



Royal Conservatoire *of* Scotland

Research Ethics Policy

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 Ethics 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, and in this policy the term "researcher" may refer to either or both. In this regard, the Ethics Committee reports to the Academic Board, which has the overall responsibility for the academic work of the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. The Director of Research and Knowledge Exchange 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 Academic Board. The Director of Research chairs the Ethics Committee which, itself, keeps ethical issues under continuous review, and will report to the Academic Board as required.

The Ethics Committee is also responsible for the consideration of any ethical aspect of a student's research proposal. The Research Degrees Committee may also keep in view any ethical issues which may arise as a research student pursues her/his project. Previously identified or emergent ethical issues will be addressed in good time, and approval sought from the Ethics Committee whenever necessary. The Research Degrees Committee will report to the Ethics Committee on any ethical issues in relation to a specific project or more generally.

2 BASIS OF APPROVAL BY THE ETHICS COMMITTEE

Approval by the Ethics Committee does not detract in any way from the ultimate responsibility which researchers themselves, whether staff or students, must have for all research which they carry out and for its effects on human participants. The Ethics Committee is dependent upon information supplied by the researcher. This information is expected to be properly considered, 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 Ethics Committee may seek external expert advice. The 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 or of the researcher, 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. It should be noted that an ethical approach, and the granting of ethical approval, is independent of a judgement of approval from a given moral, political or religious perspective, or from considerations of perceived taste.

Ethical practice in the management of this work requires that the Ethics Committee 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) 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 in need of additional protection. For example, research with children and those with learning additional support needs may require additional safeguards to be taken to protect participants' well-being. Research which involves students as participants 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, including, significantly, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2018, governs research with data concerning identifiable, living persons. Researchers should be aware of the legal issues that arise from their research and demonstrate that they have taken proper steps to ensure they comply with legal requirements, including requirements related to storage of data. This may include the researcher seeking legal advice (for which the researcher will be responsible for payment) and the Ethics Committee will make a judgement on a case-by-case basis.

Further legal issues may arise in respect of research that involves the use of material that may be considered sensitive and will arise in the use of material that could be identified as suspect or criminal in the absence of a bona fide research rationale. Advice and ethical approval should be sought in these cases to protect the researcher and the Conservatoire. Ethical approval cannot turn clear illegality into legality. However, in dealing with sensitive material, there is often not a clear boundary between what is legal and what is not. For example, accessing terrorist or other prohibited material once, perhaps by accident, is unlikely to be considered illegal. But systematically accessing and storing such information might be, and passing it on to colleagues or students most likely would be. Intention/purpose for access to such material is of the first importance. The Prevent Good Practice Guide offers a protocol that makes the research intention unambiguous and strictly restricts access to such material, minimising the potential for a researcher or the Conservatoire to slip, accidentally, into a breach of the law. This protocol offers protection to the researcher and the Conservatoire by minimising the potential for misinterpretation and thereby protecting the researcher and the Conservatoire, and any researcher undertaking research with sensitive material will be required to use it as a condition of ethical approval.

Research proposals must comply with the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland's Equality and Diversity Policy and its Disability in Employment Policy.

The following checklist will be used by the Ethics Committee to determine if a particular research proposal raises ethical issues:

- (a) Does the research use people or human data as its subjects?
- (b) Is there a realistic chance that the research will present risks of physical and/or psychological harm to the researcher? If so, what measures have been taken to mitigate these risks?
- (c) What ethical or legal rights do the people affected by the research project have? How are their rights observed and protected?
- (d) Are any potentially vulnerable people involved (e.g. children, adults with additional support needs, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland or other students)? If so, are additional safeguards required?
- (e) Is there recognition of legal issues arising and are there mechanisms for ensuring legal requirements are met?
- (f) Does the research involve the use of material or information that may be considered sensitive or is illegal (such as pornography or material related to terrorism or extreme groups)?

- (g) Does the research involve sponsorship or an 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 Equality and Diversity Policy or other ethical consideration?
- (h) Does the research comply with the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland's Equality and Diversity Policy?
- (i) 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 Ethics Committee. Copies of the formal written approval must also be retained by the Ethics Committee and, where relevant, on the student's file.

Where the Ethics Committee considers there has been a breach of the Ethics Policy, including where an application for ethical approval is made retrospectively, the details of the application and resulting actions shall be recorded in the Infraction Register. In instances where the infraction is of a serious nature, the case shall be brought to the attention of the Academic Board.

4 COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH

In the case of research conducted in collaboration with external bodies the Ethics Committee must grant explicit approval for all aspects that involve the direct participation of staff or students of the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland before the research proceeds. In cases of collaborative research or for external research that the Royal Conservatoire sponsors (by, for example, inviting staff or students to participate), the Ethics Committee may in the first instance scrutinise an application for ethical approval that has been made to the partner, or originating, institution. If this application provides sufficient information to fulfil the checklist above, then approval may be granted without a separate application being made.

Research that has received the approval of the Conservatoires UK Ethics Committee, which includes members of the Royal Conservatoire's Ethics Committee, will be deemed also to have received the approval of the Royal Conservatoire's Ethics Committee.

In the event of participation in any clinically-based research the Ethics Committee must ensure that approval has been given by the relevant NHS research ethics committee.