



Research Ethics Policy

[This policy is under review in 2021-22. Members of CTF will be advised when a revised version is available and supersedes the present version. Students should continue to refer to the current Research Ethics Policy.]

Research ethics policy (BTh and DTM)

BTh and DTM students must abide by the [Faculty of Divinity's guidelines for research integrity and ethics in the conduct of research](#):

Ethics in the Conduct of Research

The interdisciplinary nature of some research in the Faculty, especially those undertaking psychological and anthropological research, sometimes means that students and staff in these areas encounter a wider set of research ethics issues, such as working with human participants, vulnerable subjects, and personal data. In all such cases those undertaking research must give consideration to these ethical issues in order to ensure that they will carry out their research in an appropriately responsible fashion, and an application made to the research committee for ethical approval.

Members of staff who conduct research that raises ethical issues are expected to submit their application at the earliest opportunity for approval. PhD or MLitt students should submit their application at the earliest opportunity in conceiving their research. At the very latest they will need to include their application as part of the material they submit for their first-year registration examination. Students on the BA, BTh, diplomas and MLitt will need to submit their application for ethical approval together with their dissertation proposal. In all cases, staff and students must submit their account of how they will deal with research ethics and receive approval before they embark upon their actual research.

In the Faculty of Divinity the body responsible for ethical review is the Research Committee. A summary of the proposed research together with a statement concerning the ethical issues raised by the research and how they will be addressed needs to be submitted to the committee. It is recommended that the School of the Humanities and Social Sciences application form is used (available from <http://www.cshss.cam.ac.uk/research-ethics-approval>). The application for ethical approval should be submitted to the secretary of the committee, Dr Peter Harland. The committee is authorized to approve research or require specific changes or lay down certain conditions on how the research is conducted. In complex cases the committee may choose to refer the case to the Research Ethics Committee of the School of Arts and Humanities.

[University of Cambridge Policies and Practices on Research Ethics](#)

[University of Cambridge Policy of the Ethics of Research Involving Human Participants and Personal Data](#)

Research ethics policy (Common Awards)

i. Scope of the policy

This policy applies to all students enrolled from September 2016 on the programmes at all levels within the suite of awards validated by the University of Durham titled Theology, Ministry and Mission and delivered by the Cambridge Theological Federation. It specifically applies to all students who are undertaking independent learning modules and/or dissertations which involve research involving human participants.

Students for awards with validating Universities other than Durham, including PhD and DProf students, are not covered by this policy, and must abide by the policies of the University with which they are registered.

The policy only covers students who wish to engage in **research involving human participants** through the use of **questionnaires, interviews, focus groups or observations of activity**. Separate advice and permission must be sought for any research activity not covered under these headings. Students should note that it is very unlikely that permission will be granted for forms of research that involve active intervention by the researcher into a situation being investigated.

ii. Background

The Cambridge Theological Federation is committed to treating all human beings with respect, and expects the highest standards of integrity in those engaged in research activities who are students of the Federation. Where people are involved in research and placement work their wellbeing must be at the forefront of the researchers' concern and any risk must be minimised.

iii. Key Ethical Considerations

Safeguarding

- Where research includes the participation of children or vulnerable adults, researchers must have received an enhanced disclosure by the Disclosure and Barring Service. **This is a key requirement.** Normally, students obtain such disclosure at the beginning of their programme if they are a recognised candidate for ministry.
- Interviews conducted with children, young people under the age of 18, or vulnerable adults must never be conducted by the interviewer alone, whether individually or in a group. A responsible adult such as a parent, carer or teacher must be present.

Informed Consent

- All participants in research must give their informed consent to participate in writing. This requires that they have been informed, in writing, of the nature of the research and their participation in it, of any risks, and of the intended use for any information they give. In this way their consent will be informed, valid, and freely given. You should also make clear the extent of the readership of the final project: will this be read simply by examiners, or might you want to publish it on the web or in some other form?
- Where participants under the age of 16 are involved in research, informed consent must be obtained in writing from their parents or legal guardians.
- Specific consent must be obtained where interviews or observations are going to be recorded.

- The right for a participant to withdraw from the research, and withdraw their consent at any time during the process must be absolute and the mechanism to do so must be communicated to the participant.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

- The confidentiality of participants must be respected, particularly with respect to any personal information obtained from them. Participants must be informed, in writing, of how this will be secured.
- Normally, information used in final forms of assessment must be anonymised, along with the details of other identifying information (the names of Local Churches or organisations, etc). Details should be given only in outline ('a suburban church in a mid-sized town', not 'a church in Cherry Hinton, Cambridge').
- Remember that the church is a small place: people are easily identifiable from their role or details of context. If such factors mean that anonymity cannot be guaranteed, this must be made clear at the point at which consent is obtained.
- Only where express permission has been given by an individual in writing to the use of personally identifiable information being used may it be so.
- If it seems necessary to include in the supporting documentation something such as a parish bulletin that will identify the place where the research was undertaken, permission must be obtained from the officials of the place, and from anyone whose character, opinions, etc., feature in the essay, and who can be identified by means of the material in the supporting documentation.
- Assessors of submitted work are bound by the same expectations of confidentiality.
- The submission of work for assessment is distinct from work that will be published. The former has a confidential system of assessment, the latter has a wider public audience. If there is the possibility of publication, participants must be made aware of this in advance of the research beginning and this possibility must form an explicit part of the consent obtained. If publication becomes a possibility after consents have been obtained, new written consent must be gained.

Data Protection

- All research must be carried out within the bounds of the Data Protection Act. This includes requirements for secure data storage and destruction of data. It is the responsibility of the student to inform themselves of these parameters.
- Informed consent must be obtained by participants when any personal data is to be held about them.
- Informed consent means that participants must be clear about what data will be stored, how, and for how long.

The Conduct of Interviews

- Researchers are expected to be polite and courteous at all times.
- Explain to the interviewee(s) the nature and purpose of your project.
- Explain how the interview is to be used.
- Obtain permission for the interview to be recorded, if this will be necessary.
- The scope of confidentiality must be clearly set out within the interview.
- It must be clear that the participant can terminate the interview at any time.
- Any consents should be obtained in writing.

iv. Placements and Experience-Based Reflections

All of the above considerations apply to submissions for placement work or other experience-based reflections. In addition:

- It is the responsibility of the receiving placement institution to organise and confirm that necessary DBS or other safeguarding and Health & Safety checks are in place. This is named in the Working Agreement with placement institutions.
- In order to engage in pastoral work theological students must be under supervision and need to be assessed. Such supervision & assessment is carried out through conversation and through written work. Any personal details discussed in supervision are confidential to the supervision process; personal details recorded in written work are also confidential to the assessment process.
- Although the student may use encounters with others for their reflection, the emphasis of these pieces of summative assessment is on self-reflection and integrating that with critical theological enquiry. Thus the sources for reflection will primarily include journals, personal stories and similar sources rather than others' personal details.
- The work remains the intellectual property of the student who has written it and will not be shared by the supervisor or examiners with others, except those bound by the confidentiality of the assessment process.
- Placement submissions in University of Durham Common Awards programmes require the student to reflect on context as a relevant aspect of ministerial practice. This does not remove the expectation of anonymising persons and locations that appear in experience-based reflections. Discretion and sensitivity need to be exercised in including general details in order to contextualise the work rather than naming the location (e.g. referring to 'a church in an industrial district of a large urban city, with very high proportion of racial and religious diversity' versus 'The Church of St John the Evangelist, Cheetham Hill').
- When referring to evidence of the nature of the context, students are expected to exercise discretion and sensitivity. For example, parish demographics developed by the Church of England statistics department can be referred to but it is expected that students render their citations general, referring to the page and publication year, but not the specific parish.
- If it seems necessary to include in the supporting documentation something such as a parish bulletin that will identify the place where the research was undertaken, permission must be obtained from the officials of the place, and from anyone whose character, opinions, etc., feature in the essay, and who can be identified by means of the material in the supporting documentation.
- Supervisors or examiners who wish to cite students' work in any context should seek the permission of the student and ascertain that if any personal stories are retold, the appropriate written permissions have been obtained.
Students who subsequently wish to make available their writing or reflections to a wider audience should seek the written permission of those whose stories they wish to tell – even if names have been altered – in order to preserve confidentiality and confidence. At this point the Formal ethics approval process must be employed.

v. Ethics approval process

Ethical approval must be sought for any research involving human participants. If you are in doubt about whether Ethics approval is necessary, seek the guidance of your Director of Studies or supervisor.

Ethics approval is sought using the Ethics Approval Form. This requires an outline of the nature and purpose of the research and the completion of a checklist that identifies ethical issues and subsequent comment to assess the risk involved. This form must be submitted along with the relevant Independent Learning Module Proposal form or Dissertation Proposal Form in use for your

programme. Along with the form, any of the following that are relevant to the research must be submitted for approval:

- A participant information sheet that clearly explains the study such that they are in a position to give informed consent.
- A consent form for use by participants which will also specifically include permission to record any interview or observations if relevant, and detail the opportunity to withdraw.
- Any questionnaires that will be used.
- In the case of a structured, or semi-structured interview, an account of the questions and/or areas that are to be discussed.

Ethics approval forms are reviewed by the **Research Ethics Panel**. The Panel may require alterations to the documentation or to the research design itself and in these cases all documents must be resubmitted. No data collection should begin until the researcher has received written approval from the Programme Manager.

Where the panel cannot come to agreement or require additional expertise to make a decision submissions will be referred to the Federation Common Awards Management Committee for advice.

vi. Research Ethics Panel

The Research Ethics Panel reports to the Federation Common Awards Management Committee. It is responsible for reviewing and approving research activity involving human participants, and ensuring that the Cambridge Theological Federation follows best practice. The Panel has seven members and the minimum quorum is three. When the Panel returns an application to the student in order to require alterations to the proposal, the alterations may be confirmed by one member of the Panel. The Panel will usually meet three times a year.

Recommendations are communicated to students through the relevant Programme Manager.

vii. Review of this Policy

This policy will be reviewed every three years from 2016, or earlier if a serious concern is raised in the Common Awards Management Committee.

Common Awards policy on the academic consequences of research ethics misconduct:

<https://www.durham.ac.uk/departments/academic/common-awards/policies-processes/assessment/other-research-ethics/>