School of Histories and Humanities
Ethics Policy[1]

1. Context and Scope of Policy

In line with Trinity College Dublin's Policy on Good Research Practice it is imperative that research activity in the School of Histories and Humanities is conducted to the highest standards of integrity, professional conduct and probity.

As College's *Policy on Good Research Practice* states:
'In all research, in addition to the Law of the Land, the over-arching ethical principles for Trinity College can be summarized as: **respect** for the individual subject or population, **beneficence and the absence of maleficence** (research should have the maximum benefit with the minimal harm) and **justice** (all research subjects and populations should be treated fairly and equally)'.

This document sets out the principles and procedures of the Ethics Policy of the School of Histories and Humanities.

> **1.1** For the purposes of this document, the term 'researcher' encompasses:
> - Any member of the School who conducts research; this includes staff, postdoctoral fellows; postgraduate students and unpaid research associates;
> - Any individual who is not a member of the School but is undertaking research using the School's premises and facilities and/or under the name of the School (including visiting academics and students). Such a researcher should follow the guidelines for Staff or Students as appropriate.

> **1.2** Research involving human participants is defined as any of the following:
> - Research that directly involves people through their physical participation (active or passive) in research activities. Such activities may include, but are not limited to, interviews, questionnaires and discussions.
> - Research that indirectly involves people (living or deceased, particularly where there are likely to be living relatives) through the provision of access to personal data;

2. Principles

> **2.1** The following key principles inform the School's stance one the ethical issues in research involving human participants.

> **2.1.1 Diversity of approach:** Given the diversity of academic activity within the School, which is home to the disciplines of History, History of Art, Classics and Gender Studies, the nature and significance of ethical issues arising in research will vary across the disciplines and between projects.

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[1] This document is based on the Ethics Policy developed by the School of Social Sciences and Philosophy and was presented to the Research Committee of the School of Histories and Humanities on 19 February 2013.

2.1.2 Independent scrutiny: The ethical conduct of research is a matter of judgment. Scrutiny of research proposals with possible ethical dimensions, independently of the researcher, is intended to create to create the conditions for an explicit discussion of the judgements guiding the conduct of research projects. Dialogue is thus seen as a central part of ethical practice in research.

2.1.3 Informed consent: Research involving human participants should, where possible, be conducted only with the fully formed and freely given consent of participants. In line with College policy, potential participants should be informed of the nature and purpose of the research, and any potential benefits, risks, obligations or inconvenience associated with the research that may influence their decision to participate. The researcher (or lead researcher in the case of collaborative work) is responsible for ensuring that all participants have given their consent prior to participating in the research. Such consent should be given voluntarily and without coercion. Wherever possible, evidence of consent (either written consent, or oral consent witnessed by another) should be obtained. Participants should be informed that they are free to withdraw their consent at any time without adverse consequences, and that any data provided by them will be destroyed should they request it.

2.1.4 Protection from harm: Researchers should endeavour to minimize the risk of physical or psychological harm arising to any person or organization as a result of their research. It is advisable that researchers inform participants of the contact details of a person whom they can contact in the event of any issues arising from the research that cannot be resolved with the researcher.

2.1.5 Confidentiality: Except where explicit written consent is obtained, researchers should protect the confidentiality of all participants and their data at all times.[2] Researchers should be aware of the risks to anonymity, confidentiality, privacy and security posed by the data they collect and store, and take measures to prevent accidental breaches of confidentiality. The collection, storage use and disclosure of data must comply with the Data Protection Acts of 1988 and 2003.

2.1.6 Openness, honesty and integrity: Researchers should be open and honest about the purpose and content of their research at all times, and conduct the research in such a way as to ensure the professional integrity of its design, the generation and analysis of data, and the publication of results. Deception or covert data collection should be used only where essential to the research design. Any personal, academic or commercial conflicts of interest in the research should be declared. Direct and indirect contributions of colleagues, collaborators and others should be acknowledged. Participants should be given the opportunity to access the outcomes of research, and be debriefed if appropriate.

2.1.7 Professional codes of practice and guidance: Researchers should ensure that their research accords with any professional codes of practice and/or ethical guidelines relevant to the subject domain of their research. For research projects that fall within the domain of funding agencies, such as the Irish Research Council, researchers must ensure they conform with their requirements and protocols as necessary.

3. Procedures

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[2] The duty of confidentiality is not absolute in law and may, in exceptional circumstances, be over-ridden by more compelling duties, such as the duty to protect individuals from harm. If such issues arise, researchers are advised to discuss these with their Departmental Ethics Officer in the first instance

The following outlines the procedures to be followed by Staff and Postgraduate students.

3.1. STAFF

For all members of staff and unpaid research associates: Independent scrutiny of research proposals is provided by the Department within which the researcher is located and by the School's Research/Ethics Committee, if necessary, using the procedures outlined below:

3.1.1. In the first instance, researchers should self-certify the ethical propriety of their research by completing a Research Ethics Checklist (Appendix 1). This should be undertaken in the early stages of the project, prior to any data collection or, where appropriate, during each phase of the research.

3.1.2. The researcher should submit the completed form to the relevant Head of Department*.* If the Head of Department is satisfied that the research poses minimal potential risk of harm to participants and others, he/she should sign the Research Ethics Checklist and forward a copy of the signed document to the Secretary of the School's Research/Ethics Committee. If the research is led by the Head of Department then the form should be sent to the Head of School.

Where the Research Ethics Checklist indicates that an actual Certificate of Ethical Approval *is* required, the researcher should complete the proforma at Appendix 2 and submit this to the Secretary of the School's Research/Ethics Committee for consideration at its next meeting. On a decision by the committee to grant ethical approval, the Chair of the School's Research/Ethics Committee will issue the signed Certificate of Ethical Approval.

3.2 POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS

For students: Independent scrutiny of research proposals is provided by the first-named supervisor, using the procedures outlined below. In all cases, the first-named supervisor has a responsibility to encourage among students an awareness of ethical issues in research.

3.2.1 For taught programmes, the Director of the Programme should determine if there are ethical issues to consider. If so, the procedure outlined in 3.1 above should be followed.

3.2.2 For individual research projects at postgraduate level, students should normally self-certify the ethical propriety of their research with assistance from their first-named supervisor by completing a Research Ethics Checklist (Appendix 1). This should be undertaken in the early stages of the project and prior to any data collection or, where appropriate, during each phase of the research.

3.2.3 Where the Research Ethics Checklist indicates 'ethics release', the first-named supervisor should sign a copy of Appendix1, have it signed by the head of Discipline who will forward same to the Secretary of the School's Ethics Committee*.*

3.2.4 Where the Research Ethics Checklist indicates that a Certificate of Ethical Approval is required, the student (assisted by the first-named supervisor) should complete the proforma at Appendix 2 for consideration by the School's Research/Ethics Committee.

Membership of the School's Research/Ethics Committee will be as follows:

Director of Research
School Administrator (Secretary of the Committee)
Head of School
Director of Postgraduate Teaching and Learning
Heads of Research Centres:
        Mediterranean and Near Eastern Studies
        TRIARC
        Medieval History
        Irish-Scottish and Comparative Studies
        Contemporary Irish History
        Centre for War Studies
        CGWS
        Early Modern
Two nominated members of academic staff
Heads of Department
Postdoctoral representative

All decisions of the School's Ethics Committee on ethical issues must be agreed by consensus. Any member of the Committee with a conflict of interest should declare this interest at the outset of discussion on the relevant matter and take no part in the Committee's discussions and decisions on that matter.

4 Further guidance

For further guidance on research ethics, the following sources may be of use:

Association of Research Ethics Committees - http://www.arec.org.uk/
British Educational Research Association -http://www.bera.ac.uk/
Oral History Society - http://www.ohs.org.uk/
Trinity College Dublin's Policy on Good Research Practice -
https://www.tcd.ie/research/dean/TCDGoodResearchPractice.pdf

There are also excellent relevant resources, such as:

- S. Eckstein (ed.), *Manual for Research Ethics Committees* (Cambridge, 2003).
- B. MacFarlane, *Researching With Integrity: The Ethics of Academic Research* (Oxford, 2008).