Art
Academy

# Guidance for Research Ethics Approval

## 1. Introduction

The Art Academy is committed to supporting good practice in research and scholarly activity; it considers it to be fundamental that research should be conducted in accordance with ethical principles. This document outlines the procedure researchers need to undergo to obtain approval for a research proposal from the Academy. It should be read in conjunction with the Art Academy's Code of Practice on Research Ethics, which sets out the Academy's guiding principles relating to research ethics, and outlines the obligations and responsibilities for conducting research in an ethical manner.

## 2. Responsibilities for ethical approval, review and monitoring

The Art Academy's Research Scholarship and Ethics Committee (RSEC) is responsible for formulating and implementing research strategy at the Art Academy L and for assuring the standards of the Academy's research projects and awards. Among its terms of reference is the task of setting and monitoring standards for research ethics.

The purpose of the RSEC is to consider and advise, as appropriate, on legal, moral and ethical issues relating to research. It is responsible for establishing the Code of Practice on Ethics for ensuring that research carried out at the Academy adheres to its Code of Practice on Research Ethics.

## 3. Procedure for considering the ethical dimensions of a research project

All researchers engaging in research associated with the Art Academy should consider the ethical dimensions of their work. It is the responsibility of researchers to be familiar with, and conform to, the Academy's Code of Practice on Research Ethics.

### 3.1 Approval

If the research involves any of the following elements then the research is likely to have an ethical dimension for which approval must be obtained:

- Involvement of other participants - actively or passively: including persons acting in a professional capacity, members of the public, children and others who are not able to give informed consent (refer to 4.2 below)
- Research collaboration with external parties
- Potential adverse impacts on the environment
- Health and safety risks beyond those experienced in everyday life including to the researcher(s)

If any of the above elements apply to the research an application for research ethics approval must be made. This should be submitted to the RSEC.

All researchers are expected to abide by the decision of the RSEC. Research projects may be monitored, and may be called in for review at any time.

### 3.1 Approval Form

Researchers applying for research ethics approval must apply using the Art Academy's research ethics approval form. This requires the researcher to supply information about the project and to make an assessment of the risk in relation to the guiding principles set out in the Academy's Code of Practice on Research Ethics. Risk is either minimal or more than minimal. Guidance on how to assess the risk is given by this document.

In many cases, research ethics approval is sought because the proposal involves participants, in these cases additional material must be submitted with the ethics approval application, usually participant information material and participant consent forms. Guidance on informed consent is provided below in section 4.

It is important to understand that the judgement of the level of risk is distinct from the approval of research activity.

### 3.2 Ethical Dimensions

The ethical dimensions of a research project may change during the course of a project. It is important for the researcher to monitor developments for ethical implications and to seek approval, or approval of changes when changes affect ethical dimensions significantly. Examples are changes that affect the need to seek approval (3.1 above) or that affect the nature of participation (e.g. communities participating and/or what is appropriate participant information) or the category of risk (minimal to more than minimal or vice versa).

Failure to provide adequate information is by far the single most significant factor in delaying research ethics approval.

## 4. Informed consent

The prior consent of a potential participant is essential in research involving participants. Such consent is called informed consent. For consent to be legally valid, there are three requirements:

- the potential participant must be competent, i.e. of adequate age and having the necessary mental capacity
- the consent must be voluntary, i.e. the potential participant must be free from inducement, coercion or undue influence
- adequate and appropriate information must have been given to the potential participant.

Informed consent exists to protect the subject, not the researcher. It is important to remember that the pursuit of knowledge is not a justification for ignoring the interests of those studied or asked to take part.

Informed consent in research is a dynamic, on-going process, not a one-off event, and may require renegotiation over time depending on the nature and timescale of the project and the use and dissemination of any data.

The quality of the consent obtained is critical to its validity (see 4.1). The onus is on the researcher to ensure that the consent is freely given and fully informed. The quality of the consent is affected by a number of factors, these being:

- the format of the record of consent,
- the competence and capacity of the subject/ participant to give consent,

- and the clarity of the information provided to the subject/ participant.

### 4.1 Format of the record of consent

Wherever possible a signed consent form should be obtained. If written consent is not possible, oral consent can be given after the researcher or assistant has read out the details of the consent form and information sheet. This should preferably be witnessed by a second person and recorded with time and date stamp, either on video (preferable) or sound. When 'light touch' consent is appropriate the recording of consent must be consistent with the research design (e.g. where visitors to an exhibition are asked a few questions without supplying their name or address). Consistency is important, for example, if information is being collected without identifying data, obtaining the participant's signature would invalidate an agreement to preserve anonymity.

### 4.2 Competence and capacity to give consent

There are a number of circumstances where the competence and/ or capacity of participants is absent or compromised. These circumstances typically fall within the following categories, however this list is not exhaustive and researchers should consider the issues of competence and capacity for all participant groups.

- Children and young persons Research involving children under 16 will require the informed consent of parents, carers or guardians.
- Young persons (i.e. between the ages of 16 – 18) are generally thought to be able to give informed consent but it might be appropriate to seek advice depending on the nature of the work. Courts of law presume competence from the age of 14. All researchers intending to work with children should endeavour to gain informed consent from the child participants in addition to the required consent of their parents or legal guardians. Regardless of these consents, it is the responsibility of the researcher to safeguard the rights of children participants.
- Adults incompetent to consent to research Where adult participants are not in a position to give informed consent the researcher should have regard to the Mental Capacity Act (2005) and specialist legal advice should be sought.
- Other vulnerable groups There are many factors that may affect the ability of participants to freely give informed consent, for example institutional groups (employees, prisoners, patients) may feel coerced into taking part in research by the consent of the institutional authority to carry out research within their domain. Researchers should, therefore, ensure that members of an institutionalised group understand that the institutional consent places them under no greater obligation to participate in the research.
- Other factors which may affect voluntariness Voluntariness can be called into question when other pressures may be an influence for example when an Academy tutor proposes to use students as participants in their research, or when researchers propose to pay participants more than their expenses and lost earnings.
- In cases where significant cultural differences may affect understandings about the nature of informed consent the researcher should employ culturally appropriate methods to allow subjects to make decisions to participate or to withdraw from the research process.

### 4.3 Clarity of the information provided

Consent forms and information sheets should be written in language which is appropriate for the participant. They should avoid using jargon, be as simple, accessible and appropriate as possible. Descriptions of the project should be written specifically to make sense from a participant point of view

Participants should be given sufficient time to understand the information, to ask questions and to express any concerns that they may have.

An essential element of informed consent is telling participants clearly the following:

- the purpose of the research,
- expected duration, and procedures, what they are being asked to do,
- their right to decline to participate and to withdraw from the research once participation has begun,
- reasonably foreseeable factors that may be expected to influence their willingness to participate such as potential risks, discomfort, or adverse effects,
- any prospective research benefits,
- limits of confidentiality,
- incentives for participation
- and who to contact for questions about the research.

Participant information must contain Academy contact details for the researcher. Other contact details may also be appropriate for example at the site of the participation activity (e.g. within a museum), personal contact details such as home address or phone number of the researcher should not usually be given.

## 5. Clarification and definitions of terms

This section offers definitions to clarify terms which are often confusing or confused in research ethics applications. Terms introduced and clarified elsewhere in these guidelines (for example the meaning of informed consent) are not repeated here.

### 5.1 Data protection

Data Protection concerns the measures in place relating to the processing of information relating to individuals. Data protection is concerned with how data about individuals is obtained and kept (stored, held), and the uses or disclosure of such information. Personal data can only be collected and stored for the specific purposes declared at the time of collection. It cannot be used for purposes other than these nor can it be passed on to others for different purposes. Data collected should be relevant and sufficient for the purpose of its collection. There is an obligation on the person or organisation holding the data to make sure it is kept securely to assure its use only for the purposes for which it was obtained, by those authorised to use it; that it is not kept longer than necessary; and that it is not passed on to third parties. The Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA 2018) and General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) covers these matters.

### 5.2 Privacy, confidentiality, and security

These terms are often not used accurately in research ethics approval applications. It is important to use the correct term for what is meant, the terms are not interchangeable. Privacy and confidentiality refer to an individual's rights about what information about them, or related to them, is made public. In obtaining information from individuals for research purposes it must be made plain to them what

information will be made public, for example, whether what they disclose or tell will be anonymised or whether it will be attributed to, or associated with them as a recognisable person. Researchers should consider whether it is necessary to identify information with individuals or not, in some cases for example it may be critical to the research that the informant is identified, in others it may be possible to identify categories of informant which do not disclose individuals' identities, and in some other cases the identification of individuals may be entirely unnecessary. A respect for privacy is an acknowledgement that individuals have a right not to share certain information with others. Respecting an agreement of confidentiality is to acknowledge that certain information may be disclosed to another (e.g. a researcher) for agreed purposes under agreed conditions of disclosure/non-disclosure to others. Security, in contrast, in the context of information, concerns the measures in place to ensure that only authorised persons or systems will have access to information. Thus, an application may make reference to the measures in place to ensure data is secure as part of provision for confidentiality.

## 6. Research ethics risk assessment

Researchers are expected to consider how to minimise the risks related to their research. This requires an assessment of risk and taking whatever steps are available to reduce the risks to which all participants in the research, including the researchers themselves, are exposed. This is sound research design.

Minimal risk is defined as an absence of any significant risk to anyone involved in the research, or any others affected by it directly or indirectly, that is reasonably foreseeable. This document is for guidance about ethical approval of research, thus the risks to be considered are those which might contravene the guiding principles or the researcher’s obligations and responsibilities set out in the University’s Code of Practice on Research Ethics.

Ethics risk assessment Researchers should always consider the ethical dimensions of their research. If the research involves any of the elements identified in section 3.1 then the research is likely to have an ethical dimension for which approval must be obtained regardless of whether the risk is regarded as minimal or more than minimal. The risk assessment is documented by the applicant in the application for ethics approval.

Research which is likely to involve more than minimal risk requires an assessment which includes, but may not be confined to, consideration of whether any risks are posed to the researcher, to participants, to persons associated with them, or any other persons directly or indirectly involved. Such risks include, but are not limited to risks to:

- Health and safety of the participants and others
- Psychological welfare of the participants
- Security of the participants and others
- Reputation of the participants among their peers or in their communities
- Intellectual property rights of the participants.

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**Policies and documents that supplement and reference this document:**

Ethics Policy
Code of Practice on Research and Ethics
Data protection Policy
Data Retention & Disposal Policy
Safeguarding Policy

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