



## National Forum Research Ethics Governance Structure & Ethics Approval Process

### ETHICS GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

The ethics governance structure will consist of two committee of the National Forum Board as follows:

**Research Ethics Committee** with responsibility for the undertaking ethics review and approval for research conducted in the name of the Forum and for developing ethics processes in line with international good practice. It will meet, normally, up to 3 times per year;

**Research Ethics Audit Committee** with responsibility for undertaking periodic audit activities to ensure that the Forum's processes for ethics review and approval are robust and fit for purpose. In the event of any complaints arising in relation to the Forum's research activities, this committee will investigate such claims. It will meet normally once a year.



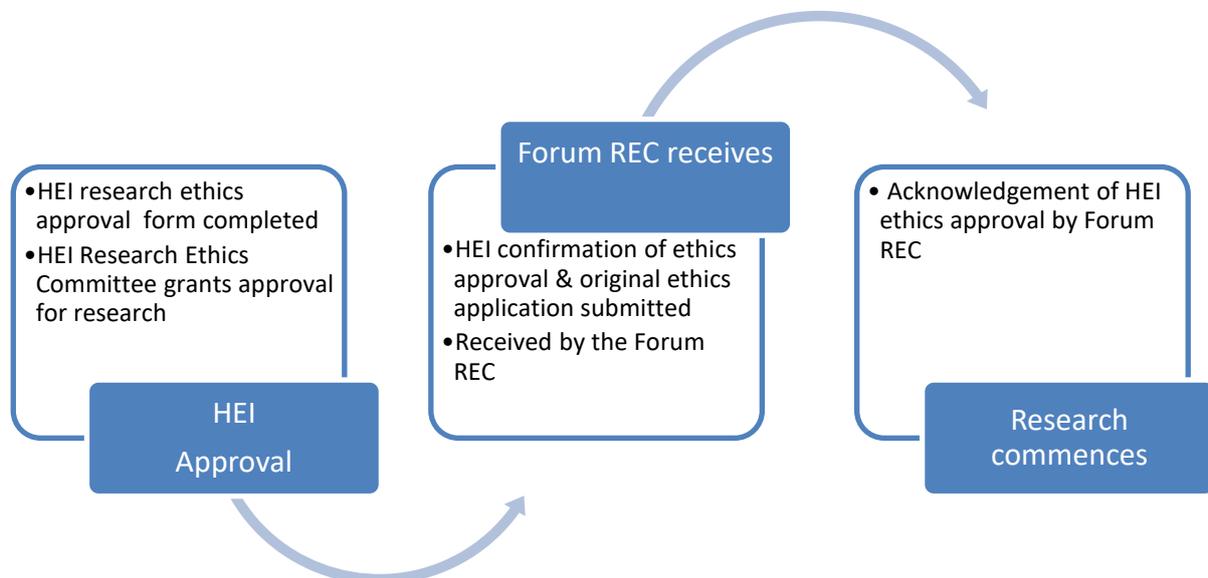
### **ETHICS APPROVALS PROCESS: Mode 1: Research Projects**

The following process applies in the case of Forum-led, or Forum-commissioned third-party research. Following an ethics application, conditions of approval will be addressed normally within two weeks and prior to the commencement of the research.



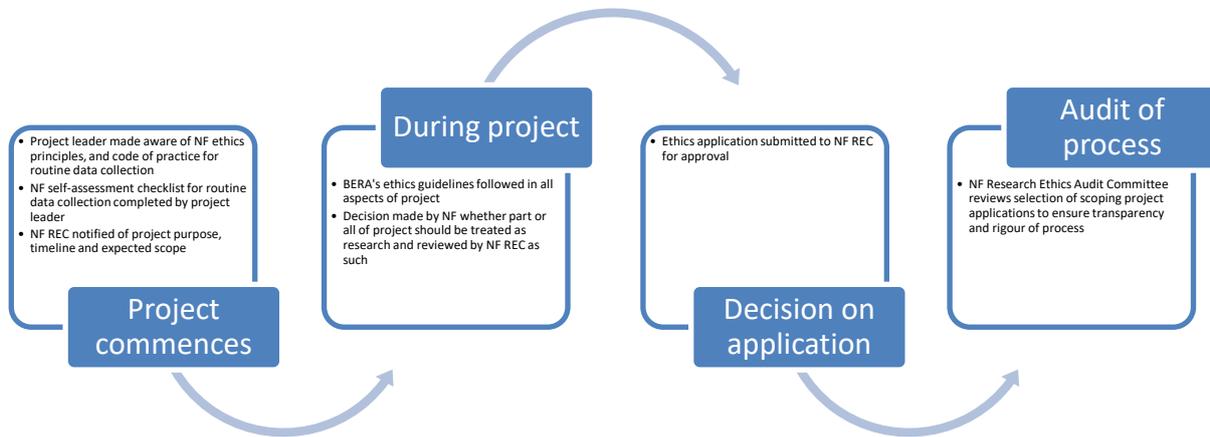
### **ETHICS APPROVALS PROCESS: Mode 2: Research Projects**

The following process will normally apply in the case of partnership research between the Forum and HEI(s) and shall be based on the recognition of institutional ethics approval processes through the Forum's Research Ethics Committee (REC).



**ETHICS APPROVALS PROCESS: Mode 3: Ethics Process for Research that May Arise from National Forum Routinely-Collected Data (such as in scoping/consultation projects)**

The process for ethics oversight of research that may arise arising from routinely-collected data within National Forum work packages such as scoping/consultation projects.



## NATIONAL FORUM FOR THE ENHANCEMENT OF TEACHING & LEARNING

### RESEARCH ETHICS APPLICATION FORM

#### ETHICS REVIEW: EXEMPTION

The National Forum is committed to ensuring that teaching & learning research is conducted to the highest standards of integrity and professionalism and that ethical considerations are fully taken into account in the design, conduct and dissemination of research activities carried out in the Forum's name. A statement of the Forum's principles underpinning research ethics is in Appendix 1.

The Forum has agreed that in furthering its commitment to high quality research, all research carried out should meet the requirements of an internationally recognised code of ethics. It has selected the British Educational Research Association (BERA) Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2011) (<https://www.bera.ac.uk/researchers-resources/publications/ethical-guidelines-for-educational-research-2011>) as being the closest internationally recognised cognate code. In addition, research should conform to institutional research ethics guidelines (for HEI partners).

It is anticipated that, in the majority of cases, the nature of research conducted by, or on behalf of, the Forum will be low risk and as a consequence that ethics approval will be based on exemption from full review of research protocols.

The attached form can be used to seek approval with exemption from full review by the Forum's Research Ethics Committee, provided that the research proposals:

- a. Have gained ethical approval from an approved body (normally by a Research Ethics Committee of a recognised HEI), or
- b. The research proposal has been assessed against the Research Ethics Checklist and meets the requirements of the BERA Guidelines

In the instance of partnership research projects between the Forum and HEI(s), the Forum will recognise the ethics approval of the HEI and will acknowledge its approval on the basis of receipt of the formal decision of the HEI and the original ethics form submitted which should be appended in place of Part 2 of the form overleaf.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> **Note:**

**The National Forum Research Ethics Committee aims to build specific expertise in the ethics implications of research in teaching and learning. The Forum Research Ethics Committee does not intend to replace the ethics oversight provided by the Research Ethics Committee of the Principal Investigator and/or the institution involved in the research. However, the Forum Research Ethics Committee will seek to build constructive reciprocal relationships with recognised Research Ethics Committees to facilitate the design, conduct and dissemination of high quality teaching and learning research for the wider benefit of the higher education sector.**

## RESEARCH PROJECT

|                                     |  |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Title of Research Study</b>      |  |
| <b>Name of Principal Researcher</b> |  |

### Part 1

#### Criteria for exemption from full review

*If the answer to either criterion is yes, then exemption from full review is permissible*

| <b>Criteria for exemption</b>   |        |
|---|--------|
| The research proposal has received ethical approval from an approved body (recognised higher education institution)   | Yes/No |
| The research proposal has been assessed against the Research Ethics Checklist and does not have any significant ethical implications                                    | Yes/No |
| <b>Research Ethics Checklist</b>  |        |
| Will the purpose of the research and the main research procedures be explained to all participants so that they understand the process in which they are to be engaged? | Yes/No |
| Will participation be voluntary?  | Yes/No |
| Will you obtain an explicit statement of consent from participants?   | Yes/No |
| Where appropriate, will you advise participants the point up to which that they may withdraw from the research and for any reason without consequences?                 | Yes/No |
| <b><i>If the response to any of the questions above is "no" a full review of the research proposal may be required</i></b>  |        |
| Will your research participants include any vulnerable groups? (e.g. learners under 18 years of age, those with learning or communication difficulties <sup>2</sup> )   | Yes/No |
| Will the research involve deception or subterfuge in any way?   | Yes/No |
| Will the research involve discussion of sensitive topics (age, culture, race, gender, sexuality, socio-economic standing or religion)?                                  | Yes/No |
| Will the research involve the collection and processing of sensitive personal data (e.g. ethnicity, health, political opinions)?  | Yes/No |
| Will the research involve participants experiencing either physical or psychological distress?  | Yes/No |
| Will the research participants include patients and/or people in custody, and/or people engaged in illegal behaviours (drugs etc.?)                                     | Yes/No |
| Will any incentives (beyond reasonable expenses e.g. travel costs, refreshments) be offered for participation in the research?  | Yes/No |
| <b><i>If the response to any of the questions above is "yes" a full review of the research proposal may be required</i></b>   |        |
| Will participant's data be treated confidentially and anonymously, unless participants specifically and willingly waive that right?                                     | Yes/No |
| Will the research data be stored and used in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1988 & 2003)?   | Yes/No |
| Will participants be debriefed at the end of their participation?   | Yes/No |
| <b><i>If the response to any of the questions above is "no" a full review of the research proposal may be required</i></b>  |        |

## Part 2 RESEARCH PROJECT DETAILS

|                              |  |
|------------------------------|--|
| Name of Principal Researcher |  |
| Contact Details              |  |
| Title of Research Study      |  |
| Members of Research Team     |  |
| Project Start Date           |  |
| Project Completion Date      |  |

### Project Description

Please provide a brief description of the project. If a National Forum Project Descriptor form has already been completed, it can be appended provided that the sections below are cross-referenced appropriately.

- 1. Aims of the research**
- 2. Research questions**
- 3. Proposed research methodology**
- 4. Data collection and analysis methods (include copy of questionnaire/surveys/interview schedule as appropriate) See Guidance note 1.**
- 5. Identification and selection of research participants (sampling approach, inclusion/exclusion criteria, and number) see Guidance note 2.**
- 6. Arrangements for informing participants about the nature and purpose of the research (include information sheet for informed consent)  
See Guidance note 3.**
- 7. Arrangements for gaining and recording informed consent  
See Guidance note 4.**
- 8. How will any ethical considerations specific to this research be addressed?  
See Guidance note 5.**
- 9. What data protection arrangements will be observed for:**

- a. Ensuring that the identity of the participants is protected? *(see Guidance note 6)*
- b. The form in which the data is to be stored?
- c. Assigning responsibility for the data?
- d. Storage of the data (e.g. location, period of storage, how data will be destroyed)?

10. a. Is it intended to publish all or part of the findings of this study?

b. Is it intended to archive all or part of the data for unconditional use?

11. How will participants be informed of the extent to which the findings of the study will be reported (including reports, peer reviewed publication, presentations)?

## ETHICS DECLARATION

I/we the undersigned have read the British Educational Research Association (BERA) Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2011) (<https://www.bera.ac.uk/researchers-resources/publications/ethical-guidelines-for-educational-research-2011>) and agree to abide by them in the conduct of this research.

I/we confirm that the research will be conducted as described on this ethics application form.

I/we undertake to retain copies of any consent obtained and to make these available to the National Forum.

I/we acknowledge responsibility and obligation to comply with all domestic Irish and European legislation.

I/we confirm that the information provided on this form is correct and accurate.

Signature:

Date:

## **GUIDANCE NOTES ON RESEARCH ETHICS SUMMARY REVIEW FORM**

### **Guidance Note 1: Data Collection Methods**

*Outline the methods to be used for data collection: qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods. If using non-standardised or qualitative schedules, provide a brief description accompanied by copies of survey, questionnaire or interview schedule. If using a standardised or previously validated approach provide name, citation and a brief description and a copy of the data collection instrument. Provide a summary description of the methods of analysis (e.g. content analysis, thematic analysis, statistical analysis).*

### **Guidance Note 2: Identification of Research Participants**

*Provide a description of the sampling framework to include: details of the size of the study population; rationale for selection of particular groups; details of any specific sub-groups (e.g. gender, age, educational group) and how the size of the study population was determined. Details of how the participants in the study will be approached and recruited*

### **Guidance Note 3: Informed Consent**

*To ensure that the principle of informed consent is fulfilled, research participants should be provided with information about the research which communicates its purpose in plain language which can be understood by a non-specialist.*

*Where research is intending to include student participants:*

- *Extra consideration needs to be given by the researcher(s) with regard to the circumstances in which students are invited to participate and the need to stress the voluntary nature of participation, in order to ensure students do not feel overburdened or under pressure to take part. In addition, their right to withdraw should also be explained and emphasised.*
- *As institutions differ in their ethical procedures, the onus is on the researcher(s) to determine whether separate institutional ethics approval is required at local level for student participation and to apply for such approval where required.*

*The Information Sheet provided to participants should address the following questions:*

1. *Purpose of the study – why is it being carried out?*
2. *Scope of the study – what will it involve? What will be required of the participant?*
3. *Chosen participants – why has the participant been chosen?*
4. *Participation:*
  - a. *is the participant required to take part?*
  - b. *can the participant withdraw?*
  - c. *will their participation in the study be kept confidential?*
  - d. *what will happen to the information they provide?*
5. *Research process – what will happen to the results and where will they be presented? E.g. report, conference presentation, published research.*
6. *Approval of the study – name of the body approving the study?*
7. *Further information – from where they may request further information? (PI/ or the Forum as appropriate).*

**Guidance Note 4: Gaining and Recoding Informed Consent**

Describe the procedures relating to informed consent including: gaining explicit consent from participants; providing participants with a copy of their signed consent form; retaining evidence of the consent (normally a signed form). Exemplar consent form:

| <b>Consent Form for Research Projects (Exemplar)</b>   |
|--|
| <p>I (blank for name) agree to participate in (name of research study).</p> <p>The nature and purpose of the study has been explained to me in writing.</p> <p>I am participating voluntarily and understand that at any time I may withdraw from the study without repercussions (where applicable, see Guidance Note 6).</p> <p>I give permission for this interview to be recorded (where applicable).</p> <p>I understand that my rights regarding confidentiality and anonymity will be observed in the writing up of the data.</p> <p>I hereby:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Give permission for quotations/and or extracts from my interview to be published <b>Yes/No</b></li></ul> <p style="text-align: center;">(Mark as applicable)</p> |
| Signature: .....   |
| Date: .....  |

Note: Evidence of informed consent should be retained by the research team and should be made available to the Forum if requested.

**Guidance Note 5: Specific Ethics Considerations**

Depending on the specifics of the study, there may be ethical dilemmas which would deserve particular consideration in terms of planning. The following examples are indicative: “insider research” (researching own institution, peer group, or disciplinary group) presents issues of subjectivity, bias, access to research participants, and validity; focus groups can present issues of ensuring confidentiality and managing group discussion according to the schedule; ensuring that questionnaires only collect data which is going to be used; issues of privacy, potential harm to participants and authorial agency which can emerge in online research.

Give special consideration to student participants as highlighted in Guidance Note 3.

**Guidance Note 6: Ensuring that the identity of the participants is protected**

Care should be given in highlighting the degree to which anonymity will be preserved and, if participation is anonymous, the point at which it will no longer be possible to withdraw their participation. For example, in the case of a survey that is anonymous, participants must be made aware that their right to withdraw is only practical up to the point of submission of the survey.

## Appendix 1

### NATIONAL FORUM FOR THE ENHANCEMENT OF TEACHING & LEARNING

#### Principles Underpinning Research Ethics

In keeping with its national role and declared objectives for enhancing policy and practice through evidence-based inquiry, the National Forum is committed to ensuring that research is conducted to the highest standards of integrity and professionalism. Ethical considerations are central to the excellence and integrity of research: in the design, conduct and dissemination of research activities carried out in the Forum's name.

In respect of ethical considerations, the Forum will ensure that its ethics approach provides for research participants: respect; equity and beneficence in the research process. In respect of the process of research inquiry, it is committed to upholding practices which are committed to: quality; knowledge integrity; honesty and academic freedom.

Research into teaching and learning by its nature will include inquiry which involves human participants and their perceptions and experiences of policy, practices, education and learning in a range of settings and contexts and this raises ethical considerations. The Forum will promote the following ethical considerations in its research activities:

**Informed Consent:** potential research participants should be provided with sufficient information about the nature and purpose of the research to be undertaken, so as to allow an informed decision to participate. This information should be provided in a format which makes the content accessible and comprehensible to a non-expert with an appropriate level of detail to ensure that potential participants understand the benefits, risks and any conditions attaching to the conduct of the research and their participation. Participants' decisions to participate in research should be voluntary.

**Right to withdraw:** participants should be informed that they have the right to withdraw from the research process at any stage (or up to a given point) without any consequences. In exercising their right to withdraw, participants should be informed that any data provided by them will be destroyed should they request such.

**Confidentiality:** participants' rights to privacy in the treatment of their data as confidential and anonymous should be observed at all times, unless that right is specifically waived in terms of the express wishes of the participant or is over-ridden exceptionally by legal requirements for the protection of individuals from harm.

**Primary data storage:** personal data gathered in the course of the research must be treated in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Acts (1988 & 2003). Such data should be stored securely and in a format which preserves the privacy of the research participants.

**Incentives:** the provision of incentives for participation in the research process must be considered carefully in terms of the overall impact on the quality of data gathered. Any incentives offered should be modest and should be acknowledged in reporting the design and outcomes of the research.

**Quality and Integrity:** the conduct of the research process should ensure that the research procedures followed are documented clearly so as to ensure the quality of the research conducted the integrity of the results generated and subsequent reporting and publication as a result.

**Openness:** any conflicts of interest (personal, academic or commercial) arising should be declared. Due acknowledgement should also be afforded to colleagues, collaborators and partners for their contribution to the research.

**Vulnerable Persons:** appropriate steps should be taken to ensure that the research complies with any legal requirements relating to vulnerable groups. The research should also ensure that research participants are protected from harm and due recognition should be given to the possibility that participants may experience distress during the course of the research process.