

NCAD Research Ethics Guidelines for Undergraduate and Taught Postgraduate Researchers

To ensure research at NCAD is guided by good practice, you should fully consider the broad scope of potential ethical implications of your research. Ethics reviews protect both research participants and the researcher themselves, ensuring that all ethical risks are considered and measures have been put in place to address these risks. They are an essential element of what it means to do good in the widest sense as a practitioner. Researchers should read the ethical guidelines outlined in the NCAD Research Ethics Policy and Code of Good Practice.

Will your research activity need to undergo ethics review?

Researchers should always take the time to consider the ethical implications of their work *before* beginning a project or at the start of a new stage of work within the context of their position as a student at NCAD. Students at NCAD are encouraged to discuss ethical implications with their supervisor at the outset of any project.

Some examples of research activities and their different categories of ethical risk are below:

Likely to have no or very-low risk ethical implications:

- Research activity that engages with only your own personal experiences and does not involve the active or passive participation of other individuals/groups/living beings
- Interviews with subject matter experts that relate to their professional expertise within a topic
- Content analysis of published or publicly accessible media

Low-risk ethical implications:

- Any research activity where participants are unlikely to experience negative emotional reactions (through say, the questions you ask or the representations you make)
- User testing or trialling of prototypes that do not involve sensitive content or vulnerable populations
- Market research or feasibility studies (e.g. for product or software designs) which do not require participants to delve into sensitive subjects
- Interviews, questionnaires, surveys or other data collection methods that do not involve sensitive content or vulnerable groups
- Incorporating audience participation in a performance that is not likely to trigger physical or mental distress
- Observing people within your own family or social circle with their consent
- Interviewing or documenting adults who have consented to share an element of their personal experience
- Research involving children where parental consent is obtained and no sensitive topics are involved

- Usage of media available publicly online which was not generated by the researcher themselves, but which does not include sensitive topics or personally identifying information

Medium to high risk ethical implications:

- Research involving vulnerable individuals or groups in any capacity (including observing, documenting, interviewing, making visual representations)
- Research which involves engaging participants with sensitive topics, or which may alter the mental state of participants (i.e. causing distress, agitation, frustration)
- Research in which there is a power differential between the researcher and the research participants
- Any research activity in which you are collecting and storing research participants' sensitive personal data
- Public usage of media available publicly online which was not generated by the researcher themselves and which includes sensitive topics or personally identifying information

All research projects are different, so this list should not be considered exhaustive or definitive. Students should consider the difference between the data collection stage (the point in which you are gathering material that informs the development and direction of your project) and the dissemination stage (when for example, you might be sharing your work in public forums - in a gallery context, at a screening, or online, in which audiences are willingly consenting to view the work) as all have differing ethical implications and responsibilities for the researcher. A research activity having ethical risks does not mean that it cannot or should not be pursued. Ethics reviews are not intended as a barrier to conducting research, but as a tool to protect researchers and the full range of collaborators and participants who intersect with their research as it is being undertaken.

The steps in engaging with ethics reviews at NCAD are as follows:

1. Discuss your research project with your supervisor/tutor
2. Complete Stage 1: Self-Guided Research Ethics Checklist (Undergraduate & Taught Postgraduate Researchers)
 - a. If you do NOT tick any of the shaded boxes, discuss with your supervisor and have them review and sign off on the form. Following your supervisor's sign-off, you may proceed with your research.
 - b. If you do tick any of the shaded boxes, you will need to discuss the ethical implications of your research further with your supervisor. They may determine that you need to advance to Stage 2 and complete the Ethics Review Form (Undergraduate & Taught Postgraduate Researchers), submitting a more detailed rationale for your project and supporting materials as needed. Once completed, submit this form to your supervisor.
 - c. Your application will then be reviewed by your supervisor within your Department, with the following possible outcomes:

- i. **Approved/Approved with Minor Revisions:** Ethical approval is granted and you can proceed with your research. There may be minor changes required to materials that should be addressed, but following submission of these changes and approval by your supervisor, the research can proceed.
 - ii. **Not Approved, Further Information Requested:** Additional information may be requested from the researcher and the proposal must be revised. Approval to proceed with research activity is withheld until recommendations made have been addressed through appropriate revisions.
 - iii. **Referred to NCAD Ethics Review Committee:** If there are major ethical implications identified in your project, it may be referred for a full review by the College Research Ethics Committee.
 - iv. **Denied.** The proposed research project is not suitable/includes an unjustifiable level of risk or capacity to cause harm. The research may not proceed.
3. If during the project any element of the research methods change substantially from those outlined in your application, you must resubmit your ethics form outlining the changes.

Students should refer any questions on the research ethics review process to their supervisors/tutors in the first instance.

NCAD Research Ethics Approval Process Flowchart

For Undergraduate & Taught Postgraduate Research Students

