



Royal Conservatoire
of Scotland

Research Ethics Policy

Academic Year 2012/13

1 SUMMARY

The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland is committed to the maintenance of the highest ethical standards in respect of research carried out in its name, or with its support.

The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland's Research Committee maintains an oversight of all research carried out under the auspices of the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. This includes research conducted by both staff and students. In this regard, the Research Committee reports to the Academic Board, which has the overall responsibility for the academic work of the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. The Head of Research is the designated officer with responsibility for the ethical review of research on behalf of the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and in that capacity she/he reports to the Research Committee. The Head of Research will make an annual report to the Research Committee which, itself, will keep ethical issues under continuous review and will report to the Academic Board as required.

The Research Degrees Committee will be responsible for the consideration of any ethical aspect of a prospective student's research proposal. The Research Degrees Committee will also keep in view any ethical issues which may arise as a student pursues her/his project. Previously identified or emergent ethical issues will be addressed at the time of each student's annual review. The Research Degrees Committee will report to the Research Committee on any ethical issues in relation to a specific project or more generally.

2 BASIS OF APPROVAL BY THE RESEARCH COMMITTEE AND/OR THE RESEARCH DEGREES COMMITTEE

Approval by the Research Committee and/or the Research Degrees Committee does not detract in any way from the ultimate responsibility which researchers must themselves have for all research which they carry out and for its effects on human subjects. The Research Committee and/or the Research Degrees Committee are dependent upon information supplied by the researcher. This information is expected to be properly researched, full, truthful and accurate. Failure to follow the guidance on ethical review of research may result in disciplinary action.

In arriving at its decision, the Research Committee and/or the Research Degrees Committee may seek external expert advice. Either Committee may withhold approval of a project if it considers that any ethical issues have not been addressed appropriately by the researcher, who may be asked to re-submit the project after having taken account of the issues identified by the Committee.

3 ETHICAL ISSUES

Ethical issues arise when the conduct of research involves the interests and rights of others particularly in respect of their safety, security, comfort, privacy or convenience.

The adoption of an ethical position in respect of research requires that the researcher observes and protects the rights of would-be participants and systematically acts to permit the participants to exercise those rights. Ethical practice in such cases requires that participants, as a minimum, be properly informed, free to volunteer without inappropriate inducement, free to opt out at any time without redress, and be fully protected in regard to safety to the limits of best practice.

Ethical practice in the management of this work requires that the Research Committee or the Research Degrees Committee as appropriate examines the research design and the system for protecting participants' interests with a view to adjudicating on their ethical acceptability and their accountability.

Any research that involves others as participants creates the possibility of an interference with the participants' interests or rights. Social research involving interviewing or observation especially where records (particularly on audio or video tape) are kept, may impinge on the confidentiality, privacy, convenience, comfort safety or security of others. Such possibilities constitute ethical problems.

Ethical issues may also be raised by research which makes reference to named persons either living or with living relatives. Research which relates to the dead may also raise issues of privacy and confidentiality.

Ethical issues may be felt to be especially important where research involves people who may be need of additional protection. For example, research with children and those with learning disabilities may require additional safeguards to be taken to protect participants' well-being. Research which involves students as subjects or in some other way also raises particular issues which must be addressed e.g. if the research involves the introduction of an experimental approach to learning, teaching or assessment then all reasonable steps must be taken to safeguard the quality of the students' learning experience.

Legal issues may also arise in conducting research with human subjects or using data about them. For example, data protection legislation governs research with data concerning identifiable, living persons. Researchers should be aware of the legal issues that arise from their research and to demonstrate that they have taken proper steps to ensure they comply with legal requirements. This may include the researcher seeking legal advice (for which the researcher will be responsible for payment) and the Research Committee and/or the Research Degrees Committee will make a judgement on a case-by-case basis.

Research proposals must comply with the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland's Equal Opportunities Policy, its Race Equality Policy and its Disability Policy.

The following check list will be used by the Research Committee and/or the Research Degrees Committee to determine if a particular research proposal raises ethical issues:

- (a) Does the research use people or human data as its subjects?
- (b) What ethical or legal rights do the people affected by the research project have? How are their rights observed and protected?
- (c) Are any potentially vulnerable people involved (e.g. children, adults with learning disabilities, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland or other students)? If so, are additional safeguards required?
- (d) Is there recognition of legal issues arising and are there mechanisms for ensuring legal requirements are met?
- (e) Does the research involve sponsorship or external contract? What additional ethical issues are raised and how are they dealt with, for example, in respect of the publication of findings? If sponsorship is provided by an external source, is that source acceptable to the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland e.g. in terms of its Equal Opportunities Policy or other ethical consideration?
- (f) Does the research comply with the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland's Equal Opportunities Policy?
- (g) Does the research raise issues of an ethical nature even if they do not raise the questions listed above? How will such issues handled?

Research work should not proceed without explicit, written approval of the Convenor of the Research Committee and/or the Research Degrees Committee. Copies of the formal written approval must also be retained by the Research Committee or on the student's file.

4 COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH

In the case of research conducted in collaboration with external bodies the Research Committee and/or the Research Degrees Committee must receive confirmation that the collaborative partner has received the appropriate ethical/legal clearance to proceed with the research. Particular attention should be paid to collaborative research which involves human subjects. In the event of participation in any clinically based research the Research Committee and/or the Research Degrees Committee must ensure that approval has been given by the relevant NHS research ethics committee.