

Policy Title: RESEARCH ETHICS POLICY

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Approved by:	Name: Ethics Group	
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Revision History

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0	New Policy	18/6/2018	Approved by Academic Council

Contents

INTRODUCTION

Research can vary from small independent projects to projects within a large, multidisciplinary programme, often involving collaboration with other HEIs or industry, either nationally, or internationally. This policy refers to research projects conducted by IT Sligo staff and students (including undergraduate, taught postgraduate, and postgraduate). All research carried out at IT Sligo must conform to best international practice in relation to its ethical grounding and is committed to ensuring that research is conducted ethically and with the minimum possible risk to all those involved or affected by it. The following policy underpins how this is assured and is intended to complement all other relevant statutory and regulatory requirements.

RESEARCH DEFINED

'Research', within the context of higher education, means original scientific, technological and engineering, medical, cultural, social and human science or educational research which implies careful, critical, disciplined inquiry, varying in technique and method according to the nature and conditions of the problems identified, directed towards the clarification and/or resolution of the problems, and when within an institutional framework, supported by an appropriate infrastructure (UNESCO, 1997¹)

PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This policy is intended to provide all researchers (students and staff), with an overview of research ethics in IT Sligo. Specifically, this policy applies to all staff who are involved in research. This includes staff in academic departments, strategic research centres and other all research relationships. It includes all students, postgraduate and undergraduate, who undertake research as part of their programmes of learning.

Central to this are fundamental principles that govern all research involving human participants, research involving animal subjects, and general principles of data confidentiality and access.

ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

IT Sligo's Research Ethics Policy is founded on seven key principles:

1. Research should be designed and undertaken with ethical considerations in mind, thus ensuring integrity and quality of all that is done. The research planning process must include explicit reference to any discipline-specific national ethics regulations that exist, and compliance with current versions of same.
2. The independence, autonomy and integrity of research participants must be respected at all times.

¹ UNESCO, (1997) Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel, General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, meeting in Paris for its 29th session, 1997. Accessed from: http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=13144&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

3. Research participants must be informed fully about the purpose, methods and intended possible uses of the research, what their part in the research entails, and what risks, if any, may arise.
4. The confidentiality of information supplied by research subjects and the anonymity of respondents must be respected and secured, except where they consent to allow their names to be used at the request of the researcher, or where they wish to have them included.
5. Participation is expected to be entirely voluntary, free from any coercion, duress or any offer of inappropriate incentives.
6. Unnecessary harm to research participants, both human and animal, must be avoided.
7. The independence of the research must be clear. Any conflicts of interest or partiality, including the roles, rights and responsibilities of outside interests or collaborators should be declared in the research proposal.

ETHICAL PRACTICES

In meeting the standard of the principles outlined above, the following practices will be mandatory at IT Sligo:

Research involving human participants:

The Institute expects research to operate with respect for all persons involved directly or indirectly. Researchers must:

- a. Obtain voluntary informed consent of participants who should understand and agree in writing to their part without any duress. They should be advised why their participation is necessary, how the research will be used and how and to whom it will be reported. An appropriately worded Participation Information Document and Consent Form must be supplied to the prospective participant. A sample of this form must be submitted with the application for ethics approval.
- b. Avoid any element of subterfuge or deception.
- c. Advise the participant of the right to withdraw for any or no reason, at any time prior to publication of the research.
- d. Recognise that special and additional ethical issues arise when dealing with persons under the age of 18, or who may be considered vulnerable, from old age, intellectual disability or other reason, which require detailed consideration.
- e. Not use incentives to encourage participation that amount to either undue influence to consent nor contain any element of duress.
- f. Make known in writing to the participants any risks arising from the research or arising from the findings.
- g. Recognise the participants' entitlement to confidentiality of personal information and must afford them anonymity and comply with General Data Protection Regulations legislation.
- h. Warn participants that information found in the course of the research may be disclosed to the relevant authorities if it is concerned with illegality or may cause harm to participants/others.

Research involving animals:

Research must comply with all statutory licensing requirements of the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA)³, SI 543 of 2013 European Union (Protection of Animals used for Scientific Purposes) Regulations 2012. IT Sligo actively supports the implementation Russell & Burch, (1959)

three R's approach on which much of the legislation controlling the use of animals for research is based. In the case of animal experimentation, the following conditions must be met:

- a. Researchers must implement the accepted practices of Reduction, Refinement and Replacement in the use of animal subjects in research.
 - Reduction is achieved by the requirement for statistical justification of proposed animal numbers and by ensuring that only experiments that are rigorously justified are used. Precise repetition of experiments on live vertebrate animals for which published data are available is not acceptable. There is a requirement to maximise the amount of data emerging from animal experiments by judicious experimental design.
 - Refinement is brought about by ensuring that animal welfare is prioritised when designing experiments and by ensuring high standards of training and education of researchers and animal care staff.
 - Replacement and uptake of alternatives to live animals in teaching and research are encouraged.
- b. Persons carrying out procedures involving harm or potential harm to living vertebrate animals for research must hold a license issued by the appropriate Government Department. Such licenses will stipulate conditions in relation to experimental procedures and types and numbers of animals used.
- c. Procedures on live animals may be carried out only in designated, licensed premises.
- d. License holders may carry out work only at the designated premises specified on their license and may only use approved protocols.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Institute of Technology Sligo Research Ethics Committee

Overall responsibility for the development, implementation and monitoring of research ethics policies belongs with Institute of Technology Sligo Research Ethics Committee (IREC). Membership of this committee will include the Vice President of Research, Innovation and Engagement (Chair), the three Chairs of the School Research Ethics Committee and two additional members of the Research and Innovation committee.

- The IREC is responsible for approving the terms of reference, membership, procedures and annual reports of School Research Ethics Committees (SREC) and giving guidance to SREC's as required.
- The IREC will convene in accordance with published meeting dates scheduled annually.
- The IREC is responsible for reviewing postgraduate research and staff research ethics applications in a timely manner.
- The IREC can and will consider specific ethical matters on an ad hoc basis.
- In addition, it will undertake an annual audit of decisions taken by all research ethics committees
- The IREC will present an update to the Research and Innovation Committee and will provide an annual report to Academic Board as an addendum to the Research and Innovation Committee's annual report.

School Research Ethics Committee

A large portion of research applications will be considered within the SREC. These projects will be diverse and will require the expertise of those within the School. The committee will be populated by a panel but membership of this committee will include the Head of Department (or nominee), and two other elected members at a minimum.

- The SREC will convene in accordance with published meeting dates scheduled annually. There are specific times of the year where the volume of applications is such that more frequent meetings will need to occur
- The SREC is responsible for reviewing applications relevant to the School in a timely manner.
- The SREC will liaise with the IREC on process and policy development and any application that require IREC review and input.

Other

All Committees involved in the review of research ethics should be independent of the researcher. If a situation arises where a potential conflict of interest is evident the committee members will withdraw as a member of the committee for this occasion.

Committee quorum members are required; normal business cannot occur in the absence of a quorum.

Committees must take into account relevant professional ethical codes and the policies of research sponsors.

Training will be provided to Committee members as decided by the Committee.