Ethical Code for Education Programmes Research

SEPTEMBER 2025

1. Introduction

This document is a guiding framework to promote highest ethical standards in educational research at NCI.

All researchers intending to do education research are required to reflect upon any potential ethical issues and probable risk. Should their proposed study have any implications for potential ethical considerations, submit their research proposals, for ethical review before commencing data collection.

The ethical principles and guidelines are developed based on a set of values of the education programmes, with due respect and full acknowledgement of existing ethical guidelines including those developed by

- The British Educational Research Association (BERA)
- The American Educational Research Association (AERA)
- The European Education Research Association (EERA)
- The European Early Childhood Education and Research Association (EECERA)
- NCI Ethical guidelines and procedures for Research involving Human participants.

2. Guiding Principles

Educational Researchers must have an ethic of respect for the following in light of the topic under study:

1. Democratic values
2. Justice and equality
3. The child the family and Society
4. Integrity, transparency and respectful interactions
5. Knowing from multiple perspectives
6. Quality and rigour
7. Academic Scholarship
8. Social Contribution

Principle 1: Democratic Values

This principle entails the ethic of respect that all participants in the research process

- Are viewed as persons and not objects with rights to participate in the research activity, either directly or indirectly, actively or passively;
- Are treated fairly, sensitively, with dignity and without prejudice, regardless of age, religion, language, disability, health condition, gender identity, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, national origin, culture, social economic status or marital, domestic or parental status;
- Embody a deep respect for the rights of people, especially children and more vulnerable members of society, to have a voice and participate actively in all decisions and actions which affect them (paying due regards to UN conventions on Human/children's rights
- Acknowledge the rights of others to hold values, attitudes and opinions that differ from the research's own;
- Be sensitive to culture, individual and role differences and strive to eliminate bias of any kind;
- Aim to distribute power between all participants as far as possible and in a way that allows all involved to actively have a voice in the research process and contribute equitably and appropriately to the research process.

Principle 2: Justice and Equity

This principle specifically focuses on the ethic of respect to:

- Operate within the code that actively promotes democratic values and contributes to social justice and equity within communities and societies;
- Plurality at the level of paradigms, theories, disciplines and methodologies, arriving at a prismatic process of research that illuminates the complexity of human learning, gives credence to diverse voices, answers to different realities, and promotes equality in our understanding of participants in the research.

Principle 3: The Child Family and Society

This principle emphasises that the ethic of respect should

- Operate for all research participants from pre-birth through the life span;
- Ensure all the research participants are seen as persons developing in the context of their families and communities, which are culturally situated as part of wider societies;
- Ensure that all persons and communities are treated in a way that is free from prejudice regardless of cultural and social identity.

Principle 4: Integrity, transparency and respectful interactions

This principle focusses on the ethic of respect to

- Ensure researchers do not knowingly act in ways that jeopardize the welfare of others;
- Ensure the avoidance of deception or non-disclosure towards research participants and that all research actions are transparent and documented fully, with data/information and methods made open for external scrutiny and critical review.
- Make public the set of ethical principles and actions, which guide research practice.
- Ensure the practice of research and outputs is conducted in ways that are honest, fair and acknowledging of all contributions in the research and dissemination process.
- Ensure that research findings are communicated in a clear straightforward fashion and in a language to be appropriate to their intended audience;
- Ensure that researchers never compromise ethical behaviour in favour of collegiality.

Principle 5. Knowing from multiple perspectives

This principle focusses on the ethic of respect to

- Promote research that is original and informing, whilst showing respect for existing work and disciplines;
- Aim to extend knowledge of understanding in all areas of educational activity and from all participants perspectives, including learners, educators, practitioners, policy makers and the public;
- Acknowledge the legitimacy of diverse educational research philosophies, paradigms and methodologies that exist and seek to reassure that research results do not selectively judge or constrain, directly or indirectly, the methodological distinctions of the research process that come from them.

Principle 6. Quality and rigour

This principle relates to respect the ethic of research practice

- That research designs rigorously serve the questions and objectives of the study
- Ensures free, independent, critical and informed choices of authors, articles, theories and concepts included in any literature review and research design with full acknowledgement and citation;
- Ensures the highest ethical standards for dealing with participants which guarantees participant their rights;
- Ensures the highest standards of academic and professional rigour n presentation and dissemination of research.

Principle 7. Academic Scholarship

This principle emphasizes that educational research should

- Ensure all those who have made a substantive contribution to the generation of an intellectual product are listed as authors/contributors;
- Acknowledge that it is improper to list people who have not directly contributed to the research or written outputs of research;
- Ensure that academic status or other indicators of power should not determine first authorship, but rather the order of authorship should reflect the relative leadership and contributions made by the researchers concerned;
- Acknowledge the obligation on authors to attribute visibly all external sources of support, including sponsors or financial support for a project in which the researcher is involved directly or indirectly;
- Ensure authors disclose the publication history of articles they submit for publication; that is, if the present article is substantially similar in content and form to one previously publishes, that fact should be noted and the place of publication cited.

Principle 8 Social Contribution

This principle expects research practice to

- Embody an awareness of social responsibility towards the communities and societies it is conducted;
- Ensure that the research strives to advance knowledge and practice and serves the public good.
- Ensure that the research has utility and meaning for all those involved in the research process;
- Promote research which makes a contribution to the wider community in a spirit of critical analysis and constructive criticism, which generates an impact on both policy and practice and the enhancement of knowledge in the field.

Where applicable, researchers are encouraged to consult guidelines stemming from their own professional bodies (e.g. The Teaching council of Ireland) in addition to the general guiding principles above when planning their research.

3. What poses an ethical risk?

Risk is often defined by the potential physical or psychological harm, discomfort, stress or reputational risk to human participants (and participating groups, organisations and funders) (ESRC,2015) Any activity done as a part of the research which disrespects or compromises participants in any of the 8 key principles described above.

Some risks may arise specifically when:

3.1 Researching vulnerable populations, such as children, intellectually disabled, individuals/ families living in difficult circumstances etc.

3.2 Selecting and treating participants in ways that may disrespect their individual and cultural rights.

3.3 Not informing participants about the purpose of the research.

3.4 Using information from participants for purposes other than the proposed research, without informing.

3.5 There are unequal power relationships (for eg. Student - teacher) that might compromise informed consent and pressurise signing of documents.

These do not preclude other aspects that might impinge on the freedom of human participant's/ group's or organisation's participation in the research.

4. Ethics Committee

The Educational Ethics sub Committee reviews all research proposals that poses an ethical risk in light of the above principles for educational research.

5. Review Process

Any student of NCI Educational programmes wishing to conduct a research study should submit a completed form to the filter committee (moke@ncirl.ie) that describes how the proposed research adheres to the 8 guiding principles of ethical practice and the educational research committee will review proposals for ethical risk.

5.1 Outcomes of Review Process

On the basis of this review, four key outcomes may arise:

- Research proposal approved (no recommendations) and researcher can commence his/her project.
- Research proposal approved pending minor revisions (to be accepted by the Chair and Research Supervisor/Mentor)
- Research proposal approved pending major revisions (to be resubmitted and approved by the Ethics filter Committee)
- Research proposal rejected (resubmission necessary)

A summary of the processes involved in applying for ethical approval can be seen in Figure 2.

Appeals

Appeals against the Committee's decision may be made within ten working days. In this case, at least three members of the Ethics Committee, none of whom will have reviewed the initial application, may review this along with any additional information submitted by the applicant.

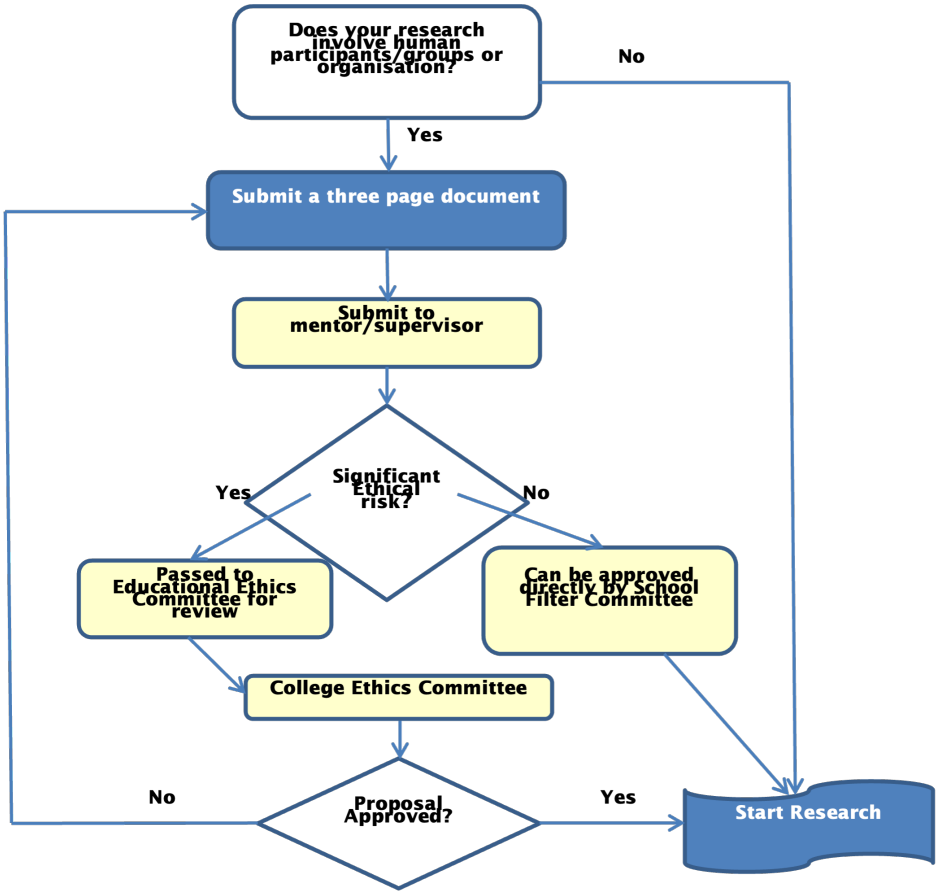

Figure 2: Process chart for seeking Ethical Approval

Resources

5.1.1 The Research Ethics Guidebook: a resource for social scientists available at http://ethicsguidebook.ac.uk/hey-ethics-principles-15

Ethics Application Checklist
To be submitted alongside the 3 page document.

Please complete the below checklist, ticking each item to confirm that it has been addressed.

1.	I agree to obtain voluntary and informed written consent/assent from all participants who are involved in this research (or if circulating digitally, I will ensure that informed consent is completed, and will have the participants indicate their informed consent by continuing with their study engagement).	☐
2.	I agree to obtain informed written consent from the parents of anyone aged under 18 in this research (or from the schools if appropriate), and informed written assent from those under 18 in this research.	☐
3.	I adress participants in the research as individuals with rights and acknowledge their contribution. This can mean not labelling participants as 'subjects'	☐
4.	I append a letter of agreement from an external institution or organisation agreeing to host the study.	☐
5.	I agree to comply with NCI's Information/Data Retention Policy.	☐
6.	I have appended a) study/project information sheet, b) consent form/assent form, a note on proposed utility of the study.	☐
7.	I have provided details of how non-anonymised information will be stored, in a safe and encrypted manner.	☐
8.	I have included my contact details and those of my supervisor (where appropriate). I have only included my NCI email address and not included any personal contact information.	☐
9.	I have given sufficient details on the proposed study/project design, methodology, and data collection procedures, to allow a full ethical review, and I understand that my failure to give sufficient detail may result in a resubmission being required.	☐
10.	I understand that if I make changes to my study/project following ethical approval, it is my responsibility to seek an ethics amendment if the change merits ethical consideration.	☐

Educational Research/Study Ethical Review Application Form

All parts of the below form must be completed.

Part A: Title of Project and Contact Information

Name:

Student Number (if applicable)

Email

Status:

Undergraduate

Postgraduate

Staff

Supervisor (if applicable)

Title of Research Project

Category into which the proposed research falls (see guidelines)

Research Category A Research Category B Research Category C

Have you read the NCI Ethical Guidelines for Research with Human Participants?

Yes No

Has this research been submitted to any other research ethics committee?

Yes No

If yes please provide details, and the outcomes of this process, if applicable:

Is this research supported by any form of research funding?

Yes No

If yes please provide details, and indicate whether any restrictions exist on the freedom of the researcher to publish the results:

Part B: Research Proposal

Briefly outline the following information (not more than 200 words in any section).

Proposed starting date and duration of project

The rationale for the project

The research aims and objectives

The research design

The research sample and sample size
Please indicate the sample size and your justification of this sample size. Describe the age range of participants, and whether they belong to medical groups (those currently receiving medical treatment, those not in remission from previous medical treatment, those recruited because of a previous medical condition, healthy controls recruited for a medical study) or clinical groups (those undergoing non-medical treatment such as counselling, psychoanalysis, in treatment centres, rehabilitation centres, or similar, or those with a DSM disorder diagnosis).

If the study involves a MEDICAL or CLINICAL group, the following details are required:

a) Do you have approval from a hospital/medical/specialist ethics committee?
If YES, please append the letter of approval. Also required is a letter from a clinically responsible authority at the host institution, supporting the study, detailing the support mechanisms in place for individuals who may become distressed as a result of participating in the study, and the potential risk to participants.
If NO, please detail why this approval cannot or has not been saught.

b) Does the study impact on participant's medical condition, wellbeing, or health?
If YES, please append a letter of approval from a specialist ethics committee.
If NO, please give a detailed explanation about why you do not expect there to be an impact on medical condition, wellbeing, or health.

The nature of any proposed pilot study. Pilot studies are usually required if a) a new intervention is being used, b) a new questionnaire, scale or item is being used, or c) established interventions or questionnaires, scales or items are being used on a new population. If no such study is planned, explain why it is not necessary.

The methods of data analysis. Give details here of the analytic process (e.g. the statistical procedures planned if quantitative, and the approach taken if qualitative. It is not sufficient to name the software to be used).

Study Procedure

Please give as detailed an account as possible of a participant's likely experience in engaging with the study, from point of first learning about the study, to study completion. State how long project participation is likely to take, and whether participants will be offered breaks. Please attach all questionnaires, interview schedules, scales, surveys, and demographic questions, etc. in the Appendix.

Part C: Ethical Risk

Please identify any ethical issues or risks of harm or distress which may arise during the proposed research, and how you will address this risk. Here you need to consider the potential for physical risk, social risk (i.e. loss of social status, privacy, or reputation), outside of that expected in everyday life, and whether the participant is likely to feel distress as a result of taking part in the study. Debriefing sheets must be included in the appendix if required. These should detail the participant's right to withdraw from the study, the statutory limits upon confidentiality, and the obligations of the researcher in relation to Freedom of Information legislation. Debriefing sheets should also include details of helplines and avenues for receiving support in the event that participants become distressed as a result of their involvement in this study.

Do the participants belong to any of the following vulnerable groups?
(Please tick all those involved).

Children;

- The very elderly;
- People with an intellectual or learning disability
- Individuals or groups receiving help through the voluntary sector
- Those in a subordinate position to the researchers such as employees
- Other groups who might not understand the research and consent process
- Other vulnerable groups

How will the research participants in this study be selected, approached and recruited? From where will participants be recruited? If recruiting via an institution or organisation other than NCI please attach a letter of agreement from the host institution agreeing to host the study and circulate recruitment advertisements/email etc.

What inclusion or exclusion criteria will be used?

How will participants be informed of the nature of the study and participation?

Does the study involve deception or the withholding of information? If so, provide justification for this decision.

What procedures will be used to document the participants' consent to participate?

Can study participants withdraw at any time without penalty? If so, how will this be communicated to participants?

If vulnerable groups are participating, what special arrangements will be made to deal with issues of informed consent/assent?

Please include copies of any information letters, debriefing sheets, and consent forms with the application.

Part D: Confidentiality and Data Protection

Please indicate the form in which the data will be collected.

Identified Potentially Identifiable De-IdentifiedC

What arrangements are in place to ensure that the identity of participants is protected?

Will any information about illegal behaviours be collected as part of the research process? If so, detail your consideration of how this information will be treated.

Please indicate any recording devices being used to collect data (e.g. audio/video).

Please describe the procedures for securing specific permission for the use of these recording devices in advance.

Please indicate the form in which the data will be stored.

Identified Potentially Identifiable De-Identified

Who will have responsibility for the data generated by the research?

Is there a possibility that the data will be archived for secondary data analysis? If so, has this been included in the informed consent process? Also include information on how and where the data will be stored for secondary analytic purposes.

If not to be stored for secondary data analysis, will the data be stored for 5 years and then destroyed, in accordance with NCI policy?

Yes No

Dissemination and Reporting

Please describe how the participants will be informed of dissemination and reporting (e.g. submission for examination, reporting, publications, presentations)?

If any dissemination entails the use of audio, video and/or photographic records (including direct quotes), please describe how participants will be informed of this in advance.

Part E: Signed Declaration

I confirm that I have read the NCI Ethical Guidelines for Research with Human Participants, and agree to abide by them in conducting this research. I also confirm that the information provided on this form is correct.

Signature of Applicant

Date

Signature of Supervisor (where appropriate):

Date

Any other information the committee should be aware of?