

## Department Policy on Research Ethics and Data Management

2nd November 2015

### PREAMBLE

Current NUIM policy is that:

“All applications or proposals for research involving human subjects or human derived material external to NUI MAYNOOTH must be submitted to the University Ethics Committee for review.” (NUIM Ethical Policy Document, p. 16)

The home page of the Social Research Ethics Sub-Committee (<http://research.nuim.ie/support-services/research-ethics/SSRESC>) clarifies further that:

“The Social Research Ethics Sub-Committee reviews research projects that involve human **participants** and **personally-identifiable information about human beings** in order to determine if the proposed research is ethically sound and does not present any risk of harm to research participants. The sub-committee does not consider itself merely a policing body, but genuinely desires to assist NUIM researchers in addressing ethical issues that typically arise in the course of complex social research projects, recognizing the value of such research.

All NUIM staff, as well as PhD and M.Litt. students, are required to undergo the ethical review process before they can begin data collection on their proposed research project. Generally, undergraduates and taught Masters students do not come under the remit of the ethics committee, but their research projects should undergo an ethical review process within the student's department and in consultation with the student's supervisor.

The purpose of the Department of Sociology research policy is to ensure that:

- Our values and practices are transparent and accessible to staff, students, the wider university community and the public
- Evolving university policies are consistent with professional standards and practices in the social sciences

### POLICY

#### A. Guiding Principles

1. The Department of Sociology is committed to maintaining the highest ethical standards in research. Our research practice is guided by the four principles laid out in the statement on ‘Research Ethics’ contained within the Sociological Association of Ireland document, “Ethical Guidelines,” pp. 6-8: (I) Professional competence; (II) Integrity; (III) Respect for human rights, diversity and equality; (IV) Social Responsibility

[http://www.sociology.ie/docstore/dls/pages\\_list/3\\_sai\\_ethical\\_guidelines.pdf](http://www.sociology.ie/docstore/dls/pages_list/3_sai_ethical_guidelines.pdf)

2. We subscribe to the principle of providing open access to publications and data, where reasonable and appropriate. We encourage staff and postgraduate students to make use of facilities such as the NUIM eprints repository, the Irish Qualitative Data Archive and the Irish Social Science Data Archive to disseminate research outputs and make data available for re-use.

3. The Department of Sociology recognizes the importance of promoting sound data management practices for ensuring that our research (and that of our students) meets professional standards relating to research integrity, responsibility towards research informants, data protection, and open access. Examples of best practice protocols include those provided by the UK Data Archive <http://www.dataarchive.ac.uk/media/2894/managingsharing.pdf> and the Irish Qualitative Data Archive - [http://www.iqda.ie/sites/default/files/IQDA\\_Best\\_Practice\\_Handbook.pdf](http://www.iqda.ie/sites/default/files/IQDA_Best_Practice_Handbook.pdf))

4. We recognize the diversity of diversity of methodologies and paradigms within both Sociology and Politics, and will implement the Department research ethics policy in a manner that is sufficiently flexible to allow for differences in convention and approach while also ensuring common adherence to our shared principles. We seek to promote a **reflexive**, as opposed to a 'box-ticking' approach towards decision making about ethical approval. A key concern for the department is to avoid a situation where rules developed with other disciplines in mind make it impossible a priori to practice good social research methodology. For this reason we also seek to ensure continued representation of sociological research methods on appropriate University level committees.

5. We recognize that social and political research often takes place in settings (families, workplaces, organisations etc.) where the researcher is already a member of the setting in question, and that such settings cannot be adequately treated with blanket rules designed for outside researchers. This does not, of course, release researchers in such settings from the need to consider how ethical principles can best be implemented in these contexts.

6. Ethical responsibility includes a duty of concern for the safety of the researcher as well as other research participants. Those supervising research – at any level from, from undergraduate to postgraduate – should ensure that student researchers are aware of any risks they may face in their proposed research and should take appropriate action. They have a right to intervene if they feel a student is taking indefensible or unwarranted risks.

## B. Procedures

1. All academic staff, postdoctoral and research postgraduate students who require ethical approval (or, in the case of staff members, who consider that their research may need formal approval) should secure it from the University Social Sciences Research Ethics Sub-Committee. Consistent with NUIM research ethics policy, ethical approval is required for research projects that involve living human **participants** and **personally-identifiable information about human beings**.

2. The Department convenes a Research and Postgraduate Sub-Committee that assists in ensuring that high ethical standards are maintained in research that does not require formal approval from the SSREC. Members of the Research and Postgraduate subcommittee are available to advise researchers and research supervisors on questions relating to research ethics, including whether or not formal University approval is required. The Research and Postgraduate Sub-Committee will normally include the Department representative who sits on the SSREC.

3. Postgraduate students on taught MA programmes will **not** normally seek university-level research ethics approval.

- The MA Co-ordinator and individual Research Supervisors will be responsible for advising students about how to ensure that their research meets acceptable ethical standards.
- Under certain circumstances, the student, in consultation with the MA Co-ordinator and Research Supervisor may decide that it is appropriate to seek university level approval – for example, when the research is being carried out with members of ‘vulnerable’ groups (as described in the University Ethical Policy Document).
- Under other circumstances it may be appropriate to seek ethical approval from the Department Research and Postgraduate Sub-Committee– for example, when it has been sought by an organization with which the student is carrying out research.

4. Undergraduate students carrying out research as part of research methods courses and the Special Topics Seminar will **not** normally seek university-level research approval.

- Module Instructors and Seminar Leaders will be responsible for advising students about how to ensure that their research meets acceptable ethical standards.
- In general, Module Instructors and Seminar Leaders will advise undergraduate students **that they should not** carry out research with members of vulnerable groups, or research that would normally require high-level ethical approval, such as covert research.

- Under certain circumstances it may be appropriate to seek ethical approval for a module assignment or Special Topic from the Department Research and Postgraduate Sub-Committee.
- Members of the Department Research and Postgraduate Sub-Committee will be available to Module Instructors and Seminar Leaders for consultation and advice on an ongoing basis.