews with prominent writers or the video documentation of public festivities – using anonymisation can be quite inappropriate or impractical. In such cases, it is typically more important for writers, performers, or other artists to receive acknowledgement for their expertise. Any samples they have provided remain their intellectual property, so should be cited as such in your study and any resulting publications.

When a study includes elements of both documenting public-oriented events and analysing personally sensitive information, then the researcher needs a clear and upfront plan on how to handle the dual requirements of respecting privacy versus giving due acknowledgement.

Working with vulnerable groups (e.g. refugees, victim groups etc.)

If your research involves working with vulnerable groups, additional ethical measures must be considered to ensure the safeguarding of people's rights and avoiding potential harm. For example, if an interview study that involves asking questions that could provoke emotional or traumatic responses, you may need to provide participants with information about relevant local support services. If working with participants from different language groups, you might want to provide information in the appropriate language/s. In cases where consent cannot be given in writing because of illiteracy, non-written consent will need to be formally documented and independently witnessed.

Collecting data outside of Ireland

If your study involves working with human participants in a country outside of Ireland, you must ensure that you act in compliance with the laws of the country in which the data is collected, respect the local culture and that you take relevant health and safety precautions. You will also need to consider how to transport the data back to Ireland safely and ethically, for example, by using a UCC secure server in a password protected folder. *Publicly Available Data*

Some data, such as interview recordings, could have long-term value beyond the study itself but are unlikely to be published in full. In these instances, it may be appropriate to place the resulting recordings in an archive, library, museum or even in an online database. The researcher should plan this in advance, taking advice from supervisors and archivists as necessary. Any plans for archiving need to be communicated with and acceptable to those who participate in the study.

The Review Process

You should set out your research to allow time to plan for and review any ethical considerations. Ask your course tutor or dissertation supervisor to check your application. Then, when you are ready for the review stage, complete an *Ethics Application Form*, and attach your *Information Sheet* and *Consent Form*. Send these to the current School Research Officer who will arrange for the review. The School homepage or the School office will be able to provide the information on who needs to be contacted. Note that, in cases where projects raise more complex ethical questions, the application might be referred to UCC's [Social Research Ethics Committee](). Please be aware that ethics reviews can be timeconsuming, especially if the reviewers have to come back to you to seek further information. As such, it is important that you prepare your application thoroughly and that you allow for plenty of time in order to complete the research in advance of submission deadlines.

Application forms, as well as information sheet and consent form templates are available on the website of the School of Languages, Literatures and Cultures:

https://www.ucc.ie/en/sllc/informationforsllcstaff/