Faculty of Education and Health Sciences

Research Ethics Committee

Tips and hints

The following points relate to common issues and errors that arise on applications to the EHS Research Ethics Committee (EHS REC). This is a living document that will be updated regularly, and we welcome contributions from the faculty community, which may be sent to the EHS REC chair at: ehsresearchethics@ul.ie

Ethics applications are the responsibility of the Principal Investigator (PI) who should fully review all applications and appendices prior to submission to the EHS REC.

Clarity and language

Remember that members of the EHS REC reviewing your ethics application may not always be an expert in your research area. Therefore, clearly explain any technical terms, jargon and abbreviations. Also, ensure that Participant Information Leaflets (PILs) are appropriate for the target audience, and avoid jargon/research or technical language where it may not be clearly understood by potential participants.

All applications should be carefully reviewed for clarity, completeness, and typos/syntax errors before submission.

Interviews/focus groups/questionnaires:

Consider have you included details about where (online/in-person etc.) and when the activity will happen; who is conducting the activity; how long it will take; if it is being audio/video recorded; how many people are involved (if relevant). The more information

you can supply, the better. Remember to refer to the UL Approved Procedure if appropriate

Structure

Where instructed, please follow the suggested outline of the ethics application form. For instance, in the full ethics application form, in Section III (B), you are requested to provide information about a) background and rationale; b) study Design; c) Procedures/Methods etc. Ensure you use this format to support reviewers to better understand your project.

Withdrawal from research project

Consenting participants may withdraw from a study under certain circumstances, depending on the nature of the study. However, it may be inaccurate to say that participants may withdraw from a study **at any time**. For instance, if a participant has completed an anonymous study, it would be impossible to withdraw their data once submitted, as it cannot be identified. Similarly, even for pseudonymised data, it should be made clear to participants that once data analysis has commenced, that the participant may no longer be able to withdraw their data from the study.

Transcribing interviews and focus group data

Many studies will transcribe interview/focus group recording and then delete the original recording. Participants should be advised the specific length of time between recording and deletion of recording. Frequently, a period of 2 weeks is cited. After this time, it may not be possible for participants to withdraw their data.

What is a Research Privacy Notice (RPN), and when do I need one?

All research involving the collection or use of personal data must provide an RPN to research participants. A non-exhaustive list of personal data is provided in the guidance document on RPNs on the website about Research Ethics Forms. A RPN is not required for data that is completely anonymous. Please note that the University of Limerick is the Data Controller, when completing the RPN.

Anonymous V pseudonymous data

Anonymous data is data that can in no way be tied back to a participant. For example, if someone completes a survey online but provides no personal identifying data, this data

is anonymous. Pseudonymised data uses a key or code to identify participants. The key/code is usually stored separately from other data but may still be used to connect a participant with his/her data.

Data storage

Please note that research data must **not** be stored on personal laptops. All research data must be stored on the GDPR compliant One Drive Cloud server (or an equivalent approved platform where relevant) of the PI.

Required information - appendices: Participant Information Leaflets (PILs), consent forms and other materials (e.g. recruitment emails, debriefing documents etc.).

It is required to include the UL logo at the top of these documents, along with the EHS REC number which is generated once the application is submitted to the EHS REC. At the end of the document, please add the following text:

> This research study has received Ethics approval from the Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee (20xx_xx_xx_EHS)
> If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact:
> Chair Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee
> EHS Faculty Office
> University of Limerick
> Tel (061) 234101

EHSREC or PESSREC Approved Procedures

These refer to previously approved procedures for conducting specific processes and activities and are available here. If you intend to use on of these procedures, the number needs to be included where directed on the full ethics application. It is no longer necessary to include a copy of the procedure in your appendices.

Applications with appendices in other languages apart from English

For project that include appendices that are translated into other languages apart from English, please attach the translated documents to the application. Also in the ethics application form, you must indicate how the translation is made. It is required that if an IT product such as Google Translate or Chat GPT or similar is used, the translated text must be checked and verified by a native speaker of that language for nuance and accuracy.

FAQs

If I am doing work with the HSE or another organisation where ethical approval is granted by another body, do I need to apply internally also to the EHS Research Ethics Committee (REC)?

No – you do not need to apply separately for EHS REC ethics, but please send a copy of your application and approval letter to EHSResearchEthics@ul.ie for noting. It should also be noted that chair's actions pertaining to externally approved applications cannot be adjudicated by the EHS REC chair and must be submitted to the original ethical approval unit.

Can non-academics apply for ethics?

Any non-academic who holds a UL contract of employment for the period of the proposed research project may apply for ethics. It is strongly advised that potential applicants check that they and the project are covered by UL insurance and seek advice on completing the ethics form from an experienced colleague.

Do I need to complete a DPIA screen?

There is an obligation to do a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) before carrying out certain types of data processing likely to result in a high risk to the rights and freedoms of individuals. A DPIA is a process to help identify, and minimise the data protection risks of a project or activity so as to ensure that a data subject's rights to privacy and confidentiality are appropriately protected.

All health research, or any project collecting special category data (including (a) racial/ethnic origin (b) political opinions (c) religious or philosophical beliefs (d) trade union membership (e) processing of genetic data (f) biometric data for purpose of uniquely identifying a person, (g) data concerning health or data concerning a natural person's sex life or sexual orientation) must complete a DPIA screening document.

There are many other reasons why you may also need to complete a DPIA, as outlined in the screening form attached here. The DPIA screening document should be sent to the Data Protection Office (DPO) who will decide if you need to complete a full DPIA. You should include the DPIA screening document in your ethics application as an appendix where relevant. You do not have to wait for a final decision from the DPO to submit your ethics application.

Does the EHS REC have a remit over methodology?

There is no clear black or white answer to this question. However, some principles do apply. Where research methodology is clearly harmful to participants, causes undue burden to participants, is a waste of participant time, or adopts a politicised or biased standpoint that may be harmful to the reputation of the University, the ethics committee has a remit to consider these factors. The EHS REC is pro-research and is happy to discuss any of these issues with researchers on a case-by-case basis.

Recorded consent

If consent is gathered on a recording of a focus group or interview, is a transcribed note of this consent sufficient, once the recording has been destroyed.

Yes – this is permissible.

What if I want to use my own phone to record interviews etc?

This is possible, but you must ensure that you comply with and are covered by . ITD Personal Device Procedure.pdf (sharepoint.com)

Do I need ethics for non-research related data collection, for example audits or surveys to inform policy or other decisions for instance?

Typically, you do not need ethical approval for non-research related activity, but it is recommended to send a quick email to ehsresearchethics@ul.ie to confirm.

Do I need ethics for auto-ethnographical research?

This may depend on the nature of the research, and it is recommended to email the Chair at to ehsresearchethics@ul.ie to discuss.

Can I use other platforms like Zoom for my research?

We have consulted with the DPO on this point. She has highlighted that UL does not have an enterprise contract with Zoom. MS Teams is the approved system. Ideally, all researchers would be using Teams.

Where do I send applications relating to animal studies?

Animal study applications go to the animal Research Ethics Committee (REC). Dr. Bridget Younge (bridget.younge@ul.ie) is the chair of the Animal REC.

USEFUL LINKS:

UL Data Protection Policy: https://www.ul.ie/media/8674/download?inline

DPIA Resources:
https://ulcampus.sharepoint.com/sites/CSCPLDataProtection/SitePages/DPIA.aspx