Royal Conservatoire of Scotland

Research Ethics Policy

1 SUMMARY

The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland is committed to the maintenance of the highest ethical standards in respect of research carried out in its name, or with its support.

The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland's Ethics Committee maintains an oversight of all research carried out under the auspices of the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. This includes research conducted by both staff and students, and in this policy the term "researcher" may refer to either or both. In this regard, the Ethics Committee reports to the Academic Board, which has the overall responsibility for the academic work of the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. The Director of Research and Engagement is the designated officer with responsibility for the ethical review of research on behalf of the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and in that capacity they report to the Academic Board. The Director chairs the Ethics Committee which, itself, keeps ethical issues under continuous review, and will report to the Academic Board as required.

The Conservatoire's Research Ethics Policy, alongside other policies such as the Research Misconduct Policy, ensures alignment with the principles of the UK Research Integrity Concordat. The Conservatoire's Performance Ethics Policy sets out protocols for ethical performance that are founded on the same principles as this Research Ethics Policy.

2 PRINCIPLES

Ethical issues arise when the conduct of research involves the interests and rights of others or of the researcher, particularly in respect of their safety, security, comfort, privacy or convenience.

The adoption of an ethical position in respect of research requires that the researcher observes and protects the rights of would-be participants and systematically acts to permit the participants to exercise those rights. Ethical practice in such cases requires that participants, as a minimum, be properly informed, free to volunteer without inappropriate inducement, free to opt out at any time without redress, and be fully protected in regard to safety to the limits of best practice. It should be noted that an ethical approach, and the granting of ethical approval, is independent of a judgement of approval from a given moral, political or religious perspective, or from considerations of perceived taste.

3 ETHICAL APPROVAL

Ethical practice in the management of this work requires that the Ethics Committee examines the research design and the system for protecting participants' interests with a view to adjudicating on their ethical acceptability and their accountability.

The Ethics Committee meets regularly throughout the year to consider applications for ethical approval. Researchers should build in sufficient time in planning their work to permit the Committee to undertake the process of scrutiny with due care.

Approval by the Ethics Committee does not detract in any way from the ultimate responsibility which researchers themselves, whether staff or students, must have for all research which they carry out and for its effects on human participants: research integrity is a shared responsibility. The Ethics Committee is dependent upon information supplied by the researcher. This information is expected to be properly considered, full, truthful and accurate. Failure to follow the guidance on ethical review of research may result in disciplinary action under the Conservatoire's Research Misconduct Policy.

In arriving at its decision, the Ethics Committee may seek external expert advice. The Committee may withhold approval of a project if it considers that any ethical issues have not been addressed appropriately by the researcher, who may be asked to re-submit the project after having taken account of the issues identified by the Committee.

The Committee may:

- Approve
- Approve with conditions
- Decline to approve, and require resubmission

Assessment of any conditions set by the Committee will normally be undertaken by the Convenor, who will confirm approval if appropriate, or refer the application back to the Committee for further consideration.

In addition, the Committee may offer recommendations for improving the application. These are not binding but will normally be aimed at improving the ethical arrangements above and beyond the threshold for approval. Although the ethical review of the proposed

research is not usually concerned with the quality of the research itself, the Committee may also offer advice to applicants on improving their proposed research, drawing on the experience of members. In certain circumstances, however, poor research design may result in a withholding of ethical approval, on the basis that participants' time should not be wasted on research that does not meet basic expectations for quality.

In certain taught programmes where a research project module uses strictly defined methods, engages with low-risk participant groups, and raises no reasonably foreseeable risks the Ethics Committee can, by arrangement, devolve the responsibility for ethical approval to programme teams, having approved an application covering those methods, template participant information sheets and consent forms. In such instances, the programme teams record outcomes and submit these to the secretary of the Ethics Committee annually, for review. No research that deviates from the approved methods, or which raises particular ethical concerns, may be approved by a programme team: such applications must be considered by the Ethics Committee.

(a) When ethical approval is required

Any research that involves others as participants creates the possibility of an interference with the participants' interests or rights. Ethical issues may also be raised by research which makes reference to identifiable persons either living or with living relatives. Research which relates to the dead may also raise issues of privacy and confidentiality. Likewise, research may involve a foreseeable risk to the safety, security or comfort of the researcher; or involve animals. All such research undertaken by students or staff of the Conservatoire requires the express approval of the Ethics Committee (see also 'Collaborative Research', below).

(b) Research integrity

Research requiring ethical approval should not proceed without explicit, written approval of the Convenor of the Ethics Committee or their delegate. Copies of the formal written approval will be retained by the Ethics Committee and should be retained by the researcher.

To ensure the integrity of the process of ethical review, and to avoid conflicts of interest, members of the Ethics Committee may not participate in the review of applications in which they are involved as researcher or supervisor. Any member of the Committee who is also a doctoral student may not participate in the review of applications from other doctoral students

Any research that commences without the explicit approval of the Committee will be considered a breach of research integrity and will be recorded on the institutional Infraction Register.

Any research that is conducted substantively outside the protocol that received approval from the Committee will also constitute a breach of research integrity and be likewise recorded. Where a substantive change to an approved protocol is necessary, researchers must notify the Committee and seek explicit permission for the revised protocol.

Where the Ethics Committee considers there has been a breach of the Ethics Policy, including where an application for ethical approval is made retrospectively, the details of the application and resulting actions shall be recorded in the Infraction Register.

Minor breaches of research integrity may be handled informally; where the infraction is of a serious nature, the matter may be dealt with under the Conservatoire's Research Misconduct Policy and the case brought to the attention of the Academic Board.

The Ethics Committee is responsible for preparing the Conservatoire's Annual Statement on Research Integrity, which is approved by the Board of Governors and published to fulfil the expectations of the Research Integrity Concordat and the conditions of funding set by the Scottish Funding Council.

4 ETHICAL ISSUES

(a) Research with particular groups

Ethical issues may be felt to be especially important where research involves people who may be in need of additional protection, and/or where safeguarding should take precedence over research confidentiality. For example, research with those under 18 and those with learning additional support needs require an explicit management of safeguarding, and may require additional safeguards to protect participants' well-being.

In Scotland, the legal age at which participants can formally consent to participation in research in 16; below this age, an ethical approach will normally involve seeking the informed consent of a parent or carer. However, researchers may also seek the *assent* of the young participants, and where assent is declined, this should normally take precedence over the consent of the parent or carer.(Assent is defined as the agreement of someone who is not legally considered to be capable of giving consent; research should not take place where such an agreement is declined.)

Research which involves learners as participants or in some other way (for example, Conservatoire students, or school pupils) also raises particular issues that must be addressed e.g. if the research involves the introduction of an experimental approach to learning, teaching or assessment then all reasonable steps must be taken to safeguard the quality of the students' learning experience.

Research which involves NHS patients, or with adults who are not able to consent, must operate within the relevant legal context, as well as in accordance with the principles set out in this Policy.

(b) Research undertaken in collaboration with external bodies

In the case of research conducted under the auspices of an external body (such as another university), the Ethics Committee must grant explicit approval for all aspects that involve the direct participation of staff or students of the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland before the research proceeds. In cases of collaborative research or for external research that the Royal Conservatoire sponsors (by, for example, inviting staff or students to participate), the Ethics Committee will in the first instance scrutinise an application for ethical approval that has been made to the originating institution. If this application provides sufficient

information to fulfil the checklist below, then approval may be granted without a separate application being made.

Research that has received the approval of the Conservatoires UK Ethics Committee, which includes members of the Royal Conservatoire's Ethics Committee, will be deemed also to have received the approval of the Royal Conservatoire's Ethics Committee.

Research consultancy undertaken by a staff member or student of Conservatoire, in that capacity, for an external body is always subject to the terms of this policy; whereas consultancy work undertaken on a personal basis by a member of staff or student is not. In such instances, the researcher may seek advice from the Committee and, exceptionally, the Committee may accept an application for ethical review. In such cases, the researcher will need to give particular attention to how they propose to meet the expectations around the legal basis to process data, and handle data retention.

(c) Legal issues

Researchers should be aware of the legal issues that arise from their research and demonstrate that they have taken proper steps to ensure they comply with legal requirements. This may include the researcher seeking legal advice (for which the researcher will be responsible for payment) and the Ethics Committee will make a judgement on a case-by-case basis, seeking external advice where necessary. Researchers should note that in some contexts, such as health research and research with adults who cannot consent, the Scottish legal context may differ from that elsewhere in the UK. Recognising that Conservatoire researchers may be based, and undertake their research, internationally, the Ethics Committee will refer both to the Scottish legal context, and the specific legal jurisdiction in which the research will be conducted. However, by default, the Committee will use the Scottish legal context as a reference for defining key concepts (for example, a 'child' or 'vulnerable adult').

Legal issues may arise in generating data on human participants or using data about them. For example, data protection legislation, including, significantly, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2018, governs research with data concerning identifiable, living persons and makes specific requirements related to the storage of data.

Research that is proposed to take place in a healthcare setting may require the explicit approval of the Health Research Authority (HRA). Reflecting the comments on legal context above, the HRA operates differently in the different nations of the United Kingdom. A range of tools are available online to establish whether HRA approval should be sought for a given project and should be used by all researchers undertaking research that may fall under the purview of the HRA. It should be noted the HRA approval can be a demanding and time-consuming process.

Since informed consent is a cornerstone of research ethics, it should be noted that there are specific legal requirements for research involving adults who cannot give their consent to participate. In such cases, researchers should seek advice on the appropriate permissions, noting again that the legal context is different in Scotland from the rest of the United Kingdom.

Further legal issues may arise in respect of research that involves the use of material that may be considered sensitive and will arise in the use of material that could be identified as suspect or criminal in the absence of a *bona fide* research rationale. Advice and ethical approval should be sought in these cases to protect the researcher and the Conservatoire. Ethical approval cannot turn clear illegality into legality. However, in dealing with sensitive material, there is often not a clear boundary between what is legal and what is not. For example, accessing terrorist or other prohibited material once, perhaps by accident, is unlikely to be considered illegal. But systematically accessing and storing such information might be and passing it on to colleagues or students most likely would be. Intention/purpose for access to such material is of the first importance. The Universities UK Guidance on Security Sensitive Research Material offers protocols that make the research intention unambiguous and strictly restricts access to such material, minimising the potential for a researcher or the Conservatoire to slip, accidentally, into a breach of the law. These protocols offer protection to the researcher and the Conservatoire by minimising the potential for misinterpretation and thereby protecting the researcher and the Conservatoire, and any researcher undertaking research with sensitive material will be required to use them as a condition of ethical approval.

(d) Special considerations of different research methods and contexts

Social research involving interviewing or observation especially where records (particularly on audio or video) are kept, may impinge on the confidentiality, privacy, convenience, comfort safety or security of others. Data storage may be a particular consideration here, where participants should expect confidential information to remain confidential *in perpetuity*. Research in an online setting may require particular care as regards to privacy and data management.

Autoethnographic research that refers to identified individuals, or those who could reasonably be identified by an informed reader may require particular consideration in respect of confidentiality and privacy, even if no data is gathered directly from those individuals. Unless there is a compelling reason to take another approach, it is good practice to seek the consent of such 'secondary participants'. It should also be noted that the inclusion in research of an individual by virtue of the professional role they hold does not obviate the researcher's ethical responsibilities to that person. Researchers should also pay particular attention to the potential emotional and psychological impact of research activities on themselves and collaborators.

Research in a range of contexts, including but not limited to community settings, professional contexts, and Artistic Research, may involve expert or non-expert individuals who are both participants and collaborators in the research. Such collaborators may have a reasonable expectation of a right to be identified in the research. Noting that this is in tension with the traditions of social research, where a right to anonymity is assumed, such issues will need careful consideration.

Researchers should consider the ethical implications of emerging digital and AI technologies, including issues relating to transparency, consent, intellectual property, bias, authorship, and data security.

Researchers should be aware of the guidance provided by learned societies and subject organisations, which may be a useful reference point in developing an ethical approach that is relevant to the particular context and methods they are using. The guidelines of the British Education Research Association (BERA); the British Psychological Society (BPS) and the Scottish Government's Guidance on Ethics for Social Research may be especially useful in this regard and have helped to shape this Policy.

(e) Special considerations of different researchers

All research undertaken at the Conservatoire, whether by members of staff, doctoral students or students on taught programmes, is subject to this policy and will require ethical review when it meets the criteria set out above. However, there are particular considerations that individual researchers should be aware of.

Taught students undertaking research should take care to establish, in good time, whether their proposed research will be reviewed by their Programme Team under the arrangements for devolved approval, or require review by the full Ethics Committee, which may require additional time.

Doctoral students should seek the support of their supervisory team and involve them in preparing the application for ethical approval. Since the application involves setting out the research method in some detail, it is an excellent opportunity to review methodological details that could have significant future consequences. Doctoral students undertaking complex, multi-year, programmes of research may find it easier to apply for approval of their work in a phased approach, rather that in a single complex application.

Staff undertaking the PhD by Portfolio should consider and, if necessary, seek advice from the convenor of the Ethics Committee, as part of the admission process. Particularly in the case of Practice or Artistic Research, the retrospective curation and 'research framing' of a body of artistic work can present particular challenges for formal ethical approval. In all cases, there should be evidence that all the elements of a PhD by Portfolio should have been pursued according the principles of ethical research set out in the policy. The Committee can review the available evidence and offer a view (rather than retrospective approval) in such cases.

(f) Data Protection and Information Governance

Researchers should ensure that all research involving personal data is conducted in accordance with relevant data protection legislation, including the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018, as well as the Conservatoire's own policies and guidance on information governance and data security. Researchers should consider carefully issues relating to confidentiality, anonymisation, storage, retention, transfer, and the secure handling of personal or sensitive data, including audio-visual material and data generated or shared through online platforms or digital technologies.

(g) Sustainability

More broadly, an ethical approach requires that researchers be mindful of the impact of their activities and seek sustainable approaches to the research they undertake, noting the Conservatoire's Sustainability Strategy, which understands sustainability as 'not only an operational imperative, but a creative and cultural one… [with] a vital role to play in shaping a just transition'.

5 CHECKLIST

The following checklist will be used by the Ethics Committee to determine if a particular research proposal raises ethical issues:

(a) Does the research use people or human data, or animals, as its subjects?
(b) Is there a realistic chance that the research will present risks of physical and/or psychological harm to the researcher or the participants? If so, what measures have been taken to mitigate these risks?
(c) What ethical or legal rights do the people affected by the research project have? How are their rights observed and protected?
(d) Are any potentially vulnerable people involved (e.g. children, adults with additional support needs)? If so, are additional safeguards included?
(e) Is there recognition of legal issues arising and are there mechanisms for ensuring legal requirements are met?
(f) Does the research involve the use of material or information that may be considered sensitive or is illegal (such as pornography or material related to terrorism or extreme groups)?
(g) Does the research involve sponsorship or an external contract? What additional ethical issues are raised and how are they dealt with, for example, in respect of the publication of findings? If sponsorship is provided by an external source, is that source acceptable to the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland e.g. in terms of its Equality and Diversity Policy or other ethical consideration?
(h) Does the research comply with the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland's Equality and Diversity Policy?
(i) Does the research raise issues of an ethical nature even if they do not raise the questions listed above? How will such issues handled?

Research proposals must also comply with the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland's Equality and Diversity Policy and its Disability in Employment Policy.

6 APPENDIX: ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS WITHIN RCS RESEARCH CLUSTERS

The examples below are illustrative rather than exhaustive and are intended to support reflection on ethical practice within different research contexts at the Conservatoire. Researchers should always consider ethical issues in relation to the specific aims, methods, participants, and contexts of individual projects.

(a) Artistic Research

Researchers working in Artistic Research may need to consider ethical issues relating to collaboration, authorship, consent, confidentiality, and the status of artistic participants as co-creators within research processes. Practice-based, embodied, and performative methodologies may blur distinctions between researcher, participant, and artistic collaborator. Autoethnographic approaches may additionally raise questions concerning identifiable individuals, privacy, retrospective consent, emotional exposure, and the ethical framing of personal and creative experience.

(b) Art-making in the Anthropocene

Research within Art-making in the Anthropocene may raise ethical issues relating to community engagement, environmental responsibility, emotional well-being, and the representation of ecological crisis, displacement, and loss. Researchers should consider the ethical implications of interdisciplinary and community-based collaboration, including questions of inclusion, reciprocity, sustainability, and the potential impact of creative or participatory activities on individuals, communities, and environments involved in the research. Guidance on research with indigenous communities (such as that produced on research with Sami communities) may prove widely useful.

(c) Creative Health

Research involving health, well-being, disability, care settings, or therapeutic contexts may require particular attention to safeguarding, informed consent, confidentiality, emotional risk, and partnership working. Researchers should consider carefully issues relating to vulnerability, capacity, and participant welfare, particularly where projects involve children, clinical populations, or sensitive personal data. Some projects may additionally require approval through NHS Research Ethics Committees alongside Conservatoire ethical review and researchers should initially use the Health Research Authority's online tools and seek expert advice if necessary.

(d) Musicology

Musicological research may involve ethical considerations relating to intellectual property, culturally sensitive material, and the representation of living individuals, communities, or traditions. Oral history, interview-based, ethnographic, or community-engaged methodologies may raise issues around informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and the interpretation or contextualisation of participant testimony or the insights of tradition bearers. Researchers should also consider ethical responsibilities relating to cultural ownership, attribution, and the handling of historically sensitive materials.

(e) New Work and Improvisation

Research involving devising, improvisation, rehearsal processes, and collaborative creative practice may require careful consideration of participant agency, ownership of creative material, documentation, and consent within evolving artistic processes. Researchers should be attentive to the ethical implications of power relationships within ensembles, rehearsal rooms, and workshop environments, particularly where work involves experimentation, emotional risk-taking, autobiographical material, or the blurring of professional and personal boundaries. Intellectual Property should also be considered.

(f) Performing Arts Education

Research involving learners, teachers, educational institutions, or participatory learning environments may require particular attention to safeguarding, consent and assent, power relationships, and the protection of the learning experience. Researchers should consider carefully the ethical implications of assessment, observation, feedback processes, and experimental pedagogical approaches, particularly where participation may affect progression, confidence, well-being, or relationships between students and staff.

(g) Science, Humanities and Arts Research Exchange (SHARE)

Interdisciplinary and collaborative research undertaken through SHARE may involve differing disciplinary expectations and norms concerning ethics, authorship, consent, data management, and public dissemination. Researchers should ensure that ethical responsibilities are clearly understood across partnerships, particularly where projects involve external organisations, public engagement, participatory methodologies, or community collaboration. Particular attention may be required where different professional, institutional, or regulatory frameworks intersect within a single project.