

Ethics in Research Policy

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Introduction

Hugh Baird College is committed to promoting high ethical standards in the conduct of both students and staff who undertake research. Staff and students must be aware of their ethical responsibilities and obligations to consider arising from their research activities. Those undertaking academic activity on Hugh Baird College premises using its facilities but not in the College's name or as part of an approved staff development degree are expected to abide by the standards outlined in this Ethics policy, although formal ethical review and approval might be carried out via other routes as appropriate. Any member of staff who undertakes research at the college as part of a degree program must in the first instance seek consent from their line manager and the chair of ethics committee.

Research must be conducted in accordance with all applicable statutory and regulatory requirements, including the RCUK policy and guidelines on governance of good research conduct - research councils UK (2014), the concordat to support research integrity. (2012), European science foundation: The European code of conduct for research integrity (2012) and UK Research Integrity Office Code of Practice for Research: Promoting good practice and preventing misconduct (2009)

- 1.1 The principle of **voluntary participation** requires that people be not coerced into participating in research. This is especially relevant where researchers had previously relied on captive audiences for their subjects, prisons, universities, colleges, and places of work.
- 1.2 There is also the requirement of **informed consent**. Prospective research participants must be fully informed about the procedures and risks involved in research and must give their consent to participate.
- 1.3 Ethical standards also require that researchers do not put participants in a situation where they might be at **risk of harm** because of their participation. Harm can be defined as both physical and psychological. There are two standards that are applied to help protect the privacy of research participants.
- 1.4 All research guarantees the participant's **confidentiality** they must be assured that identifying information will not be made available to anyone who is not directly involved in the study. The stricter standard is the principle of **anonymity** which means that the participant will remain anonymous throughout the study -- even to the researchers themselves. The anonymity standard is a stronger guarantee of privacy.
- 1.5 Prior to the research taking place, the research proposal must be submitted for consideration, comment, guidance, and approval to the subject tutor. They will in turn if required, seek advice and guidance from the Ethics Committee before the commencement of the study.

2. Basic Principles of Ethical Practice in Research

Research ethics at Hugh Baird College is underpinned by the following commonly agreed principles of ethical research: -

Autonomy - Individuals participating in the research must be made aware of the purpose of the research and be free to take part without coercion or penalty for non-participation. Individuals should be able to withdraw at any time without being required to give a reason and without threat of any adverse consequences arising from their withdrawal.

Beneficial – The research must be worthwhile and provide a reasonable opportunity for securing beneficial outcomes which outweigh any associated risks. The research methodology must be sound, ensuring the best results are obtained.

No Harm – Any harm must be avoided by robust precautions

Confidentiality – Personal data must remain unknown to all but the research team (unless the participant agrees otherwise, or in cases where there is an overriding public interest, or where participants wish their voices to be heard and identified).

Integrity – The researcher must acknowledge any actual or potential conflicts of interest, and undertake their research in a manner that recognises standards of research integrity

Informed Consent

- 2.1 There should be informed consent from participants before they take part. This means that they should know exactly what they are being asked to do, and what the risks are, **before** they agree to take part. This can never take precedence over their rights whilst research is being carried out.
- 2.2 An **Information Sheet** is commonly used to provide potential participants with information about the study. It should be written at the appropriate reading age for your specific group of potential participants. Appendix 1 shows an example of an information sheet. Further advice on preparation of the form is available from the library.
- 2.3 Say who you are; where you are from; and what you are doing.
 - Tell the person how/why they were selected to be invited to take part.
 - Inform them that, even if they agree to take part, they can change their mind at any time, without giving an explanation.
 - Tell them what they would be asked to do if they agreed to take part.
 - Tell them the level of anonymity and confidentiality you can guarantee.
 - Say what the information will be used for, how it will be stored, and how long it will be kept.
- 2.4 The storage of data will need to comply with the Data Protection Act (1998) and the data must be kept secure and under no circumstances shared with a third party.

- 2.5 A participant will normally be asked to sign a **Consent Form** to record informed agreement to take part. The library can provide guidance on information sheets and consent form

3. No Pressure on Individuals to Participate

- 3.1 Incentives to take part should not be provided. If an incentive is used it needs to be only a token, and not enough to encourage someone to participate who would really prefer not to take part.
- 3.2 You should also not rely solely on the consent of *gatekeepers*, these are: Parents, Head Teachers, Tutors, and Department Heads. Their consent may be needed before you can approach their students/staff, but *individual* potential participants should also be fully informed, and should have the option of not taking part.
- 3.3 If a participant fails to complete and return a questionnaire, you need to know in advance what you will do. Will you make a follow-up request for its completion and return and, if so, how will this be worded? It is not good practice to pester people. You need to decide how you follow up non-respondents, if at all.
- 3.4 Hugh Baird College Staff who wish to use the students that they teach in their research **must seek the consent of the department head** Failure to do so will result in disciplinary action.

4. Respect Individual Autonomy

- 4.1 Autonomy means the freedom to decide what to do. Even when someone has signed a Consent Form, they must be made aware that they are free to withdraw from the study at any time, *without giving a reason*. They must also be able to request that the data they have given be removed from the study and destroyed.
- 4.2 You need to be prepared for this possibility, and to have plans for how you would remove the data already given if this is requested. You would need to retain a link from any code or pseudonym that you use, back to the name of the individual, to enable you to carry this out. This link would need to be kept confidential and separate from the data.
- 4.3 For example you may decide to assign participants in your study either a pseudonym or a number that will be retained throughout the study.

5. Avoid Causing Harm

- 5.1 The duty of the researcher is not to cause harm or put themselves or participants in danger, whilst conducting their research. Health and Safety at Work Act (1974)

6. Maintain Anonymity and Confidentiality

- 6.1 The collection and storage of research data by researchers must comply with the Data Protection Act 1998 and the General Data Protection Regulation (Regulation (EU) 2016/679) (GDPR)

Collection of data used to be covered by the Data Protection Act 1998, but this was replaced by the General Data Protection Regulation on 25th May 2018.

- 6.2 Personal data' means any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person ('data subject'); an identifiable natural person is one who can be identified, directly or indirectly, in particular by reference to an identifier such as a name, an identification number, location data, an online identifier or to one or more factors specific to the physical, physiological, genetic, mental, economic, cultural or social identity of that natural person.

Information relating to a living identifiable person includes expression of opinion about or intentions towards that person

- 6.3 Making data 'anonymous' means removing the contributor's name. However, you will often need to take more than this basic step to protect a participant's identity. Other information can help to identify people, for example: job title, age, gender, length of service, membership of clubs, and strongly expressed opinions. The more pieces of information that are presented together, the easier it is to identify someone.
- 6.4 Organisations, educational establishments, and groups may also need their anonymity protected. Geographical information, combined with the type of organization, can give away identity quite quickly. Take as many precautions as you can to protect anonymity, and only promise the level of anonymity that you can realistically provide.

- 6.5 Confidentiality' relates to the protection of the data collected. Where the aim of your research is specifically to access private feelings, stories, and concerns, you will need to be clear about how the confidentiality of that data will be respected. You must, be clear about the level of confidentiality you can, and cannot, guarantee.
- 6.6 Sensitive data that may be collected for research, regarding matters such as age, colour, race/ethnicity, nationality, disablement, religion, sex, gender, sexual orientation, personal medical records, and political beliefs.
- 6.7 Personal data should not be kept for any longer than is necessary. E.g. If email addresses are collected to send a summary of study results out, once the summary has been sent the email addresses should be destroyed, paper documentation should be shredded
- 6.8 Participants must be informed of the kinds of personal information that will be collected, what will be done with it, and to whom it will be disclosed.
- 'Consent 'may need to be obtained where information collected from individuals is to be used later for research purposes
- 6.9 **Ensure you only collect personal data where necessary for the research.** You anonymize/pseudonyms personal data as soon as possible and have rigorous data security procedures in place

7. Social Media and Confidentiality

- 7.1 Social networking and other on-line websites such as You Tube, present a challenge for consideration of consent issues. If you use this media, the participants and their interactions are being monitored and analyzed for your research. Even though this media is in the public domain you must obtain the participants permission to use the content for your research. If consent has not been obtained researchers must depersonalise all the data that they use from social media.
- 7.2 Whilst undertaking research the researcher must not use social media to display or discuss their research unless they have obtained the participant's explicit consent.

8. Working with Traumatic Imagery

- 8.1 Photographs and video of horrifying, violent acts and traumatic imagery needs to be handled with care, as it can place the wellbeing of those who work with it at and view it risk.
- 8.2 Exposure to traumatic images can cause distress both to the researcher and to any participants that are involved with the study.
- 8.3 In order to reduce any trauma you must take steps to minimise unnecessary exposure. Frequency of view should be only what is necessary for the study.
- 8.4 **Images must not be used that show:**
- Graphic violence, torture, or any extreme violent behaviour.
 - Gratuitous nudity or graphic/extreme sexual acts.
 - Images depicting children (under the age of sixteen) in a sexual context.
 - Explicit drug use.
 - Self-harm, suicide, or attempted suicide.
 - Hangings or other forms of execution.

9. Misconduct in research

Misconduct in research as including, but not limited to:

- a) Fabrication;
- b) Falsification;
- c) Misrepresentation of data and/or interests and/or involvement;
- d) Plagiarism; and

e) Failures to follow accepted procedures or to exercise due care in carrying out responsibilities for:

i) avoiding unreasonable risk or harm to:

- humans;
- animals used in research; and
- the environment; and

ii) the proper handling of privileged or confidential information on individuals collected during the research.

10. Responsibility of the student

10.1 It is the responsibility of the researcher prior to their Ethical Application, identifying potential risks for participants. These must be addressed in their ethics application

11. Responsibility of the tutor/supervisor

11.1 All student research must be supervised, and it is the responsibility of the tutor to determine how the research is conducted. The tutor will in the first instance review the ethical issues of the project. For any project they consider substantial risk the Chair of Ethics must be contacted to discuss the proposal in the first instance.

12. Consideration of Ethical Issues for tutors/supervisors

The points listed below will assist tutors in deciding whether a research application requires referral to the Ethics Committee

- 12.1 Arrangements for the security of data, participants, and confidentiality
- 12.2 Ensuring the anonymity of participants
- 12.3 If any payments are to be made to the participants or other rewards granted and the integrity of that related to the research
- 12.4 The research participants have no direct association with it or the researcher.

- 12.5 Size of sample proposed for any group enquiry shall not be larger than justifiably necessary
- 12.6 Any relationship, other than that required by the academic activity, between the researcher and the participants must be declared and **shall not normally result in approval of the academic activity**
- 12.7 All participants shall be made fully aware of the true nature and purpose of the study
- 12.8 All participants shall have given their explicit consent
- 12.9 All participants must be informed at the outset that they can withdraw themselves and their data from the academic activity at any time and they must not subsequently be put under any pressure to continue
- 12.10 Risks to the researcher, the participants and Hugh Baird College have been assessed

13. Ethical approval is not required when:

- The research will only employ information freely available in the public domain. This includes published biographies, newspaper articles, and published minutes of meetings.
- The research will only draw upon anonymised records and data sets that already exist in the public domain. (e.g., published by the Office of National Statistics).

It is acknowledged that there are sometimes difficulties in establishing a clear line between research requiring and not requiring ethical approval. Where these situations arise, students are advised to adopt a precautionary approach and follow the ethical approval procedure or seek further advice from their course tutor.

14. Using Artificial Intelligence in Research

Ethical Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

As the university centre embraces technological advancements, including the use of AI in research, we recognize the unique ethical considerations that arise in this domain. The following guidelines apply to research involving AI:

14.1. Transparency and Explain ability

- Students using AI are responsible for ensuring transparency and explain ability in their models and algorithms. Clear documentation of AI methods should be provided to allow for scrutiny and understanding of the decision-making process.

14.2. Fairness and Bias Mitigation

- Students must actively identify and mitigate biases in AI algorithms, ensuring that the technology does not perpetuate existing biases in data or decision-making.

14.3. Informed Consent

- When AI systems are utilized to process data that may impact individuals, informed consent processes should be adapted to include the potential implications of AI-driven analysis.

14.4. Accountability and Oversight

- Students working with AI are accountable for the ethical implications of their work. Regular oversight and review by relevant bodies, including ethics committees, are encouraged.

14.5. Data Privacy and Security

- Protecting the privacy and security of data used for training and operating AI systems is paramount. Adherence to relevant data protection laws and regulations is mandatory.

14.6. Human Oversight and Intervention

- While AI can automate various processes, students must ensure there is a mechanism for human oversight and intervention to address unexpected or harmful outcomes.

14.7. Social Impact Assessment

- Students using AI should consider the broader societal impacts of their work, evaluating potential effects on employment, privacy, social equity, and human interaction.

14.8. Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing

- Ethical considerations in AI research extend to collaboration and knowledge sharing. Researchers are encouraged to openly share methodologies, datasets, and findings, facilitating collective understanding and accountability.

14.9. Responsibility for Outcomes

- Students who use AI systems are responsible for the consequences of their creations. This includes both positive and potentially negative outcomes that may arise from AI utilization.

14.10. Continuous Education and Training

- Given the rapidly evolving nature of AI technologies, students involved in AI-related research must undergo continuous education and training on the latest ethical considerations and best practices.

14.11. Adaptation to Emerging Challenges

- As AI technology evolves, our ethical guidelines for its use will also evolve. We are committed to adapting to address new challenges and ensure ethical AI research

By integrating these AI-specific ethical considerations into our research ethics framework, the aim is to harness the potential of AI while upholding the principles of integrity, transparency and fairness,

APPENDIX 1: Consent Form Template

The consent form template below can be adapted to suit your area of study.

Insert title of study here

You are being invited to participate in a research study conducted by xxxxxxxxxxxx. Before you make the decision to take part, it is important that you understand why the research is being undertaken and what will be involved. Please read the following information, if you need any more information regarding the study, please feel free to contact me on xxx xxxx xxxx (office hours) or email me: xxxxxxx@hughbaird.ac.uk

Thank you for taking the time to read this

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of the study is.....

Why have I been chosen?

You have been invited to take part in this study as you are currently on the xxxx. I would therefore welcome your input into my study by allowing me to use transcriptions of your interview for my study.

Do I have to take part?

You do **not** have to take part in the study.

What will happen if I decide to take part?

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will take part in: -

List with bullet points the interview/questionnaire process, how long it will take

- A questionnaire

- A series of 3 interviews lasting no longer than 40 minutes, this will be completely anonymous, and no personal data will be shared with any other parties. These interviews will take place: -
- A focus group consisting of 6 participants including yourself this will take place in Semester 2 of your second year.
- If at any time you wish to have access to the transcripts just contact me. At the end of the study, you will be invited to attend a focus group to discuss the research outcome.

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