Guidance Document for SREC applicants

There are three sub-committees of the University Ethics Committee; Clinical, Animal, and Social.	
Clinical or Animal Experimentation	If you wish to apply to CREC (Clinical Research Ethics Committee) or AEEC (Animal Ethics Experimentation Committee), you will need to contact these committees directly for their manuals. They can be reached via email at crec@ucc.ie or aeec@ucc.ie
Social Research	Please Note: The Social Research Ethics Committee reviews ethical applications from UCC Research Post Graduate students (e.g. PhD and Masters by Research students), and employees. We do not accept applications from non-UCC applicants or from undergraduate students. In general, applications from taught postgraduate students are dealt with at School/Department level. If you are applying to SREC there is no deadline for ethics applications but rather you can submit at whatever time suits you to srec@ucc.ie
This document will give you some guidance as to which is the most appropriate Committee to apply to for ethical approval: Introduction to Research Ethics at UCC	
The link to the ethics page at UCC is https://www.ucc.ie/en/research/support/ethics/	

- There are several codes of research ethics produced by universities, professional bodies, and others. SREC encourages applicants to refer to the ethics documents related to their own disciplines, but as a matter of course, all applicants ought to be familiar with the UCC Code of Research Conduct https://www.ucc.ie/en/research/support/integrity/codeguidelines/ . The approach of the Social Research Ethics Committee (SREC) is to be enabling and to offer advice to researchers to strengthen the ethical approach in their study. However, there are common issues which impact on researchers securing approval. The purpose of this document is to proactively address these ~~issues~~ to help strengthen applications and the ethical review process.
- We must also remember that our duty of care to research participants extends from the conception of the project to post-dissemination of findings and that ethical approval once granted does not and should not displace ethical engagement for the duration of a research project.

Do I need research ethics approval for my research? Research ethics approval is required for all research involving direct and indirect interaction with human participants (via computer / internet, in clinical or other settings) and/or which uses personal data of identifiable individuals. It is also required for any research that involves the use of animals.

When do I need to obtain research approval? Research approval must **always** be obtained in advance of carrying out the research and ethical approach cannot be granted retrospectively. Only when you obtain approval for your research, can you start that part of the research, which involves people.

Section 1 - Guidance for Applicants

Please make sure that you give yourself a good lead-time in applying for ethics approval. Normally applicants should expect to hear from SREC within 2 to 3 weeks with a decision within 6 weeks. A substantial increase in the volume of applications may result in some additional delays with the reviewing process. However, every effort is made to process applications as quickly as possible.

The operational procedures for SREC are as follows

- SREC has a list of trained and experienced reviewers
- When each application is submitted, it is assigned via email to the next two reviewers on the list.

You will find the following in the Social Research section of the ethics webpage

- ✓ A copy of the SREC Application Form
- ✓ Sample info sheets and consent forms
- ✓ FAQs

Common errors made by applicants:

1. Forgetting to complete the Application Checklist and the Self Evaluation Checklist
2. Failing to complete the declarations section on Q36 and/or forgetting to sign and/or obtain supervisors' signature (if applicable) on the form (Q37)
3. Forgetting to include required supporting documentation such as copies of questionnaires/interview questions (as applicable), information sheet, consent forms, recruitment materials etc. which should be added to the end of the application form and **scanned as one pdf**
4. Not adequately addressing storage requirements on Q30 (see Electronic Data Storage Guidelines on the SREC form)
5. Failing to proofread applications and supporting documentation, to correct errors.
6. Applications being overly long. (Guideline: 10 – 20 pages is common, with 25 – 30 pages for some)
7. Please see additional guidelines on completing SREC Application forms in Section 2 below and please remember that application forms will have to be returned if they are not completed correctly or completely.

Electronic Data Storage Guidelines

Detailed guidance is provided on the SREC form regarding the storage of physical and electronic data to comply with the requirements set out in the UCC Code of Research Conduct.

For additional information on data storage see **Data Storage & Backup**

Section 2 - To assist applicants in completing other sections of the SREC Application form please carefully read the following:

Children/Young persons

If the research participants include children/young persons (under 18 years of age) you will need to ensure that your research is in compliance with the UCC Child Safeguarding Statement, which sets out the legal requirements under the Children First Act 2015; Link here: UCC Child Protection Policy

Garda Vetting

Garda vetting is required for researchers carrying out certain kinds of designated research:
If research engages children under 18 years of age and in order to comply with the Children First Act 2015 http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2015/act/36/enacted/en/pdf, please note that UCC is obliged to complete the process of Garda vetting for staff and students.
Garda Vetting previously obtained from a body other than UCC, does not meet UCC vetting requirements.

- For academic staff, details on UCC Garda Vetting policy are available at https://www.ucc.ie/en/hr/gardavetting/
- For students (including PhD students), details on UCC Garda Vetting policy are available at: UCC Student Vetting Policy and Procedure.

Students for whom Garda vetting is required should contact studentgardavetting@ucc.ie and the relevant details will be sent to them.

GDPR and Data Protection

In addition to the data protection questions on the SREC form, you will need to consider if you will need to submit a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA). See the UCC GDPR page for more information. Also see UCC's DPIA Procedure . The first part of the procedure is a checklist to determine whether a DPIA is necessary.

Right to Withdraw

The right to withdraw from the study is included in all research studies where consent is obtained. However, it cannot be open-ended; for example, once a paper has been published or a thesis submitted, withdrawal is impossible. Where data have been gathered in a manner allowing them to be linked to a specific participant (e.g. audio-recorded interviews) then one can offer the right to withdraw at any time during the interview and up to a specified time after; where the data have been gathered anonymously (e.g. through online survey) then the withdrawal of consent is only possible up to the point at which the data are submitted.

Voluntary consent

In most of the applications that come to SREC, this is relatively unproblematic. There are specific circumstances, however, where difficulties can arise:
Where the participants are children (i.e. under 18 years), it is necessary to obtain consent from the parent or guardian. The child should also be afforded the opportunity to give their assent to be involved in the research.

Where the participants are children, recruited through schools or other organizations, it is important to take steps to ensure that the consent offered is indeed voluntary. If a teacher, principal, group

leader or other figure of authority appears to be endorsing and encouraging participation in research, this may present a problem. Therefore, we suggest that, while such figures may facilitate contact with potential participants, they should play no more active role in the recruitment process.

Where participants are residents of institutions, whether prisons, care homes etc., the same difficulty may arise. If prison officers, for example, appear to be promoting the project, there must be a question over whether the consent gained is indeed voluntary.

Research questions

To make sense of your data collection and sample selection strategy, it is necessary to include the research questions for the study as part of your application.

Confidentiality & anonymity

We must always offer these promises from ourselves, but there are limits to these. Specifically, there are limits in law such as the need to protect individuals from harm. Where a risk assessment identifies potential for such an issue to arise, the applicant must outline proposed procedures.
Where data are gathered in a group format, such as a focus group, there must also be concerns about confidentiality. Again, we can offer confidentiality from ourselves, but cannot guarantee it from the other group participants. Under these circumstances, it is advisable to include in the consent form an agreement to maintain confidentiality, and to explain this before the group commences.

Recruitment

Recruitment should be undertaken ethically. If organisations or persons facilitate recruitment of research participants, the nature of their facilitation needs to be detailed and as researchers, we still need to take responsibility for all aspects of the recruitment process and ensure it is done ethically. How potential participants will be identified and invited to take part in the study needs to be detailed in the application. Recruitment plans need to be fully understood by reviewers and recruitment materials made available for review purposes. Recruitment processes and materials vary and include formal letters, posting flyers, sending emails, announcements in classes or other settings, postings to online bulletin boards or social media sites, or informal personal conversations.

Guidance for Conducting Internet Research

Online platforms and online communities are widely used by researchers as rich sources of research data. Given the increasing value of user-generated data available on internet-based communities, researchers must consider the potential ethical and legal challenges that may arise as a result of collecting and using data available online. This Guidance Document for Conducting Research on Online Platforms is for UCC researchers conducting internet research.

Guidance for Researchers conducting Research with Vulnerable People

This Guidance is for researchers engaged in research involving participants who are or may be vulnerable. It sets out the issues which REC reviewers consider important in reviewing applications for research ethics approval. The Guidance recognises that research with vulnerable research participants can make an important contribution to improving the lives of vulnerable people. For this reason, vulnerable persons should not be excluded from research because of the challenges involved**, rather researchers are encouraged to develop the ethical practices required to include such persons in their research projects.** However, it also reflects the concerns which arise in carrying out research with vulnerable participants and the importance of appropriate and proportionate safeguards in this context. Link here Vulnerability Guidance Document