

## **HIGHER EDUCATION RESEARCH ETHICS POLICY**

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This policy and procedure is subject to The Equality Act 2010 which recognises the following categories of individual as Protected Characteristics: Age, Gender Reassignment, Marriage and Civil Partnership, Pregnancy and Maternity, Race, Religion and Belief, Sex (gender), Sexual orientation, Disability.

### **Alternative Format**

This policy is available in alternative formats, to request this, please email [marketingcampaigns@mkcollege.ac.uk](mailto:marketingcampaigns@mkcollege.ac.uk)

# Version Control

Version Number	Author	Approver	Date approved	Next review date
1	Group Director HE, Adult & IoT	Group Leadership Team	19/11/25	Nov 27

# Change log

Version Number	Summary of changes
1	New policy

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# Introduction

Milton Keynes College is committed to maintaining appropriate standards of professional conduct in all research related activities, with all research conducted in accordance with the highest ethical standards.

‘Research’ for the purposes of this policy is to be understood as:

- Original investigation undertaken to gain knowledge and understanding
- Work of direct relevance to the needs of commerce, industry and to the public and voluntary sectors
- The invention and generation of ideas, images, performances, artefacts including design, where these lead to new or substantially improved insights
- The use of existing knowledge in experimental development to produce new or substantially improved materials, devices, products and processes, including design and construction.

Research ethics can be defined as the moral principles which influence each stage of the research process, from conception through to dissemination. Ethical scrutiny involves making a judgement that the potential risks (if any) of the proposed project do not outweigh the perceived benefits.

## Policy Scope

This policy applies to research undertaken by learners who are enrolled in undergraduate programmes taught at Milton Keynes College. These programmes will typically be at Levels 5 and 6 where students may undertake a research project within a taught module, under the supervision of College teaching staff.

The College does not require staff to undertake research as part of their contractual terms, and the College does not provide resources for staff undertaking personal research. Staff may be supported to undertake a higher degree through a staff development programme, and research elements of this study would be supervised and approved by the awarding institution for

the programme and therefore any research ethics consideration will be the responsibility of the supervising institution.

## **Principles for Good practice in Research**

Milton Keynes College requires that staff supervising research during their academic duties, and students conducting research during their studies adhere to the following principles:

- a) demonstrate integrity, professionalism, honesty, rigour, transparency and openness in communication.
- b) observe fairness and equity.
- c) avoid, or declare and manage, actual or potential conflicts of interest.
- d) show care and respect for all participants, subjects, users and beneficiaries of research including humans, animals, the environment and cultural objects.
- e) observe all legal, regulatory and ethical requirements laid down by the College or validating University, or other statutory bodies.

## **Ethics Risk Assessment process (Stage 1)**

Research supervisors will provide training on ethical risks and research ethics for all undergraduate researchers.

Students will conduct a risk assessment of the planned research for submission to their supervisor. See Appendix 1 to this policy. The review will cover:

- whether there are any identified ethical issues
- whether there are any potential risks to the College, the research or the health, safety and wellbeing of researchers and research participants
- whether there are legal or regulatory requirements which govern the research.

The outcome of the risk assessment will be to determine whether the proposal will need an ethics review.

## The need for an Ethics Review (Stage 2)

Ethics review and the seeking of approval for research will be required if the proposed research includes engagement with human or animal participants (including social media engagement).

Ethics approval will not be required in other cases for example:

- applied scientific practical work
- creative practice
- exhibition or performance (without live audience)
- desk based research
- programming
- review of publicly held data/published literature (except for social media)

## Process for applying for Ethical Approval

If the risk assessment identifies the need for further evaluation the student should complete the Stage 2: Research Ethics proposal form.

This requires the student to briefly describe the project and identifying the risk factors (as identified in the Risk Assessment process) and explaining the mitigations.

The completed form must be considered and approved by the supervisor before any primary research commences. The form and formal approval will be kept on record for 5 yrs following student graduation<sup>1</sup>.

If the supervisor has concerns, and does not feel able to approve the proposal, the proposal should be referred to the Head of School.

If a student wishes to appeal the decision of the Head of School, then the proposal will be referred to the Group Director HE.

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<sup>1</sup> In accordance with OfS requirements on the retention of student work

# Research Misconduct

The College defines misconduct in research as including, but not limited to:

- a) Fabrication;
- b) Falsification;
- c) Misrepresentation of data and/or interests;
- 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 or the environment; and
  - ii) the proper handling of privileged or private information on individuals collected during the research.

Allegations of misconduct will be investigated and addressed using the College's procedures for Academic Misconduct.

# Intellectual Property

Intellectual property concerns creations of the mind and in the context of research may include, an invention, a design, research data and other findings of research, ideas, processes, software, hardware, apparatus and equipment, substances and materials as well as artistic and literary works (including academic and scientific publications).

Intellectual property created by its researchers is automatically owned by the individual unless previously agreed otherwise, for example, in a research or funding agreement with the student's employer. As such, the College and its researchers will ensure that any agreements relating to research include a provision for ownership and use of intellectual property.

The College upholds the presumption that any intellectual property discovered or developed using public or charitable funds should be used in line with the funder's terms, for example, disseminated in order to have a beneficial effect on society. The College and its researchers will comply with any additional conditions relating to intellectual property required by student employers or funding bodies.

## Appendix 1: Stage 1: Research Ethics Risk Assessment Form

Section	Question/Prompt	Response
1. Research Participants	Does your research involve human participants?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
	If yes, describe who they are (e.g., students, vulnerable groups, etc.)	
	Could participation cause psychological or emotional distress?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
	How will you obtain informed consent?	
2. Animal Participants	Does your research involve animal participants?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
3. Data Collection & Privacy	Will personal or sensitive data be collected?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
	Will you collect data from social media sources?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
	How will you ensure participant anonymity and confidentiality?	
	Where and how will the data be stored?	
	How will the data be used and shared?	
4. Potential Risks & Mitigation	Identify any potential risks to participants (human or animal) (e.g., physical, psychological, social, economic):	
	What measures will you take to minimize these risks?	
5. Ethical Approval & Compliance	Are there any legal or institutional guidelines relevant to your research?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
	Describe how your research aligns with ethical standards	
6. Supervisor's Review & Comments	Supervisor's comments on ethical considerations:	
	Recommended for further ethics review? If Yes – complete stage 2 If No – commence research	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

Signature (Student): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature (Supervisor): \_\_\_\_\_

1. -If your risk assessment is recommended for further ethical evaluation you will need to complete stage 2 of the ethical approval process
2. If your risk assessment is NOT recommended for any further ethical review, you may commence with your research.

## Appendix 2: Stage 2: Research Ethics Proposal Form

Student Details	
Name	
Student ID	
Course/Programme	
Supervisor Name	
Proposed Research Title	
Project Details	<p>Briefly explain (max 600 words)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Background to the research</li> <li>2) Study design</li> <li>3) Participants – who, how many, identification and recruitment</li> <li>4) Potentially vulnerable groups</li> <li>5) Methods of data collection</li> <li>6) Methods of data analysis</li> </ol>
Ethical review	To what extent is participation in your research voluntary?
Explain and discuss mitigations	
	<p>Do you have informed consent from participants?</p> <p>Are the participants capable of giving consent?</p> <p>Are any participants under 18?</p> <p>Is there any deception or coercion</p>
Explain and discuss mitigations	
	<p>Is there any risk of participants being harmed psychologically (including offense or embarrassment) or physically?</p> <p>What is the risk of any harm becoming permanent?</p> <p>How have the likelihood and harm been minimised?</p> <p>Is the College at risk of potential embarrassment or complaint?</p>
Explain and discuss mitigations	

	Can participants withdraw their consent at any stage?
Explain and discuss mitigation	
	Will you need to debrief participants?
Explain and discuss mitigation	
	How is the anonymity of participants maintained?
Explain and discuss mitigation	
	How will confidentiality be maintained?
Explain and discuss mitigation	
	How will information be stored during the research and what are the protocols for destroying data once the project is complete?
Explain and discuss mitigation	
	Are there any personal risks to the researcher (You) in undertaking this project?
Explain and discuss mitigation	
	Are there any regulatory or legal requirements?
Explain and discuss mitigation	
Supervisors Comments	
Supervisor Signature	
Date:	
Ethical Approval	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

1. -If your research ethics proposal is not approved, your supervisor will discuss comments and changes required. You will then need to resubmit this form for further approval of the changes to your project
2. If your research ethics proposal is approved you may commence with your research.