

Guidance Document for SREC applicants

There are three sub-committees of the University Ethics Committee; Clinical, Animal and Social.

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| 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 | The Social Research Ethics Committee reviews ethical applications from UCC Research Post Graduate 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 level; however, where this is not possible, SREC will accept such applications. 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 <http://www.ucc.ie/en/research/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](#).
- The general 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 a number of 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 which 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 approval cannot be granted retrospectively. Only when you obtain approval for your research, can you start that part of the research which involves people.

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. That being said 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 2 reviewers on the list.

Please see link to the recently updated SREC Application Form here [SREC Application Form](#)

Common errors made by applicants:

- Forgetting to complete the application checklist on page 1 and the Self Evaluation Checklist on page 3
- Failing to complete the declarations section on Q36 and/or forgetting to sign and/or obtain their supervisors' signature on the form (Q37)
- 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**
- Not adequately addressing storage requirements on Q30 (see Electronic Data Storage Guidelines on the SREC form and also on page 3 of this document)
- Failing to proof read applications and supporting documentation to correct errors.
- 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.

Look under the social research tab of the ethics webpage to find the following (links below also)

- a copy of the [SREC Application Form](#)
- the link to this guidance document
- sample info sheets and consent forms – links on below table

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|--------------------|---|
| Experiment | Experiment-Template Information Sheet & Consent Form |
| Focus Group | Focus Group-Template Information Sheet & Consent Form |
| Interview | Interview-Template Information Sheet & Consent Form |
| Survey | Survey-Template Information Sheet & Consent Form |

Electronic Data Storage Guidelines

As per the UCC Code of Research Conduct, for data retention purposes a complete dataset must be securely stored for ten years and then destroyed.

As researchers, it is imperative that we can assure our participants that their data will be stored securely; this is of course particularly important where potentially sensitive personal details are involved.

- It is not adequate to simply say that the data will be stored safely. Exact detail is required as to the use (and location) of locked cabinets, management of audio files, encryption of laptops, electronic storage and so on.
- Where possible physical data such as survey forms etc. should be converted to electronic format as soon as possible and the originals shredded, however if physical data has to be retained then it should be safely stored on a secure premises at UCC in a locked cabinet/office. Research participants should know how long data will be retained before it is destroyed.

Treating Identifiable Data

1. Data should be converted to anonymous form as soon as is possible, thus opening the possibility of storing the data on OneDrive etc.
2. If data is not anonymised then the UCC IT Department recommendation is to use *Research Data Store OR Departments/Schools own local secure storage, (eg UCC NAS etc.) if this exists.
3. If identifiable data is not stored on *Research Data Store or NAS the researcher must provide a justification for this and must ensure that the laptop or pc on which the data is stored is encrypted and password protected.
4. Applicants should never store research data on a USB and only use an encrypted portable hard drive for short term storage until data has been anonymised.
5. Applicants must consider how to maintain safe storage of their data beyond the life of their laptop/pc to meet the 10 year requirement in the UCC Code of Research Conduct.
6. All laptops and PCs used to access data must be encrypted and password protected

Treating Anonymised Data

1. If confidential data has been anonymised or if you have public or non-sensitive data, then the UCC-supplied OneDrive for Business through UCC Office 365 or Google Drive through the UCC-supplied G-Suite (formerly Google Apps for Education), can be used for data storage.
2. The personal versions of OneDrive and G-Suite should not be used to store research data.

*Research Data Store provides a network based shared data storage facility for the UCC Research community. It is for active research projects and is not an archive service. A Principal Investigator or Head of Department can request storage (maximum 1TB) for a research project. Research Groups will have access to 1TB of storage and folders can be shared with researchers in either the central or student domains. This service can be requested by a PI or by a Head of Department on behalf of members of a research team / students.

To make a request to use Research Data Store, visit <http://ServiceDesk.ucc.ie> and select option 4 (Data Storage and NAS Access). <https://www.ucc.ie/en/it/services/datastore/>

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 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 give consideration to 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](#)